

Negotiating Identity and Power in Premodern Deccan: A Biographical Analysis of *Afāqī* Noble Afzal Khān Shīrāzī

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Abstract

This article primarily aims to explore the career of Mīr *Ghiyāṭ-al-Dīn* Shīrāzī by examining his identity and contributions to the 'Ādil Shāhī Sultanate in Medieval Deccan. This study ameliorates the qualitative research methodology that focuses on the identity and the agency of individuals as a major factor that plays a significant role in shaping the personality and achieving the targets even when the opponent group of different backgrounds challenged and fiercely opposed. This research found Shīrāzī's career very significant as it helps us in understanding the migration of elites and the networks of intellectuals within the medieval Persianate worlds that fostered new political and cultural prospects in premodern Deccan. It discovered extreme disagreements among nobles having diverse identities that derived them to play identity politics in order to ascertain their interests in premodern Deccan. The identity politics gave birth to the emergence of factionalism and sectarianism in the imperial court of the 'Ādil Shāhī Sultanate. Consequently, 'Ādil Shāhī rulers had to make state policies taking influences of the dominant group into their consideration. Accordingly, nobles used to adjust their loyalty and support in accordance to the rulers' ideology and policies. In this context, the identity politics made a ruler and his noble interdependent. This study revealed that the regional identity was more effective than the politics of religious identity in premodern South Asia.

Keywords

Afāqī; *Dakhnī*; identity and politics; *Ishrāqī*; premodern Deccan.

Article history

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Statement

The author declare that he has no conflict of interest.



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1. INTRODUCTION

In the history of medieval Deccan, the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries are significant because of crucial neo-political developments like the establishment of political powers—Gulbarga in 1347 and Vijaynagar in 1336, followed by skirmishes among nobles. It resulted in the form of new regional dynasties – Bijapur in 1489, Ahmadnagar and Berar in 1491, Bidar in 1492 and Golconda in 1512 (Firishta, 2010, 509). Correspondingly, the period is also important for cultural and political exchange among contemporary kingdoms – Ottoman, Deccan, Safavid, and Mughal through the channel of migration. This was the time when a large number of Persian people migrated to India by both land and sea routes in search of better opportunities. This migration brought many changes in the socio-political culture of premodern Deccan. One of the remarkable changes was composition of nobility and polity based on regional and religious identity.

The identity politics comprised *Gharbī* (also called *Afāqī*), *Dakhnī*, Shī'a and Sunni. In the history of medieval Deccan, the term, *Gharbī* (literary means Westerner, foreigner and newcomer) refers to those people who emigrated from West lands of India such as from West Asia, Middle East, Central Asia or Iran to Deccan, South India. These emigrants were also known as *Afāqī*. Most of them belonged to Persia and followed Shī'ism. Amongst, those who belonged to Shīrāz, a town in Iran and migrated to India were called *Shīrāzī*. In contrast, the descendants of north Indian emigrants who had been born and raised in Deccan were called *Dakhnī* (Deccani) (Eaton, 2005). Abyssinians were identified as *Habshī*. The word Shī'a derived from the Arabic phrase *shī'at ul-'Alī*, refers to the group or party of Ali bin Talib (d. 661), the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). Shī'as believe that 'Alī was the first rightful successor of the Prophet Muḥammad. In contrast, Sunnīs believe that Abū Bakr (d. 634) was the first rightful successor of the Prophet Muḥammad. The term *Ishrāqī* is a part of Islamic philosophy which refers illuminist philosophy represented by Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191) (Eden, 2011).

Employing the qualitative research method that focuses on identity and agency, the present article aims to understand court politics by exploring the career of an immigrant intellectual popularly called Afzal Khān Shīrāzī who served the Sultanate of Bijāpūr as an imminent teacher, court advisor, *peshwa* and *wakīl al-saltanat* (chief minister). He started his career first as a Madrasa (school) teacher and later on achieved the highest position of *peshwa* in the State administration (Ghauri, 1970). Reconstructing the history of his career is useful for many reasons such as his

influence in formulating the 'Ādil Shāhī political discourse and intellectual atmosphere; his contributions to the state administration and his role in the court politics. In addition, a close study of his family background and educational training within a chain of teachers helps us to understand that, for prominent elites with certain identities, education and pedigree were how much important for joining the court service. It can also be observed how they used their experiences and identities to handle difficult situations and resolve knotty issues related to court politics.

