

Wardah Sarwar \*

Huma Pervaiz \*\*

## **The Unlikely Elite: Eunuchs as Power Players in Medieval India**

### **Abstract**

*This article deviates from the conventional interpretation of eunuchs as merely marginalized individuals or harem caretakers by examining the intricate and often overlooked roles that they played in the imperial courts of Medieval India. By scrutinizing the primary examples from the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughal Empire, this study illustrates how eunuchs ascended to the ranks of considerable authority, such as Mansabdars, military commanders, governors, and persuasive advisors. Based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, the paper discloses how eunuchs harnessed their unique status—marked by their allegiance, perceived lack of threat to royal lineage, and close connections with rulers—to gain riches, power, and influence. This research addresses critical questions pertaining to the factors that facilitated eunuchs to acquire high-ranking positions and exert command over military and administrative matters. The study emphasizes to reconsider conventional perceptions regarding gender and power dynamics in historical governance by exposing a nuanced interaction between loyalty, favoritism, and merit that transfigured the political environment of that time. The research, ergo, broadens the discourse on gender and power in Medieval India by presenting eunuchs not solely as supplementary figures within empires but as key players in configuring political and social hierarchies.*

**Keywords:** Eunuchs, Delhi Sultanate, Mughal Empire, Mansabdars, Gender, History, Power.

### **Introduction**

Much of the existing scholarship on third-gender identities, including transgender individuals and eunuchs, tends to focus on their oppression and marginalized existence. Typically, studies on eunuchs within the context of empires center on their roles in securing the safety of women.<sup>1</sup> However, this article takes a different perspective by investigating the privileged status and influence held by certain eunuchs in Medieval India. It seeks to analyze eunuchs independently, rather than merely linking them to women. Although eunuchs initially entered service primarily as guardians of the female residents and as intermediaries between the segregated male and female quarters, over time, many also assumed significant administrative roles. By examining the eunuchs of that

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\* Wardah Sarwar, Graduate of the History Department, Institute of Global and Historical Studies, GCU KSK Campus. E-mail: [sarwarwardah@gmail.com](mailto:sarwarwardah@gmail.com), Contact No: 0309-4800187.

\*\* Dr. Huma Pervaiz, Assistant Professor in History Department, Institute of Global and Historical Studies, GCU KSK Campus.

era, this study suggests that researchers should not only consider eunuchs in relation to other gender identities or their subordinate roles but also emphasize their positions of power and agency.

In doing so, it argues that during Medieval period in India, eunuchs ascended to influential positions such as '*Mansabdars*'<sup>2</sup> due to their perceived loyalty and non-threatening status to royal lineage, which allowed them to accumulate wealth and maintain power within the court system. While this article will not cover the many other roles eunuchs held—such as trusted messengers, harem guards, or performing menial tasks like feeding pigeons—it aims to shed light on those significant eunuchs who not only held administrative positions within the imperial offices but also commanded armies and governed subahs. However, not every slave eunuch could achieve such elevated status since they existed in great numbers, achieving uniformity among them was an unattainable goal.

This article aims to comprehensively investigate eunuchs who occupied significant administrative posts or '*mansabs*' under their respective emperors during the Medieval era. While the primary focus centers on their '*mansab*' roles, it also explores other facets, such as the military campaigns they undertook, the edifices they erected, and any other noteworthy aspect, including the historiography by Bakhtawar Khan. Furthermore, it answers Principal questions such why eunuchs were given such important roles and the duty of protecting state's treasures.

### **Literature Review**

This survey of the literature explores the studies that are focused on the significant contributions that eunuchs made to their different empires during the Medieval times. It commences by reviewing contemporary research on eunuchs during the Medieval period, emphasizing on their prominence during the Ottoman Empire, which was concurrent with the Mughal Empire, and then continues to the exploration of Mughal (Indian) setting. After comprehensive survey of historical narratives and scholarly publications, this examination demonstrates how eunuchs negotiated gendered power dynamics and occupied indispensable positions. From their significant roles in the Ottoman harem to their designations in Mughal courts, this literary body presents a thorough understanding of how eunuchs aggregated power and secured positions of influence.

One substantial source for investigating the authority of eunuchs in the Ottoman Empire is Jane Hathaway's 2018 book '*The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power-Broker*'. This book scrupulously studies the history of the Chief Harem Eunuchs, highlighting their roles, influence, and rise to prominence within the palace hierarchy. Hathaway's work sheds light on how these eunuchs managed the harem's complex dynamics to gain tremendous control. Another key text is George Junne's 2016 publication '*The Black Eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire: Networks of Power in the Court of the Sultan*'. Junne's book provides a thorough examination of the Chief Black Eunuchs, also known as *darussaade agasi* or *Kizlar Agalari*, and their substantial influence from 1574 to the empire's fall in the 1920s. Once the sultans' personal slaves and harem guardians, these African eunuchs rose to prominence as major players with substantial wealth and influence. As the only connection between the harem and

the outside world, Junne emphasizes their special status and how their close bond with the sultan enabled them to achieve influence on par with a wazir.

