Abstract: In the winter of 2011, Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab, was assassinated by his security guard, Mumtaz Qadri, who stated that Taseer’s opposition to Pakistan’s blasphemy laws was an attack on Islam. In Lahore, a city with a Mughal past, Taseer’s death was understood through invocations of a murder that happened in 1659, when the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb killed his brother Dara Shikoh after declaring him an apostate: Taseer was portrayed as Dara reincarnated and Qadri Aurangzeb. This article argues that images of past kings stem from trauma caused by the loss of kingship and by a century of colonial rule. This article proposes that beneath nostalgia for past kings lies a deeper longing for the intact world kingship sustained. To reconstruct this world, I close-read the account of Bhimsen Saxena, a Hindu soldier who served under Aurangzeb and expressed both anger and loyalty towards his king; in this, he possessed a pre-modern subject’s capacity to hold ambivalence that modern citizens no longer possess. Narrative accounts such as Bhimsen’s can open the imagination to lost capacities for holding pain or ambivalence and bring scholarship on religious violence in modern South Asia into conversation with scholarship on the Mughal past.

The city of Lahore is at odds with Pakistan. This is because Lahore has a Mughal past but a new country like Pakistan is still not sure what to make of the Mughals. Stories of kings circle Mughal monuments in Lahore; adventures accompany kings, as do chance encounters in which they forgo their riches to become dervishes, prophecies through which they gain back their kingdoms, and otherworldly guides who appear when fate demands their path cross with the king’s. Meanwhile, Mughal kings are absent in Pakistani history textbooks or flattened to suit the needs of the nation, where Akbar (d. 1605) represents heresy and Aurangzeb (d. 1707) orthodoxy and the two battle one another for the soul of Islam, which finds its final sanctuary in the shape of Pakistan. Among those opposed to this narrative, the inverse is true: Akbar represents secular tolerance and Aurangzeb represents religious fanaticism. Although there are many excellent arguments about the losses caused by Partition in 1947, there are none that address how kings are old, archetypical symbols living in the soul of the city and why they keep surfacing in distorted forms produced by erasure and nostalgia.
When the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, was assassinated for his opposition to Pakistan’s blasphemy laws in the winter of 2011, many in Lahore went into mourning for Dara Shikoh, the brother who Aurangzeb declared an apostate and killed in 1659. Dara is seen as a throwback to Akbar in popular imagination, and Taseer as a throwback to Dara. Mumtaz Qadri, Taseer’s murderer, was celebrated and showered with rose petals, which further intensified mourning for Dara Shikoh and longing for alternate courses history could have taken had Dara lived. Or, many made comparisons between Qadri and Aurangzeb, as though the same soul had transmigrated through different bodies, determined to annihilate its enemy yet again. In mourning Dara and Taseer as manifestations of one soul and Aurangzeb and Qadri as manifestations of another, the centuries between the present and past collapsed. Regardless of whether Aurangzeb was portrayed as jihadi hero or fanatical villain, these characterizations constituted personal emergencies in which something held dear was endangered and required a hollowed-out king to act as a container for loss.

Stories of kings in Lahore also point to longings for an unpartitioned world made up of imaginary maps that float free of Pakistan. Tour guides tell of a secret network of tunnels beneath Mughal monuments that still links Lahore to cities in India. These maps of underground tunnels directly mirror maps of old routes that once connected Mughal cities, as though the disappeared routes form threads in a shared consciousness shaped by the memory of an older, unpartitioned world. In tunnel stories, Mughal kings are believed to have escaped through elaborate tunnel networks and their armies to have traveled unseen beneath the land as Mughal power waned. This means that images of kings serve a dual function in Lahore. They sustain nationalist binaries by representing Aurangzeb and Dara Shikoh through mutually exclusive notions of orthodox and heterodox, religious and secular. Simultaneously, images of kings possess the potential for destabilizing these binaries because they are unconsciously oriented towards a time when such binaries did not exist.

What is missing from both these formulations is the actual experience of kingship, which is too far removed for us to remember, but close enough to summon nostalgia. This essay will excavate the experience of kingship by resurrecting Aurangzeb through the memoir of Bhimsen Saxena, a Hindu newswriter who accompanied Aurangzeb’s armies on campaigns into the Deccan that began in 1680. Bhimsen romanticized past kings such as Aurangzeb’s father Shah Jahan (d. 1666) and was disappointed with Aurangzeb. But despite his love for Shah Jahan and his anger at Aurangzeb, Bhimsen possessed an ability to hold ambivalence that the modern citizen does not, because Bhimsen’s psyche was shaped by his rootedness in the very world for which the modern citizen feels nostalgic. Recovering ambivalence through the interiority of one life can allow a modern
citizen to see Aurangzeb from behind the eyes of one of his subjects and destabilize certainties about the king created by nationalism and nostalgia.