In this article, I employed the qualitative research methodology that emphasizes the agency and identity of individuals as a major factor in shaping their choices, actions and experiences. The agency can be effective in changing the material or cultural conditions (Pomper, 1996, 283; Outhwaite, 2007, 733). Following this methodology, I tried to examine the agency and identity of Afzal Khān Shīrāzī beyond the traditional narratives. The article investigates his actions and decisions in a specific context such as how his identity and agency shaped his personality and career. How did his identity become the sole cause of conflicts at the 'Ādil Shāhī court of Bijapur? How did his identity and agency pave for his success in competing with his rivalries of different identities?

Throughout the article, I used several contemporary sources such as *Burhān-i Ma'āsir* of Syed Ali Tabatabai, *Tazkirat ul-Mulūk* of Rafiuddin Ibrahim Shirazi, *Tārīkh-i Firishta* of Muhammad Qasim Firishta and *Futūhāt-i Adil Shāhī* of Fuzuni Astrabadi, *Muntakhab ut-Tawārīkh* of Abdul Qadir Badauni. Besides, I consulted non-contemporary historical accounts like *Basātīn us-Salātīn* of Mirza Ibrahim, *Wāqī'āt-i Mamlakat-i Bījapūr* of Bashiruddin Ahmad Dehlavi, *Tarikh-i Dakkan* of Saiyed Ali Bilgrami; *History of Medieval Deccan (1295- 1724)* of H. K. Sherwani, and *Studies in the History of Medieval Deccan* of Rafi Ahmad Alavi, *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* of Ghulam Yazdani, *Memoirs of Archaeological Survey of India No. 49 Bijapur Inscriptions* of M. Nazim, etc. These are rich sources to understand the role of the agency and the identity in social and political developments.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Existing Works on Afzal Khān Shīrāzī

The contemporary writers including the author of the *Tārīkh-i Firishta* and the *Burhān-i Māsir* except the *Tazkirat ul-Mulūk* did not give a fair space to him in their writings. The latter provides detailed information about his scholarship and political

career. A text of the early nineteenth century, the *Basātīn us-Salātīn* is also a helpful source but repeats more or less the same information found in the *Tazkirat ul-Mulūk*.

In addition, there is not much written about him in modern scholarships. Very few modern scholars cited him without any critical assessment. For example, H. K. Sherwani has confused him with Afzal Khān, a Mughal noble who was killed in a meeting with Shivaji, the Maratha ruler at the battle of Pratāpgarh in 1659 (Sherwani, 1946, 433). In contrast, Rafī'uddīn Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī provides an eye-witness account of Afzal Khān Shīrāzī's murder in 1580. Shīrāzī's information is authentic because he was imprisoned in the same bar out of which Afzal Khān Shīrāzī was executed (Shīrāzī, 121b; Zubairi, 178).

S. A. A. Rizvi has mentioned him merely as a shī'a scholar (Rizvi, 1995, 271-73) but there is hardly any clear evidence about his sectarian identity. Instead, he was better known for his regional identity Shīrāzī. Iqtidar Alam Khan wrote an introductory note the *Tazkirat ul-Mulūk* by highlighting its significance for studying the reign of the Mughal emperor, Akbar (Khan, 1980, 41-55). He said nothing about Afzal Khān Shīrāzī. Likewise, Ghulam Yazdani and M. Nazim missed discussion on his career at all. Anooshah's article on Shīrāzī scholars is informative but the primary focus has been made on the contributions of Mīr Fathullāh Shīrāzī (d. 1589) to the formation of political discourse at the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (Anooshahr, 2014, 340-42). Therefore a fresh attempt is needed to construct the history of Afzal Khān Shīrāzī and the role of his identity and agency in making his career as well as his contribution to the 'Ādil Shāhī Sultanate.

2.2. Education and Scholarship

His real name was Mīr Ġiyāṭ-al-Dīn Shīrāzī but was popularly known as Afzal Khān Shīrāzī (d. 988 A.H./1580/81) in Deccan. The exact date of his birth is unknown but he might have been born around in 1530s at Shīrāz in Iran. He was cousin (uncle's son) and senior to Mīr Rafī'uddīn Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, the author of the *Tazkirat al-Mulūk* who was born in 947 A.H./1540-41 (Shīrāzī, 72a, f. 88a, 125b; Rieu, 1879, 315a-316b).