Ruby Lal's 2017 book *'Harem and eunuchs: Liminality and networks of Mughal authority'* makes a substantial contribution to the study of the eunuchs' ascendancy in India. Analogous to Jane Hathaway, Lal explores in great detail the distinct convergence of eunuchs and the harem notably under Akbar's and Jahangir's rule. With a focus on their incorporation into the harem, the study also meticulously investigates the historical development, positioning, and engagement of eunuchs within the Mughal imperial structure. Lal examines the degree of eunuch integration under Mughal governance, illuminating their conspicuous presence within the innermost domestic circles. This publication enhances our comprehension of the dynamics of power and authority during this time by providing a refined evaluation of the difficulties surrounding the position and role of eunuchs within Mughal society.

Similar methods have been employed by Hathaway and Lal to investigate the power relations of eunuchs within the domestic household, particularly in the harem. Junne, on the other hand, adopts a slightly different stance by examining the relationship between eunuchs and emperors as well as empresses. However, Junne's study is distinct because it directs attention exclusively to Black eunuchs who became powerful throughout the Ottoman Empire and frequently took on wazir-like duties. Nonetheless, this article takes a fresh approach to examine the impact of eunuchs outside the confines of harem. Contrary to previous research, it reveals how eunuchs established close ties with emperors, who granted them power and promoted them to higher positions, allowing them to amass wealth and influence.

### **Methodology**

This article examines the rise of eunuchs to crucial roles in imperial courts using Pierre Bourdieu's idea of symbolic capital, which alludes to the value and recognition that certain individuals or groups acquire in a social environment.<sup>3</sup> Unlike tangible resources like wealth or possessions, symbolic capital refers to the regard, prominence, and reputation acquired via social networks. It incorporates the perks of building garnered through vast networks of relationships and being respected by others.<sup>4</sup> This entire approach systematically changes one's reputations into assets that further provide access to a variety of opportunities and benefits in the society.<sup>5</sup>

When readers investigate their authority, they may naturally question the reasoning behind such significant empowerment. The framework used in this study addresses this inquiry. It can be deduced that the eunuchs' status as slaves, combined with their unique physical condition, facilitated the development of strong relationships with the emperors, fostering a deep level of trust between them. Their lack of familial ties and absence of progeny made them reliable and non-threatening to the royal lineage. Therefore, the majority refrained from asserting their independence, with the exception of Malik Sarwar, as outlined in the article.

Certain slaves such as Malik Kafur and Khusrau Khan formed strong relationships with emperors through sexual relations. This phenomenon indicates that personal closeness between emperors and eunuchs sometimes influenced advancement to higher ranks, although not all slaves who achieved prominent positions are documented to have had personal affiliations with emperors.

Eunuchs who served loyally gained honor and prestige, allowing them to accumulate wealth, as described in Bourdieu's theory. They were permitted to accumulate riches, knowing that upon their death, all their property would revert back to the imperial treasury. Many spent extravagantly and invested in construction projects to impress nobility and common people, leaving a lasting legacy. Notably, among the palaces outside the Fort mentioned alongside the concubine palace from King Akbar's era was the palace of Itibar Khan during his governorship of Agra.<sup>6</sup>

### **Ascendancy and Power in the Delhi Sultanate**

A significant shift took place during the Delhi Sultanate period when eunuchs rose to positions of previously unheard-of power and influence. The customary predominance of people with noble births in the hierarchies of power was significantly disrupted by the appointment of eunuchs. This tendency culminated under authority of Alauddin Khalji and Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji, who gave important positions in their administrations to favored eunuchs like Khusrau Khan and Malik Kafur. In addition to Khusrau Khan and Malik Kafur, this section examines the lives and vocation of other well-known eunuchs, such as Malik Sarwar and Imad-ud-din Rayhan.

From humble beginnings, these eunuchs gained considerable influence within the Sultanate's administration. The political landscape of Medieval Delhi was altered by these appointments, which demonstrated a purposeful policy to concentrate power around trusted eunuchs. However, it cannot be confirmed that all eunuchs rose solely on the basis of personal favoritism rather than merit.

Alauddin is well known for incorporating eunuchs and slaves into the state's political system. He removed the veteran rulers of his kingdom from their posts and replaced them with young, unskilled slaves who showed ignorance and lack of vision.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, he filled important roles with eunuchs who lacked sagacity.<sup>8</sup>

His fascination and intense attraction towards the beauty of Malik Kafur<sup>9</sup> led him to surrender full control of his authority into the hands of his confidant. While a few esteemed officers retained Alauddin's favor, their influence had diminished, reducing them to being essentially courtly figures with minimal power.<sup>10</sup> In the course of his reign, his beloved Malik Kafur attained the highest position, holding the foremost spot in his affections, and was appointed as both the commander of the army and the wazir.<sup>11</sup> In his capacity as the army commander, he led the campaign to Deogir<sup>12</sup> and was entrusted with missions to conquer Dhor Samundar and Mabar.<sup>13</sup> During the span of 1297 to 1311, Sultan Alauddin Khalji sent a series of raids into the Deccan area, with a significant number of these expeditions being guided by his enslaved eunuch, Kafur.<sup>14</sup>

Details about his initial tenure under Alauddin's rule remain elusive. Peter Jackson offers insights into Malik Kafur, noting his position as a barbegi by 1306-