My focus on one life is in keeping with the writing of Mughal history, which contained several accounts of individual lives and with scholarship on Partition, which draws upon personal narratives to recover nuances of individual experience that do not fit into linear accounts. Partition is recent enough for historians to speak to survivors; the memory of kingship however, can only be found in the archives and in fragments of the everyday in cities such as Lahore. Reading Bhimsen while reading Lahore creates a bridge between subjecthood and citizenship through the possibility of empathy with the lived experience of a royal subject. This methodological intervention is needed because loss, anger, and longing lodge themselves too deep in the psyche to be countered with historical reasoning alone. Access to Bhimsen’s psyche can address both the distorted versions of kingship that shape the present and our sublimated desires for an unpartitioned world.

I focus on empathy and the capacity to hold ambivalence because many acts of violence in South Asia that command media attention are evidence of a constructed other deserving of neither. A mosque built at the order of Babur was destroyed in Ayodhya in 1992 because it symbolized Muslim invasion, statues of Buddha at Bamiyan were reduced to rubble by the Taliban in 2001 because they allegedly insulted Islam, and Wendy Doniger’s book, “The Hindus,” was pulped by Penguin Press, India in 2014 on the grounds that it offended Hindus. This is not to say there were no notions of self and other in the pre-colonial world; rather, the presence of the king mediated notions of Islam and Hinduism, self and other, one person’s sacred and another’s. The absence of a figure entrusted with both temporal and spiritual authority has meant the loss of this mediating function and the loss of this mediating function has meant that places of worship or laws about blasphemy are now the repositories of religious sentiment. The sense of violation that occurs when these sites, and by extension religion, is perceived to be under threat would not have been possible in a world where the sacred was housed in the body of the king.

Understanding the broken link between subject and king is integral to measuring what we have lost with the passing of kingship and to imagining ways of being in the world now out of reach. Before reading Bhimsen, I will show how the loss of kingship has morphed into strange imaginings that appear in textbooks, films, and personal encounters in both India and Pakistan. From its origin in British India, where colonial rule put an end to kingship, to its surfacing in present-day Lahore, nostalgia for lost kings and futures that could have been is a consistent undercurrent in the creation of Pakistan. It is easy to dismiss caricatures of kings and caliphs in popular imaginings in the Muslim world as evidence of how
divorced communal identity is from history. However, if we read loss into the constant surfacing of kingship, then voices from the past such as Bhimsen’s can offer a remedy. Beyond Pakistan, this kind of intervention can be tried in any context in which a past made difficult to access or deliberately severed from the present refuses to disappear, surfaces in a distorted form, and insists on claiming popular imagination in ways that academic interventions often fail to address.  \(^8\)

I. Nostalgic Inheritances

Nostalgia was once a medical diagnosis. By combining the Greek roots *nostos* (homecoming) and *algia* (longing), a Swiss physician coined the term in 1688 to refer to pathological longings for home among displaced people. Svetlana Boym has argued that at a historical moment when attitudes towards time and space were changing, those resistant to progress and excessively attached to home would be diagnosed with nostalgia and treated with leeches, opium, or a trip to the Alps. Eventually nostalgia went from treatable disease to incurable condition as no gene could be located for it, nor could its origins be found to reside in the body. Nostalgia also came to be institutionalized—as Pierre Nora has argued—in public sites of memory belonging to the nation.  \(^9\) This means that nostalgia is both a product of modernity, which allows for unprecedented displacements, and a reaction against modern notions of time and progress because of which older, magical ways of being in the world have been lost.  \(^10\)

Nostalgia for Mughal kings began with the waning of Mughal power and intensified because of the traumatic end of the Mughal Empire in 1857 at the hands of the British, who exiled the last Mughal king Bahadur Shah Zafar to Burma after putting him on display for visitors “like a beast in a cage.”  \(^11\) The loss of Delhi to Muslims, who were driven out of the city and blamed for the uprising of 1857, and the violence done to the body of the last Mughal king created a body of literature that mourned lost kings, ruined cities, and impossible futures.  \(^12\) From this loss emerged reconstructions of kingship: As British colonial historiography on the Mughals portrayed Akbar as syncretic and Aurangzeb as sectarian, Muslim intellectuals, whose imaginings Pakistan has inherited, defensively portrayed Akbar as swayed by Hindus and Aurangzeb as a staunch Muslim preserving his faith in a hostile landscape.  \(^13\)

Allama Iqbal, the philosopher, poet, and politician whose ideas gave language and momentum to the Pakistan movement saw Aurangzeb as a proto-nationalist and “the founder of Musalman nationality in India.”  \(^14\) Aurangzeb was also heralded as an exemplary Muslim by influential political leaders such as Maulana Abul Ala Maududi (d. 1979), the founder of the Islamist political party, the Jama`at-i Islami, who reached back into the past to find a leader whose morals could point Pakistan towards its
Meanwhile, Hindu intellectuals and politicians, including Nehru, propped up Akbar as a secular, non-denominational leader. Hindu and Muslim nationalists then recast Akbar and Aurangzeb along colonial binaries even though both kings articulated their roles across a spectrum of divinity that allowed for many formulations. While Akbar claimed to be
the messiah returned and an embodiment of God, Aurangzeb portrayed himself as a human servant of the divine, given to asceticism. In both these formulations, despite their variance, Islam was not an abstraction to be defended or destroyed by the king; rather the king was himself a sacred symbol whose fashioning changed depending on the political and cultural mood of the time.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite the disappearance of actual kings, communal identity in India and Pakistan continues to draw upon representations of kingship.\textsuperscript{18} The successful Bollywood film Jodha Akbar (2008) celebrates the love between Akbar and his Rajput wife as indicative of the tolerant co-existence that characterized Akbar’s India.