He belonged to an aristocratic family that held administrative positions under the Āq-Qoyūnlūs in Shīrāz and Rayy. Here, his brothers served as courtiers (Shīrāzī, 88a-88b). Likewise, the titles *mīrzā* and *mīr* which are prefixed with his name also suggest that he was of aristocratic lineage (Shīrāzī, 121a). The word *mīr* refers to the prince, chief, and governor as well as a descendant of the Saiyed family. The *mīrzā* is

a short form of *amīr-zāda* which is frequently used for the meaning of king or noble ("mirza", 1980, Vol. III, 261-65; Steingass, 2007, 1360). All this information indicates his association with aristocracies or at least with a patrimonial lineage of a royal family.

Afzal Khān Shīrāzī's father died when he was eight years old. He was brought up and got an education at his native place Shīrāz. He received education from the most prominent scholars of their time like Mīr Faṭḥ-Allāh Shīrāzī who was a noted student of Mīr Ġiyāṭ-al-Dīn Dashtakī. The former was a distinguished scholar of religious sciences, logic, Arabic and Persian grammar, astronomy, philosophy, mathematics, and history who trained Afzal Khān Shīrāzī (Shīrāzī, 72a; Tabataba, 1936, 550). There was a cordial relationship between the teacher and the student. The teacher used to go to his student's house and help him to teach the missed lessons in case he could not attend the classes. The two spent much time debating on important issues in the classroom as other students watched them with astonishment (Shīrāzī, 88a-89b). Following his teacher's ideology, Afzal Khān Shīrāzī adhered to the *Ishrāqī* (illuminative) philosophy which was developed by Suhrawardī.

Like his teacher, he combined his religious scholarship with political science. Thus, he emerged as a great Islamic scholar, successful diplomat and good administrator of his time. One can realize the degree of his scholarship and leadership from the acknowledgment of contemporary scholars. They called him *Imām-i zamāna* (leader of the age) for his knowledge and expertise (Shīrāzī, 126a-127a). His teacher Mīr Faṭḥ-Allāh Shīrāzī also acknowledged his scholarship and praised him (*Ibid.*, 88b). Tabataba, the author of the *Burhān-i Māsīr* addressed him with the title of *Afzal ul-khawānin* (best among Khāns) and wrote that he had been a virtuous person and capable of taking the right decision on the right time. He was a great scholar, administrator, reliable courtier and visionary court advisor (Tabataba, 598). In this way, one can see that his cultural privilege and educational qualifications made his identity distinct and his agency proficient. Along these lines, he established himself as a prominent scholar who combined religious and political science like Mīr Faṭḥ-Allāh Shīrāzī. He utilized intelligently his knowledge and cultural capital as a resource to achieve his goals in Bijapur, Deccan.

2.3. Afzal Khān Shīrāzī in Deccan

Afzal Khān Shīrāzī moved to India with some of his students in search of better opportunities and settled in Bījāpūr in the early reign of 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh (r. 1558-1580).

Here, he began his career as a Madrasa teacher. As I have indicated earlier he combined his religious scholarship with political science, and this made him popular among scholars as an *Imām-i zamāna* (leader of the age) (Shīrāzī, 126a-127a). Being an *Imām-i zamāna*, he was regarded as a reliable astrologist. He was an expert on the *fāl* (omen, prediction), a branch of foretelling philosophy that might be traced to ancient Greece but overwhelmed the medieval Persianate world.

As an omenologist, by interpreting the verses of the Qurān he used to predict the consequence of the future, especially of the warfare. For instance, in 972 A.H. (1564), once Sultān 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh asked him to predict the consequences of a campaign against Ahmadnagar. Following the Sultān's order, he predicted its harmful consequence and suggested the army commander Kishwar Khān to quit the campaign but he did not take his prediction seriously as a consequence he was killed in the same battle (Shīrāzī, 71b). We do not find evidence how much his predictions were utilized in campaigns and warfare but the aforesaid information shows the reliance of the Sultān on his knowledge. It was his intellectual and cultural identity that paved the way for his entry into the State service. He smartly utilized his agency to ascertain his objectives.

Apart from this, he was well aware of *Tasawwuf* and its impact on politics. He effectively utilised his knowledge of Sufism and mystical experiences in bringing the officials as well as common people into his influence and ultimately in gaining political interests. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī writes,

“Once, at night I was with Afzal Khān on a way to somewhere. He went near a deep well, around which there were many trees whose branches were overarching the well. I saw him going down to the well by taking the branches in his hand, and then an unseen herald shouted, all of you are thinking only about your protection, O' Raf'ī, what are you doing while he suddenly disappeared. We searched for him even I went down to the well but there was nothing except darkness. He was not there. ...Subsequently, we found him standing safe before us” (Shīrāzī, 126a-127a).