7.<sup>15</sup> Kafur's earliest established station was at Rapri along the Yamuna, marked as his iqta by 1309-10.<sup>16</sup> Towards the end of the reign, he assumed a commanding role in Deogir.<sup>17</sup>

The authority vested in Malik Kafur by Alauddin and its eventual repercussions did not serve as a precedent for Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji. Qutbuddin elevated his favored Khusrau Khan to a position similar to that of Malik Kafur, despite the historical outcome of Alauddin's similar elevation of a Malik Naib. During the inaugural year of his rule in 1317, Sultan Qutbuddin bestowed upon him the title Khusrau Khan, entrusted him with the esteemed role of the ministry, and granted him the authority of Malik Naib.<sup>18</sup> In the second year of his reign, Khusrau Khan joined the Sultan on the campaign to Deogir.<sup>19</sup> Upon their return to Delhi, the Sultan dispatched him at the helm of a substantial army to undertake the conquest of Mabar.<sup>20</sup> As authority shifted entirely to the favorite Khusrau, Mubarak Shah assumed the role of a mere puppet.

Imad-ud-din Rayhan, another eunuch by status, ascended to become one of the most prominent nobles during the rule of Nasir al-Din Mahmud (1246-66 A.D.).<sup>21</sup> He was a baseborn Indian eunuch<sup>22</sup> who had embraced Islam.<sup>23</sup> Upon Balban's exile from the court in 1253 A.D., Imad-ud-din was appointed as Vakil-i-dar in the capital city.<sup>24</sup> Imad-ud-din's Hindu origins and eunuch status presented a challenge to the pride of the court's maliks and nobles, who were exclusively Turks and Tajiks of noble lineage.<sup>25</sup> Serving under his leadership was deemed unacceptable to them. Consequently, the efficiency of the administration declined, leading to a flood of petitions to the Sultan urging his removal. Ultimately, the influential maliks managed to convince the Sultan to issue an order for Rayhan's dismissal. He received a directive to assume control over the fief of Badaon, while Balban made his way back to the capital in February 1254.<sup>26</sup>

Another noteworthy eunuch to gain prominence was Malik Sarwar<sup>27</sup>, who held a position within the administration of Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq.<sup>28</sup> However, detailed accounts of his specific role and rank during Firuz's reign remain somewhat unclear. Afif mentions him as the guardian of the royal jewelry, while certain records indicate his role as the '*shahna-i-shahr*' during Firuz Shah's era.<sup>29</sup> In 1389, he was granted the prestigious title of Khwaja Jahan and was subsequently promoted to the esteemed position of wazir.<sup>30</sup> Sultan Mahmud, the last ruler of the Tughluq dynasty, bestowed upon him the title of Malik-ush-Sharq (chief or lord of the east) and designated him as the governor responsible for overseeing the eastern territories of the empire.<sup>31</sup> The rationale behind designating the wazir as a governor was to quell the Hindu uprisings that had plunged the administration of this region into disarray.<sup>32</sup> Taking advantage of the favorable circumstances, he quickly proclaimed his independence and adopted the honorific title of Atabak-i-Azam, solidifying his position as a prominent ruler in Jaunpur.<sup>33</sup>

### **Ascendancy and Power in the Mughal Court**

Beyond their ceremonial responsibilities, the Mughal Empire's eunuchs actively participated in governance and had considerable power. This section examines a number of eunuchs, including Itimad Khan, Khwaja Ambar Nazir, and Khwaja Phul Malik, who also held important administrative positions as governors and military commanders in addition to serving as trusted advisors to the Mughal

emperors. Instead of traditional family or aristocratic ties, their rise to power was mostly driven by their loyalty, effectiveness, and the emperors' profound faith in them. This feature highlights a distinctive feature of Mughal rule, in which meritocracy and personal loyalty and trust were valued highly.

Under Babar's patronage, Khwaja Ambar Nazir maintained the esteemed status of a eunuch confidant. Eventually, Babar bestowed upon him the title of Itibar Khan, which translates to 'the trusty Khan'.<sup>34</sup> He was later appointed governor of Delhi.<sup>35</sup> When Humayun left for Persia after his banishment from India in 1543 A.D., it was left to Itibar Khan and others to take care of Maryam Makani, Akbar's mother, also known as Hamida Banu.<sup>36</sup> He was designated to serve Akbar. Following Humayun's demise, Akbar dispatched him to Kabul to accompany his mother's return, and in the second year of Akbar's rule, he came back with her entourage.<sup>37</sup> Sending this eunuch with women demonstrates the high level of trust that the emperors placed in him. Subsequently, he assumed the position of the Delhi governor and passed away within the city's precincts after a certain period.<sup>38</sup>

Among the renowned eunuchs during Akbar's era, Khwaja Phul Malik stands out. In the time of Salim Khan, Sher Khan's son, Khwaja Phul Malik's integrity earned him the designation of Muhammad Khan.<sup>39</sup> Following the decline of Afghan authority, he was incorporated into Akbar's retinue and rendered commendable service.<sup>40</sup> Recognizing his significance, Akbar provided him with encouragement and acknowledgment. Consequently, he was bestowed with the title of Itimad Khan and elevated to a rank of 1,000.<sup>41</sup> He assumed full responsibility for managing the treasury, efficiently executing the Emperor's vision and promptly restoring order to financial matters.<sup>42</sup>

According to Abul Fazl, his appointment was made in an effort to buck the moral decay that was occurring among the officers, who had been dishonestly thinking of ways to enrich themselves and amass treasures for themselves at the expense of not collecting the finances for Shahinshah's.<sup>43</sup> This demonstrates that eunuchs were relied upon for complete devotion to their masters, largely because they lacked family ties.