Although the purpose of his act is not clarified by the author Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, the statement sheds light on Afzal Khān Shīrāzī's power of displaying miracles like a mystic person. This was the time when *Sufis* and *nāth panths* were believed to have miracle powers in India. Obviously, he wanted to utilise his mystical experiences as a tool for political gains observing that the 'Ādil Shāhī rulers believed in divine power and authority of mystical persons.

However, when the fame of his scholarship reached Sulṭān 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh, he called upon him and honoured him with a special position in the imperial court along with an additional charge of the religious and educational department. Later on, by dint of his efficiency and exploiting the pro-*gharbī* policy of his patron, he rose to the highest position of the *wakīl al-saltanat* in the state service. He greatly favoured scholars, poets and intellectuals during his service tenure in Bījāpūr. He invited scholars and started organizing scholarly debates on various issues. Many scholars and intellectuals actively used to take part in the debate. In the debate, he turned out to be a greater debater. In this way, he made an intellectual identity here among educated people and nobles.

The fame of his scholarship attracted more learned people. Subsequently, officials along with scholars began visiting him. It was due to his efforts, that around 200 scholars rendered service to Bījāpūr sultanate (Shīrāzī, 94a-94b). Thousands of people came to Deccan. Ahmed estimated ten thousand people came to the Deccan from Shīrāz only at different times (Ahmed, 1915, 179). Among his invitees, a prominent scholar was his favourite teacher Mīr Faṭḥ-Allāh Shīrāzī who initially came to Bījāpūr and later moved to the Mughal court (Shīrāzī, 77a). He belonged to the *Ishrāqī* (illuminist) school of philosophy (Badāyūnī, 1380, 105; Ṭabaṭabā, 509). According to this philosophy, God is regarded as the supreme light from which by irradiation, the *anwār-i qāhira* (victorious lights or archangelic light) emanates. Explicitly, the whole hierarchy of the *anwār-i qāhira*, from degree to degree, illumines the presence of each lower degree. In other words, God is the main source of light from which all spirits borrow light ("Ishraqi", 2013). This mystical notion of divinity highly influenced public and private life including imperial ideology in the medieval world. The idea of kingship was largely shaped by the institutions of mysticism (Moin, 2012, 5). In such wise, the *Ishrāqī* philosophy had political implications that were greatly exploited by monarchical ideologues and monarchs throughout the medieval period.

As far back as the fourteenth century, Shīrāz to which Afzal Khān Shīrāzī belonged had been a centre of the *Ishrāqī* philosophy. He was brought up and gained education in an environment full of the impact of the *Ishrāqī* philosophy. Many prominent scholars greatly contributed to synthesising the two most influential trends prevalent in Islamic philosophy i.e. the peripatetic philosophy (represented by Avicenna) and the *Ishrāqī* (Annoshahr, 334-35). Obviously, the emigrant Shīrāzī scholars developed the pedagogy in educational institutions and the intellectual environment as well as the political atmosphere that was influenced by the *Ishrāqī*

philosophy. There is a reliable ground for speculation regarding the impact of the *Ishrāqī* philosophy on the 'Ādil Shāhī kingship. Mīr Faṭḥ-Allāh Shīrāzī first started propagating the *Ishrāqī* philosophy in the 'Ādil Shāhī court but he successfully developed it at the Mughal court. According to Badāūnī, the emperor Akbar had been arguing for the necessity of full prostration (*sajda* or *zamīnbos*) before the monarch which was strongly opposed by Ulama (religious scholars of Islam) since the conservative Islamic jurists considered it heretical. Faṭḥullāh Shīrāzī was specifically invited with the intention of getting his justification on the imperial ideology of the emperor Akbar (Badāūnī, 1380; Tabatabā, 519). Here, he developed the *Ishrāqī* philosophy that ultimately paved the way for flourishing a new imperial ideology which was later known as *ṣulḥ-i kul* (peace with all) policy.

I found a similar sort of development in the 'Ādil Shāhī court too. Afzal Khān Shīrāzī along with other scholars developed the *Ishrāqī* philosophy further in the 'Ādil Shāhī court. Most probably, the 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh's benign character was influenced by this philosophy. Thus, the *sajda-i ta'azīmī* (prostration out of respect) came into practice in his court because of the influences of this philosophy which permits prostration out of respect (Ṭabaṭabā, 509). Many instances tell about the practice of *sajda-i ta'azīmī* in the 'Ādil Shāhī court. For instance, once the chief of Naygawārs, Jot Rao visited the 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh's court and placed his forehead on the ground, Afzal Khān Shīrāzī put his forehead on the Sulṭān's foot like prostration (Shīrāzī: ff. 98a-98b). This philosophy had an impact on the personality of 'Ādil Shāhī rulers as well as their idea of kingship. For this reason, they openly claimed to have divine power and tried to project themselves as a divinely ordained king who were in direct contact with God. They considered showing respect to them as like respecting God's representative on the earth. This is why they allowed *sajda-i ta'azīmī* in their courts. It is notifying that Afzal Khān Shīrāzī made his space in the State service by developing ideas in favour of the 'Ādil Shāhī ruler. He shrewdly utilized his agency for achieving a higher position in the State service by developing an ideology and making policies in favour of the ruler.

2.4. Afzal Khān Shīrāzī's Contributions

It was Afzal Khān Shīrāzī's distinct identity of scholarship and wisdom along with royal lineage that made it possible for him to get the higher position in the reign of Sulṭān 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh and Ibrāhīm 'Ādil Shāh II (r. 1580-1627). 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh greatly trusted him because of his sincerity, loyalty, efficiency and wisdom (Shīrāzī, 88a-89b, 112a-112b). No important issue or State affair was decided without seeking

his advices in 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh's reign (Zubairī, 1892, 130). 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh says, "Since Afzal Khān joined the service I began to understand perfectly the spiritual and worldly responsibilities, further I came to know how a Sultanate is ruled. Because of him, I took great interest in the administration and relished the taste of the real kingship" (Shīrāzī, 80a).

During his service tenure, Afzal Khān Shīrāzī introduced many changes leading to systematizing further the 'Ādil Shāhī administration. He invited religious scholars, intellectuals, pious people, literary personalities, efficient public officials, experts in administration, honest revenue collectors and brave army commanders in large numbers and posted them to the deferent units of the State administration. He assigned the Department of finance and military administration to Najaf Iraqī and *'amal ist'ifā* (auditing) to Laṭīf Khān. He appointed Rafī'al-Dīn Shīrāzī treasurer in addition to the duties of the royal palace and kitchen. He appointed Shaykh Nūr-al-Dīn consultant on issues related to the forts and defence. He also employed three hundred *harkāre* (messengers) and seven hundred spies to get information from far-flung regions in the realm. He imprisoned the corrupt officers and seditious people. He continued with the influential officials such as Muṣṭafā Khān and Kāmil Khān so that they could not oppose him or create obstacles (Shīrāzī, 94a-94b). Acknowledging his contributions, Sulṭān 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh remarked that he had become free from all worries when Afzal took over the charge of the administration (*Ibid.*, 80a). Afzal Khān Shīrāzī's intuition and agency guided him in taking effective decision and selecting efficient officials from newly invited *Afāqīs*.

After resolving the internal problems, he paid his attention to the external threats to the State. With this intention, he made many policies to deal with the local chieftains who were not ready to accept the 'Ādil Shāhī sovereignty and were creating challenges to the State. For example, some powerful local chieftains called Naygawād had rebellious attitudes. They had created severe threats to the law and order in their areas. They often plundered surrounding regions and unleashed oppression. The efforts made by Sulṭān 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh to suppress them had already failed many times earlier.

When Afzal Khān Shīrāzī told the Sulṭān about his plan to tackle them, the Sulṭān expressed impossibility saying that he had been trying to persuade them for the last twenty years and had offered the designation of *peshwā* yet they did not comply. Afzal Khān Shīrāzī proposed a strategy of 'divide and rule' by offering land grants and services to them in the sultanate and simultaneously took firmly armed action against those who dared revolt or denied the imperial offers. Following his

plan, the Sultān succeeded in controlling them and restoring the law and order (Shīrāzī, 96a). He divided the local powerful chiefs by offering opportunity in the State service and land grants to them. In this way, he weakened them and finally destroyed their power.