In the year 1565, he facilitated the transfer of Miran Mubarak, the King of Khandesh's daughter, into Akbar's harem.<sup>44</sup> Subsequently, he actively participated in the conquest of Bengal.<sup>45</sup> In the year 1576, he assumed the role of the governor of Bhakkar.<sup>46</sup> Abdul Qadir Badayuni, who chronicled the events of Akbar's empire, offers a sharp critique of Itimad's numerous appointments. He stated in his argument: "A moment shall arrive when only the dissolute shall attain favor... and governance shall be guided by women's counsel, and young boys shall hold authority, and the management by eunuchs."<sup>47</sup> Concurrently, Badayuni does acknowledge Itimad's "enterprise and economy" as unparalleled.<sup>48</sup> Detailing the occurrences spanning 1562–1563, Badauni notes that during that period, Itimad Khan rose to remarkable prominence within the harem and even emerged as a trusted advisor to the sovereign in matters of state.<sup>49</sup> He established the town of Itimadpur, situated six kos away from Agra.<sup>50</sup> He also constructed a large tank in the vicinity and erected various structures, including a mausoleum for himself. His resting place is within this location.<sup>51</sup>

Sultan Mahmud of Gujarat placed immense trust in a eunuch named Iitimid Khan, who later served under Akbar.<sup>52</sup> Iitimid Khan was renowned for his extraordinary capacities and loyalty. Iitimid Khan embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca, during which he acquired a substantial stone believed to bear the imprint of the Prophet's foot.<sup>53</sup> He also assumed the role of governor in Gujarat and held a post as a commander of Four Thousand.<sup>54</sup>

During Akbar's rule, Shamshir Khan, recognized as Khwaja Sara, assumed the position of superintendent of the treasury.<sup>55</sup> This demonstrates his important contribution to financial management at that time.

Ikhlas Khan Khwaja-sara<sup>56</sup> stands out as another notable eunuch from Akbar's reign, having held the rank of an amir of one thousand horse.<sup>57</sup> Ikhlas Khan was the title, while his real name was Khwaja Khas Malik.<sup>58</sup> His term as the governor of Delhi came to an end with his demise.<sup>59</sup>

Within the Akbarnama, Khwaja Alam, another eunuch figure, is introduced. Notably, he held the significant role of chief taskmaster, presiding over a group of pahlwans or wrestlers.<sup>60</sup> Tragically, an incident unfolded at the Kharbusa stage where he wielded a stick against one of the wrestlers, provoking a retaliatory response that led to his unfortunate demise by dagger.<sup>61</sup> The emperor expressed his sorrow at the passing of the elderly servant and imposed severe punishment on the person responsible for his death.<sup>62</sup>

Khwaja Daulat joined the Imperial establishment and was promoted to the title of Daulat Khan. He eventually rose to become the chief of the eunuchs, receiving the title Nazir-ud-daula.<sup>63</sup> These eunuchs occupied influential positions that enabled them to amass substantial wealth. The situation was similar for Nazir-ud-daula, a significant eunuch in Akbar's court. Jahangir's writings note that in terms of accepting bribes, he was unmatched within the empire.<sup>64</sup> Upon Daulat Khan's demise, he had amassed a fortune amounting to no less than ten crores of ashrafis, each weighing five methkals. This was in addition to jewels, gold and silver plates, chinaware, and brass and copper utensils valued at an additional three crores. Jahangir further added that all of this wealth was subsequently added to my father's treasury.<sup>65</sup>

Khwaja Hilal, an esteemed eunuch, commenced his career as a servant under Qasim Khan Namakin.<sup>66</sup> Later, he became associated with Emperor Jahangir's court. At the outset of Jahangir's reign, he held the office of Mir Tuzuk, administering with a firm hand.<sup>67</sup> Eunuchs held notable positions that often brought financial gains, so they initiated the construction of various edifices, including forts. Similarly within his jagir, the town of Rankatta<sup>68</sup>, located six kos from Agra, Hilal erected a compact fort and a substantial inn, subsequently renaming it Hilalabad.<sup>69</sup> It is also documented that he constructed a palace near Madar Gate in Agra.<sup>70</sup>

Itibar Khan, held a position of favor under Jahangir's patronage, and the rebellious prince Khusrau was entrusted under his care for a certain duration.<sup>71</sup> He was the principal eunuch in Jahangir's court, held the position of Governor in the city of Agra.<sup>72</sup> He attained the esteemed position of an amir of two thousand horsemen.<sup>73</sup> In 1623, Shah Jahan, having revolted against his father, made an

attempt to seize Agra. However, Itibar Khan staunchly defended the city for the Emperor and resisted submission.<sup>74</sup> Jahangir was greatly appreciative of this steadfast loyalty. He documented that due to Itibar Khan's commendable service in safeguarding the Agra Fort, he was honored with the distinguished title of Mumtaz Khan.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Jahangir bestowed upon him a '*mansab*' of 6000 zat and 5000 sawar.<sup>76</sup> He possessed his own palaces, comparable to the opulent palaces lining the riverfront of the Yamuna in Agra, owned by renowned nobles.<sup>77</sup>