2.5. Court Politics and Afzal Khān Shīrāzī

The court politics or conflict of nobility was not new to the 'Ādil Shāhī Sultanate. The founder of the Sultanate, Yūsuf 'Ādil Khān was an *Afāqī* noble of the Bahmanī Sultanate before establishing his dynasty in Bijapur. He declared himself as an independent ruler with the support of five thousand *Afāqīs* in 1489. Firishta writes that on his accession, Yūsuf 'Ādil Khān proclaimed that he had received the good news of the new kingdom to be bestowed by God upon him and was enjoined to strictly follow the commands of God, respect *ahl-i bait* (those who belong to the family of the prophet, Muhammad) and promote Shi'ism. He further adds, Yūsuf 'Ādil Khān declared with a claim that in his dream he had promised God to add the names of twelve Imāms to the *khutba* and promote Shi'ism. Thus, the names of the three caliphs (Abū Bakar, 'Umar and Usman) were removed the *khutba* of Friday and Edī's prayers at the Jām'i Masjid, and the names of the twelve imams were started reciting like in Shī'a tradition. Following the Shī'a tradition, the words '*Alīyan walī Allāh*' ('Alī is the friend of God) were added to the *azan*, a laud call for the prayers (Firishta, Vol. III, 33; Zubairī, 21). It appears from Firishta's statement that Yūsuf 'Ādil Khān wanted to create a distinct religious identity for his sultanate in opposition to the Bahmanī dynasty where Sunnī Islam was followed. However, his attempt to foster Shi'ism created an atmosphere like civil strife between his *Shī'a* and Sunnī nobles i.e. *Afāqīs* and *Dakhnīs*. Playing the identity politics, he promoted *Afāqīs* and demoted or dismissed *Dakhnīs* from the State service. Consequently, his policy twisted the interests of nobles of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds and civil strife continued till the dynasty came to an end.

After Yūsuf's death, a Sunnī noble Kāmil Khān Dakhnī became more powerful as the regency of young Prince Ismā'il in his reign. Being a regent, he independently used to settle the external and internal affairs of the State. He altered the founder's religious policy of pro-Shi'ism. Subsequently, *Afāqīs* started opposing his policy of discontinuing Shi'a tradition. In reaction, he decreased the number of *Afāqī* officials and almost deprived *Afāqī* army of the State service. Further, he attempted to capture the throne by suppressing oppositions. Hence, Dilshād Āgha selected an *Afāqī* noble Yūsuf Turk to tackle Kāmil Khān Dakhnī but meanwhile, he was killed. His murder

caused civil strife in the capital, Bijapur. His wife urged her son Safdar Khān to get the advantage of the crises and take revenge for his father's murder. He organised *Dakhnīs* with the help of his mother to seize the garrison meanwhile the young prince Ismā'īl pushed a heavy stone from the top of the garrison which crushed Safdar Khān. In consequence, leaderless *Dakhnī* soldiers dispersed. This event ended the domination of *Dakhnīs* in the capital. Furthermore, the prince terminated *Dakhnīs* and *Habshīs* (Abyssinians) from the State service. He greatly patronised *Afāqīs* and promoted them. Thus, those *Afāqīs* who had left the capital during the regency of Kāmil Khān *Dakhnī* out of fear and took shelter in neighbouring States, started coming back. Very soon, *Afāqīs* became powerful once again. After Ismā'īl 'Ādil Khān's death in 1534, his elder son Mallū 'Ādil Khān ascended the throne but was shortly deposed.

Then, Ibrāhīm 'Ādil Shāh became the ruler at the age of fifteen in 1535. He was the first 'Ādil Shāhī Sultān who followed the Sunnī faith. More importantly, he gave preference to *Dakhnīs* and *Habshīs* over *Afāqīs*. He dismissed many *Afāqīs* from the State service. He retained only a few powerful *Afāqīs* (Firishta, Vol. III, 47). Overall, the dominance of *Dakhnīs* continued until the Sultān died in 1558. It is interesting to know that once in a gathering, Ibrāhīm 'Ādil Shāh-I thanked God expressing pride over his decision to discontinue Shī'a tradition and promote the Sunnī school of thought in his Sultanate. His son, 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh, who was present in the gathering, reacted to his father's statement saying if deviating from the ancestor's religion and tradition is a matter of pride then every son should follow the path of deviation. Son's reaction extremely displeased the father who later on got his son's teacher Khwāja 'Ināyatullāh Shirāzī killed beholding him responsible for his son's faith in Shi'ism (Firishta, Vol. II, 97). Interestingly, Ibrāhīm did not want his son to be his successor because he believed in Shi'ism. After his death, mostly nobles especially those who were unhappy with his father's religious policy favoured his son's claim to be a true successor. Notably, he was enthroned with the support of the *Afāqī* nobles. He promoted Shi'ism and greatly favoured *Afāqīs* (Firishta, Vol. III, 68-70). He invited many religious scholars from Iran and gave them a free hand for propagating Shi'ism in the Sultanate (Firishta, Vol. II, 99). He was powerful enough to maintain control over nobility. No civil strife was witnessed in his reigning period.