Another eunuch, Firuz Khan (also known as Firuz k.), was bestowed a mansab of 1500/600 by Jahangir.<sup>78</sup> He was one of the trusted servants of Jahangir, and was present in Lahore at the time of Jahangir's passing in 1627.<sup>79</sup> Shahriyar, a contender for the throne under the clever guidance of Nur Jahan, sought refuge within the harem following the failure of her schemes. Asaf Khan, responding decisively, instructed Firuz Khan Khwaja-sara to enter the harem and extract Shahriyar from his hiding place.<sup>80</sup>

In the first year of Shah Jahan's reign Firuz entered into his service.<sup>81</sup> He attained successive promotions, and prior to his demise, his rank advanced to 3,000, with 1,500 horse.<sup>82</sup> He held responsibility for overseeing the palace and commanded considerable esteem and reverence within Shah Jahan's service.<sup>83</sup> He is recorded in the historical accounts of his time as Nazir-i-Mashkuya, which translates to the overseer of the female quarters, and as Nazir-i-Mahal, signifying his role as the guardian and supervisor of the palace.<sup>84</sup> A garden he established along the Jhelum's shores is renowned for its beauty. He is also recognized as the founder of Firozabad Town during the reign of Akbar.<sup>85</sup> On the 7th of October 1647, he passed away.<sup>86</sup>

Bakhtawar Khan (d. 1698)<sup>87</sup> is one of the famous eunuchs of Aurangzeb's time. He held a favored position as a eunuch within Aurangzeb's court, earning a noble stature. In the tenth year of Aurangzeb's reign, he was bestowed the prestigious rank of one thousand, and in the thirteenth year, he was elevated to the role of superintendent of the eunuchs.<sup>88</sup> He is celebrated not solely for his identity as a eunuch and his official role during Aurangzeb's rule. His distinction lies in being a eunuch historian of note, having composed the *Mirat-ul-Alam*.<sup>89</sup> This Persian work stands as an exceptional universal history of great significance. The preface of book underscores the author's deep affinity for historical scholarship and reveals his longstanding intention to craft a composition of this nature. He also crafted an abridgement of *Tarikh-i-Alfi* and *Akhbar-ul-Akhiyar*.<sup>90</sup> Among the structures attributed to him are the establishments of Bakhtawarpur and Bakhtawarnagar villages.<sup>91</sup>

Aurangzeb's chief eunuch Khwaja Talib or Khidmatgar (d. 1704) held a notably elevated position.<sup>92</sup> The chief administrator of Aurangzeb's imperial harem during the final decades of his reign initially joined the emperor's household when Aurangzeb was still a prince, around the time of his marriage to Dilras Banu Begum in 1637.<sup>93</sup> The Khwaja was presented as a gift by Shahnawaz Khan Safavi, Dilras Banu's father.<sup>94</sup> Being one of the few surviving individuals from the emperor's era, he had played a crucial role as Prince Muazzam's (His real name was Bahadur Shah I, and he was the son of Aurangzeb) primary guardian during the latter's period of confinement due to charges of treason.<sup>95</sup> Aurangzeb's

offspring sought the favor of this eunuch, lavishing him with presents and audiences.<sup>96</sup>

Eunuchs persisted in assuming pivotal duties during the reigns of later Mughal monarchs as well. They embodied a range of crucial and varied functions. During Muhammad Shah's era, eunuch Javed Khan held significant authority over the harem.<sup>97</sup> Another notable eunuch of Muhammad Shah's time was Roz Afzun Khan, who served as the Superintendent of the Imperial Palace.<sup>98</sup> Upon the death of Muhammad Shah, his son Ahmad Shah (1748-1754 A.D.) ascended the throne. During the reign of Ahmad Shah, Javed Khan emerged as a prominent figure. Ahmad Shah's mother, Udham Bai, was known for her promiscuous nature, engaged in close associations with her personal attendant, Javed Khan.<sup>99</sup> He was an attractive eunuch possessing youthful vigor and a robust personality.<sup>100</sup>

Upon her son's ascension, Javid's progression was undoubtedly assured. Despite being 50 years old and lacking literacy skills, he managed to present himself as astute and well-versed in affairs due to his constant proximity to the Emperor.<sup>101</sup> He persuaded Ahmad Shah to appoint him as the darogha of the Diwan-i-Khass, bestowing upon him a mansab of 6000, thereby elevating him far beyond his peers.<sup>102</sup> Consequently, the emperor entrusted him with the complete governance of the nation. Subsequently, he was elevated to a commanding rank of seven thousand, bestowed with the title of Nawab Bahadur.<sup>103</sup> He assumed the distinguished role of the chief eunuch within the confines of the royal residence.<sup>104</sup> In this significant capacity, Javed Khan assumed the responsibility for overseeing all matters concerning the domestic servants and female guards of the royal household.<sup>105</sup>