However, it was the period of 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh's 'pro-*gharbī* policies that led *Afāqīs'* domination in the Sultanate. This was the time, Afzal Khān Shirāzī joined the State service and greatly contributed to the State building. The Sultān greatly favoured him because of his legacy and loyalty. When the Sultān was assassinated in

1579, he was the *wakīl al-saltānat* (prime minister). In the capacity of *wakīl us-sultānat*, he acted very wisely in the critical situation that occurred due to the assassination. Firstly, he tried to stop the news of the assassination from reaching to public because it could create political unrest. Despite his all effort, the news Nobles, officers and bureaucrats headed to the royal palace as they heard the news. But, he very smartly dealt with them and successfully managed the issue. For the time being, he succeeded in saving the sultanate from the crises, which was born after the assassination. Since the Sultān had no son, very soon a rivalry arose to capture the throne. Shāh Ṭahmāsp's sons Ibrāhīm 'Ādil Shāh II and Ismā'īl 'Ādil Shāh, the nephews of the diseased Sultān were the two contenders for the throne. It became too critical to control still Afzal Khān Shīrāzī artfully dealt with the situation. He first took the senior nobles and officials including bureaucrats in his confidence who were very worried about the succession then he called an assembly for the discussion on the issue of successorship. Since he had already taken the mostly senior nobles and officials in his confidence, he expressed his opinion on the selection of Prince Ibrāhīm 'Ādil Shāh II as a new successor who was nine years old only at the time. They all agreed with the selection. Thus, acting upon the common decision and again seeking the approval of the chief nobles, he obliged (Shīrāzī, 105a-106b).

Afzal Khān Shīrāzī's firm decision on time saved the kingdom from any succession struggle and usurpation of power by the powerful nobles. He resolved the issue of succession but the matter of regency of the minor king was yet to be decided. Many nobles wanted him to be regent but at the same time, many others were not in his favour at all. He refused to accept the regency because he had already faced very difficulties and challenges while resolving the issue of succession. He had witnessed the court strife and selfishness of nobles that had gotten rooted in the Sultanate. More importantly, he was well aware of the conspiracy plotted by his opponents against him (Shīrāzī, 87b-88a). For the reasons, he did not accepted the position of regency of the minor king. He kept himself away from the issues of the regency excusing his poor health (Shīrāzī, 115a-117a).

Nonetheless, in a short period, three regents from three different groups of nobility were appointed and dismissed. First, the dowager queen Chānd Bibī, the wife of the diseased Sultān and the daughter of Ḥusain Nizām Shāh the ruler of Ahmadnagar was appointed as his regent and Kamāl Khān as his *wazīr* (minister) who had gotten promotion in the reign of the diseased Sultān. No longer, he usurped all powers and started lavishly consuming wealth from royal treasury without consulting the minor Sultān or the regent. He attempted to keep the minor Sultān

aside within two months to get complete control over the administration. He tried to separate the regent from the minor Sultān with the same intention. Consequently, she was brutally dragged out of the *harem* on his indication when she denied his order to shift from the royal palace to some other residence (Shīrāzī, 112b-114b). Hence, she deputed Kishwar Khān to tackle Kamāl Khān who put him to death in 1580. Now, Kishwar Khān was elevated as regent of the minor king. He was also a greedy for power (Ali, 1996, 112). Acting in the minor Sultān's name falsely, in order to secure power, he confined Chānd Bibī in the fort of Satāra on the pretext that she had instigated her brother Murtuzā Nizām Shāh to invade Bījāpūr (Firishta, Vol. II, 123-127). Thus, Mustafā Khān was appointed to tackle his tyranny. But unfortunately, Muṣṭafa Khān was killed by one of his rivals. Then after, an Abyssinian official Ikhlāṣ Khān Habshī rose against Kishwar Khān. Ikhlāṣ Khān Habshī led Abyssinians against him. As a result, Kishwar Khān fled from the capital and shortly after his flight, he was killed in Golkonda where he had taken shelter (Firishta, Vol, III, 91; Astrabadi, 161b). After his flight, the issue of the *peshwāship* became a bone of contentions among nobles. Every senior nobles were desirous to be *peshwā*. They held discussions to resolve it for several days but there was no consensus. Afzal Khān kept himself away from this skirmish because his opponents had plotted a stronge conspiracy to kill him and send the minor Sultān along with his mother to Mecca (Shīrāzī, 115a-117a).