In the era of the Later Mughals, a trio of eunuchs—namely Mian Khushfahan, Mian Arjmand, and Mian Mahabat—governed the realm on behalf of Mughlani Begum (1754-1756).<sup>106</sup>

### **Conclusion**

While examining eunuchs as '*Mansabdars*' in Medieval India, this article illustrates the complex relationship between loyalty, trust, and strategic placement under imperial control. From the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughal Empire, eunuchs ascended to influential positions owing part to personal favoritism and also because they were regarded as trustworthy and did not jeopardize the royal lineage. Though some, like Imad-ud-din Rayhan, confronted challenges because of their origins or eunuch status, others, like Malik Sarwar, utilized their positions to create regional authority. This research highlights the ways in which eunuchs maneuvered through the ranks of authority, accumulating riches and prestige while defending imperial objectives. Their unfading legacy resides not only in the administrative structures they established but also in the extensive narrative of governance, where personal loyalty and efficiency entwined with the imperial rule. A unique period in Indian history is thus marked by the ascent of eunuchs to top administrative positions, which also illuminates the nuanced aspects of power and influence in Medieval monarchies.

## Notes and References

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of Medieval Indian empires, particularly during the Mughal period, eunuchs have often been studied in relation to their interactions with harem women. For further insights, see Shadab Bano's *Eunuchs in Mughal Household and Court* in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (vol. 69, pp. 417-427, Indian History Congress, 2008) and Ruby Lal's *Harem and Eunuchs: Liminality and Networks of Mughal Authority in Celibate and Childless Men in Power* (pp. 92-108, Routledge, 2017).

In studies concerning eunuchs other than Medieval Indian period, much of the literature focuses on their role in relation to harem women, whom they were tasked with safeguarding. For a detailed exploration of this, see Jane Hathaway's book *The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power-Broker* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), as well as her 2009 article, 'Eunuch Households in Istanbul, Medina, and Cairo during the Ottoman Era.' The book provides an in-depth analysis of the Chief Harem Eunuchs, highlighting their roles, influence, and rise to substantial power within the palace hierarchy. Her article, which covers a similar theme, focuses on the Chief Eunuchs of the Ottoman imperial harem and is crucial for understanding how they consolidated power through alliances with influential harem women, such as the sultan's mother and favored concubines.

<sup>2</sup> Abdul Aziz's book, *The Mughul Indian Court and Its Institutions*, focuses on the '*mansabdari*' system in its first section. Aziz explains that Akbar instituted this system in 1574, during the nineteenth year of his reign. A '*mansab*' denoted a specific rank of office with defined obligations, precedence, and salary. While some '*mansabs*' were lifelong, they were generally not hereditary, as heirs could not automatically inherit the position. A key feature of Mughal governance was that all civil officials, whether high-ranking or lower-level, were selected from these military rank-holders known as '*mansabdars*'. Thus, the '*mansabdari*' system integrated the military, nobility, and civil administration under a unified structure.

K.S. Lal, in *History of the Khaljis (1290-1320)*, discusses Alauddin's military reforms during the Delhi Sultanate. Alauddin reorganized the army and instituted a system where soldiers were recruited directly under the king's name and paid from the royal treasury. Unlike the graded pay scale system of Akbar's time, this was not referred to as the '*mansabdari*' system, and appointments were based on merit without a hereditary principle. In a general sense, when referring to a position and its holder without implying hereditary succession, the terms '*mansab*' (position) and '*mansabdari*' (position holder) are used here.

<sup>3</sup> Diana L Miller, *Symbolic capital and gender: Evidence from two cultural fields* (*Cultural Sociology* 8, no.4,2014),p.462.

<sup>4</sup> Ed.Ralph J. DiClemente, Richard A. Crosby and Michelle C. Kegler, *Emerging theories in health promotion practice and research* (John Wiley & Sons,2009),p.232.

<sup>5</sup> Diana L Miller, *Symbolic capital and gender: Evidence from two cultural fields* (*Cultural Sociology* 8, no.4,2014),p.462-463.

<sup>6</sup> Shadab Bano, *Eunuchs in Mughal household and court*. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.69 (Indian History Congress, 2008),p.421.

<sup>7</sup> Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, Trans. Henry Miers Elliot In *The History of India: As told by its own Historians* (London: Trubner And Co,1871), Vol3,p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> According to Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmed, the selection of Malik Kafur as Malik Naib, or deputy governor, stemmed from the profound personal bond that Alauddin had established with him, *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*,Vol1,p.157.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press,1999),p.176.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*; Agha Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* (THACKER SPINK & CO. Pvt. Ltd, 1933),p.5.

<sup>12</sup> Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's History and Culture of the Indian People Volume VI: The Delhi Sultanate, writes it as Devagiri,p.31.

<sup>13</sup> Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmad,Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Trans. B.DE (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal,1927),Vol1,p. 417

<sup>14</sup> India in the Persianate Age (1000-1765 A.D.), retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/india-in-the-persianate-age-richard-eaton/page/n15/mode/2up>

<sup>15</sup> Peter Jackson, The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press,1999),p.175.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Agha Mahdi Husain, Tughluq Dynasty (THACKER SPINK & CO. Pvt. Ltd, 1933),p.31

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Kidwai, Saleem, "Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestics: New Forms of Bondage in Medieval India." In Chains of Servitude: bondage and slavery in India., by Utsa Patnaik and Manjari Dingwaney (Madras: Sangam Books, 1985),p.92

<sup>22</sup> Says Minhaj-us-Siraj (or Juzjani), quoted in The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History,p.73.

<sup>23</sup> Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, The Sultanate of Delhi, 711-1526 A.D. (Agra: Durga Printing Works, 1964),p.161; and Kishori Saran Lal, History of the Khaljis,1290-1320 (Allahabad: The Indian Press Ltd,1950),p.318. Also see Sheikh Mohamad Ikram, Muslim Civilization in India (New york: Columbia University Press,1964),p.56.

<sup>24</sup> Ishwari Prasad, A Short History of Muslim Rule in India: From the Conquest of Islam to the death of Aurangzeb (Allahabad: The India Press Limited, 1981),p.86.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid; Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, The Sultanate of Delhi, 711-1526 A.D. (Agra: Durga Printing Works, 1964),p.318.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Richard Eaton records him as having Ethiopian origins in "India in the Persianate Age 1000-1765"

<sup>28</sup> Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's History and Culture of the Indian People Volume VI: The Delhi Sultanate, notes that his journey commenced as a slave under the patronage of Sultan Muhammad, the son of Firuz Tughluq,p.186.

<sup>29</sup> Mohammad Habib and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, A Comprehensive History of India Volume 5: The Delhi Sultanat,1206-1526 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1970),p.711.

<sup>30</sup> Ishwari Prasad, History of Medieval India (Allahabad: The Indian Press Ltd,1933),p.402; Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's History and Culture of the Indian People Volume VI: The Delhi Sultanate (Bombay, 1960),p.186.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ishwari Prasad, A Short History of Muslim Rule in India: From the Conquest of Islam to the death of Aurangzeb (Allahabad: The India Press Limited, 1981),p.188.

<sup>34</sup> Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society,1907),Vol1,p.451.

<sup>35</sup> Shadab Bano, Eunuchs in Mughal household and court. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.69 (Indian History Congress, 2008),p.420.

<sup>36</sup> Nawab Samsam-ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, Maathir-ul-Umara, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1941),Vol1,p.705.

<sup>37</sup> Abul Fazl Allami, Ain-Akbari, Trans.H.Blochman(Calcutta,1873),Vol1,p.404.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society,1907),Vol2,p.277.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Nawab Samsam-ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, Maathir-ul-Umara, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1941),Vol1,p.709.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Shadab Bano, Eunuchs in Mughal household and court. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.69 (Indian History Congress, 2008),p.420.

<sup>44</sup> Kishori Saran Lal, The Mughal Harem (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan,1988),p.57. Also see Private Life of The Mughals of India retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/private-life-of-the-mughals-of-india/page/n13/mode/2up>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Also read Shadab Bano, Eunuchs in Mughal household and court. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.69 (Indian History Congress, 2008),p.420.

<sup>47</sup> Ruby Lal, “Harem and Eunuchs: Liminality and Networks of Mughal Authority,” in *Celibate and Childless Men in Power: Ruling Eunuchs and Bishops in the Pre-Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 92-108,p.99. And Shadab Bano’s Eunuchs in Mughal household and court. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.69 (Indian History Congress, 2008),p.422.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Nawab Samsam-ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, Maathir-ul-Umara, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1941),Vol1,p.709.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Kishori Saran Lal, The Mughal Harem (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan,1988),p.57.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid; Ghilmans and Eunuchs retrieved from <http://voiceofdharm.org/books/mssmi/ch9.htm>

<sup>54</sup> Kishori Saran Lal, The Mughal Harem (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan,1988),p.57.

<sup>55</sup> Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmad,Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Trans. B.DE (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal,1936),Vol2,p.515.

<sup>56</sup> See Ain-i-Akbari, Trans.Blochmann,Vol1, p.405, where he is called Ikhlas Khan Itibar, the eunuch.

<sup>57</sup> Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmad,Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Trans. B.DE (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal,1936),Vol2,p.672.

<sup>58</sup> Shadab Bano, Eunuchs in Mughal household and court. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.69 (Indian History Congress, 2008),p.420.

<sup>59</sup> Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmad,Tabaqat-i-Akbari, Trans. B.DE (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal,1936),Vol2,p.672.

<sup>60</sup> Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society,1939),Vol3,p.515

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Shadab Bano, Eunuchs in Mughal household and court. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.69 (Indian History Congress, 2008),p.420.

<sup>64</sup> Kishori Saran Lal, The Mughal Harem (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan,1988),p.57.

<sup>65</sup> Shadab Bano, Eunuchs in Mughal household and court. In Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.69 (Indian History Congress, 2008),p.421.