However, Chānd Bibī succeeded in taking charge as a guardian of the minor Sultān but the post of *peshwā* remained vacant. Hence once again nobles divided into three groups of divers identities i.e. *Dakhnī*, *Āfāqī* and *Habshī* on the issue of *peshwaship*. All of them wanted to be selected *peshwā* from their group. None of them agreed on appointing the *peshwā* from the opponent group (Shīrāzī, 124a). The group of *Āfāqī* and *Habashī* were more powerful than *Dakhnīs*. She had no good experience with the *Āfāqīs* except Afzal Khān Shīrāzī in the past. Therefore, she appointed Ikhlāṣ Khān Habshī the regent of the prince and nominated Afzal Khān Shīrāzī as a *peshwa* to keep the balance of power. She instructed Ikhlāṣ Khān Habshī to consult Afzal Khān Shīrāzī while making administrative decisions. Ikhlāṣ Khān Habshī was not happy with her decision of putting pressure for consulting to him.

In addition, the struggle for regency and *peshwaship* had already created distrust among the nobles and ultimately political unrest arose in the sultanate. Nobles and officials were divided into three major groups with certain regional and racial identities. They all were constantly contesting for the power or at least for the royal favour. Murtuzā Nizām Shāh of Ahmadnagar accounted this political unrest as an

opportunity to conquer Bijapur. He decided to wipe out the Sultanate of Bijapur. Accordingly, a combined army from Ahmadnagar and Golconda attacked Bījāpūr. Afzal Khān Shīrāzī fiercely fought against the allied army in the battle of Nāldurg and defeated them. While he was chasing enemies, he learnt about the chaos that overwhelmed the capital city, Bijapur. For this reason, Afzal Khān Shīrāzī had to leave for the capital to resolve the crises (Shīrāzī, 112b-114b, 117a, 124a; Firishta, Vol. II, 123-127). The opponents who were always in search of a chance to make his loyalty and honesty doubtful, succeeded this time in hatching the conspiracy alleging him of the treachery. As a consequence, he was dismissed from the *peshwaship* and Abū'al Ḥasan was appointed as new peshwa. He was executed on allegations of treachery in 1580 in the same manner as the conspiracy that was hatched against Maḥmūd Gawān in the Bahmanī kingdom (Shīrāzī, 123b-127a). Historians hold different opinions about the causes of his death. Zubairī accounted the regent Abū'al Ḥasan solely responsible for his death punishment. In contrast, Firishta and Rafī'-al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī accused Ikhlāṣ Khān Habshī for his death. According to them, Ikhlāṣ Khān Habshī fabricated malicious falsehoods and false chargesheets against him and put him into the bar where he was later killed.

3. CONCLUSION

This research found that the 'Ādil Shāhī rulers faced both the benefits and losses from the identity politics. They tried to strengthen their authority and keep the nobles under their control through identity politics. In contrast, the nobles often looked for an opportunity to regroup the people of a similar identity in order to protect their interests. This resulted in the form of sectarianism and fraction in the sultanate. The domination of a group played a decisive role in making the State policy exclusively in their favours. Being an *Āfāqī*, Afzal Khān Shīrāzī greatly benefited from the pro-*gharbī* policy of 'Ādil Shāhī rulers. He intelligently used his identity and agency along with his scholarship to protect his interests. During his service tenure, he exploited the pro-*gharbī* policy of his patron rulers. He had to constantly try to use his identity to adjust himself in the unfavourable situations posed by the opponent groups. He played safely identity politics until the opponent group became powerful. At last, he fell prey to the court politics and the conspiracy hatched by his opponents. He could not protect himself when the opponents like Ikhlāṣ Khān Habshī became powerful. Finally, he was put to death on the charge of treachery in 1580 despite his contribution to the 'Ādil Shāhī Sultanate is undeniable.

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