<sup>66</sup> Nawab Samsam-ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, Maathir-ul-Umara, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1952),Vol2,p.682.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> According to Shadab Bano, the author of the article Military Slaves in Medieval India, Khwaja Hilal established the town of Runkata, also known as Rungata, which he named Hilalabad, and built a magnificent mansion in Agra,p.353.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Private Life of The Mughals of India retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/private-life-of-the-mughals-of-india/page/n13/mode/2up>

<sup>71</sup> Kishori Saran Lal, *The Mughal Harem* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan,1988),p.57; Ram Nath in his book “Private life of the Mughals of India (1526-1803)” notes that the domain of Gwalior, including its surrounding districts, came under the jagir of Itibar Khan, likely due to Khusrav’s confinement within the Gwalior Fort.

<sup>72</sup> Khwajah Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, Trans. B.DE (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal,1936),Vol2,p.670-671.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* However, insights from the “Private Life of The Mughals of India” reveal that in the year 1610, he attained a ‘mansab’ of 4000 zat (personal) and 1000 sawar (cavalry). This rank was subsequently elevated to 5000/2000 in 1613, 5000/3000 in 1615, and ultimately to 5000/4000 in 1622.

<sup>74</sup> Private Life of The Mughals of India retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/private-life-of-the-mughals-of-india/page/n13/mode/2up>

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>77</sup> Kishori Saran Lal, *The Mughal Harem* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan,1988),p.57.

<sup>78</sup> Ghilmans and Eunuchs retrieved from <http://voiceofdharm.org/books/mssmi/ch9.htm> Shivangini Tandon notes that Firuz Khan held a rank of 3,000, commanding 1,500 horses. For further details, refer to her work, *The Presence of the Marginalised in the Life Sketches of the Ruling Elites: Slaves, Musicians and Concubines in the Mughal Tazkiras*,p.68.

<sup>79</sup> Private Life of The Mughals of India retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/private-life-of-the-mughals-of-india/page/n13/mode/2up>

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>81</sup> Nawab Samsam-ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, *Maathir-ul-Umara*, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1941),Vol1,p.564.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>84</sup> Private Life of The Mughals of India retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/private-life-of-the-mughals-of-india/page/n13/mode/2up>

<sup>85</sup> Claire Pamment, *Hijraism: Jostling for a third space in Pakistani politics (TDR: The Drama Review, MIT Press,54,no.2, 2010)*,p.37.

<sup>86</sup> Nawab Samsam-ud-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, *Maathir-ul-Umara*, Trans.H.Beveridge (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1941),Vol1,p.565.

<sup>87</sup> Ghilmans and Eunuchs retrieved from <http://voiceofdharm.org/books/mssmi/ch9.htm> But “History of India as told by its own historians Volume 7” provides that he died in 1684.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*,p.150.

<sup>89</sup> Also referred to as Mirat-i-Jahan Numa. See Ghilmans and Eunuchs retrieved from <http://voiceofdharm.org/books/mssmi/ch9.htm>

<sup>90</sup> Kishori Saran Lal, *The Mughal Harem* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan,1988),p.57; See Ghilmans and Eunuchs retrieved from <http://voiceofdharm.org/books/mssmi/ch9.htm>

<sup>91</sup> Bakhtawar Khan, *Mirat-i-Alam*,Trans. Henry Miers Elliot In *The History of India: As told by its own Historians* (London: Trubner And Co,1877), Vol7,p.150.

<sup>92</sup> Ruby Lal, “Harem and Eunuchs: Liminality and Networks of Mughal Authority,” in *Celibate and Childless Men in Power: Ruling Eunuchs and Bishops in the Pre-Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2018),p.105; K.S.Lal in “The Mughal Harem” mentions his death year to be 1698.

<sup>93</sup> Munis D Faruqi, *The princes of the Mughal empire, 1504–1719* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2012),p.89-90.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*,p.90.

<sup>95</sup> Ruby Lal, “Harem and Eunuchs: Liminality and Networks of Mughal Authority,” in *Celibate and Childless Men in Power: Ruling Eunuchs and Bishops in the Pre-Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2018),p.105. Munis D. Faruqi notes that Aurangzeb’s complete trust in the Khan was evident when the emperor appointed him as one of the primary caretakers for Prince Mu’azzam during his house arrest for treason. For this see,

Munis D Faruqi, *The princes of the Mughal empire, 1504–1719* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2012),p.240.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Henry Miers Elliot and John Dawson, *The History of India: As told by its own Historians* (London: Trubner And Co,1877),Vol8,p.113.

<sup>98</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall Of The Mughal Empire* (Calcutta: Orient Longman Ltd,1964),Vol1,p.25.

<sup>99</sup> Jaswant Lal Mehta, *Advanced Study in the History of Modern India,1707-1813* (Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd,2005),p.133. For further details see Sehar Khwaja, *Fosterage and Motherhood in the Mughal Harem: Intimate Relations and the Political System in Eighteenth-Century India* (*Social Scientist* 46, no. 5-6, 2018,p. 45-46.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Henry Miers Elliot and John Dawson, *The History of India: As told by its own Historians* (London: Trubner And Co,1877),Vol8,p.113

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall Of The Mughal Empire* (Calcutta: Orient Longman Ltd,1964),Vol1,p.338.

<sup>104</sup> Jaswant Lal Mehta, *Advanced Study in the History of Modern India,1707-1813* (Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd,2005),p.133.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall Of The Mughal Empire* (Calcutta: Orient Longman Ltd,1964),Vol1,p.440.