Meanwhile, in March 2008, a month after the release of Jodha Akbar, a group called FACT (Foundation Against Continuing Terrorism) staged an exhibit on Aurangzeb in Chennai to reveal Aurangzeb’s atrocities against Hindus. The exhibit, which included depictions of temple destructions undertaken by Aurangzeb, drew protests from Muslims, who feared becoming targets of violence once news of temple destructions spread through Chennai. The exhibit was shut down by police officers for fear of creating communal unrest. A newspaper article titled, “Has Aurangzeb reincarnated in form of police?” suggested the Chennai police were incarnations of Aurangzeb because they were suppressing freedom of expression.\textsuperscript{19}

The release of a nostalgia film about Akbar’s tolerance followed by the staging of an inflammatory exhibit pointing to Aurangzeb’s intolerance show the fault lines of collective imagination. In the case of the exhibit, the quick spread of news from hundreds of years ago collapsed time as though temples were being destroyed today. Time collapsed around Salman Taseer in Lahore in the same manner; mourning Dara Shikoh fused into mourning Taseer because both men possessed a soul repeatedly murdered in a cosmic battle. The backdrop for this capsizing was the city of Lahore; Lahore’s Mughal monuments disrupt our experience of time by evoking an older world that hides behind a new one. This uncanny quality makes the Mughal past seem inescapably lost, because Mughal monuments do not fit into the present. Simultaneously, the arresting power of Mughal monuments creates desires for the lost world they represent. As Santhi Kavuri-Bauer and Veronica Della Dora argue, ruined monuments in the post-colonial city act like a synecdoche on the imagination of citizens; representing a whole that once was, they offer the fragmented subject a relationship with a fabled past.\textsuperscript{20}

Lahore’s historical link to Delhi—both cities were Mughal capitals—and the splendor of the Mughal past is still mourned by families who live in the old city.\textsuperscript{21} I taught Mughal history in Lahore for a year in the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011 and was introduced by a colleague to
Amir, a descendant of a family with roots in Lahore that go back several generations. Amir explained to me that Lahore was Dara Shikoh’s city. “Lahore loved Dara Shikoh,” he began. “This city was with him, not with Aurangzeb, who is just like bearded fundamentalists today who are destroying Pakistan. Aurangzeb tried to win us over by building the Badshahi mosque, but we knew better,” the “we” in his statement representing, for all time, the loyal denizens of Lahore. “As if Aurangzeb could build anything like Shah Jahan’s Taj Mahal,” he scoffed. “It’s Dara we loved. This was his city.” In this narrative, Aurangzeb was the first in a line of calamities that had befallen Lahore, which was tolerant in the way of Akbar and Dara Shikoh and deprived of the future that Dara, its murdered could-have-been king would have created.

After telling me about Dara’s tolerance, Amir began to tell me he mourned Ranjit Singh (d. 1839), the first Maharaja of the Sikh Empire, which rose up after the weakening of Mughal power in North India. “It’s not India that was partitioned,” he said. “It was the Punjab. Lahore got cut off from Amritsar. These two holy cities of the Sikhs were like two eyes on a face.” In Amir’s map of his world, Ranjit Singh is another mythic king who held together the land, and like Dara Shikoh, represents co-existence. “Between Aurangzeb and Zia-ul-Haq,” said Amir, “the tolerance of South Asia has been destroyed.” Amir’s nostalgia is grounded in pain about the present but is also an escape that disavows present responsibility in favor of turning points in the distant and strangely immediate past.

Defenses of Aurangzeb did not break down the good Islam/bad Islam binary through which each king was understood in Lahore; one person’s good Islam simply became another’s bad Islam. Aurangzeb’s piety and simplicity were recounted to me by many who opposed the lavish expenditures of the Pakistani elite: In these arguments, Taseer, a rich politician, was being mourned while the deaths of villagers from American drone attacks were being ignored. An administrator from a lower middle class background, Ahmed, who works at Punjab University, saw the Mughals, with the exception of Aurangzeb, as representing the secularism of Pakistan’s urban elites. “No one is willing to defend Islam in this country, especially not the elites,” he said. “Akbar and Dara Shikoh practiced Hinduism and drank wine—why are we making them heroes when they were bad Muslims? The real hero was Aurangzeb, who stood up for Islam and practiced it correctly.” The Islami Jami`at-i Talaba (Islamic Society for Students), a group founded by Maulana Maududi in Lahore in 1947 has a stronghold in Punjab University, where it has demanded gender segregation, a conservative dress code, and a return to Islamic values. As a supporter of the Jami`at at a public university, Ahmed’s attachment to Aurangzeb comes from seeing Aurangzeb as a throwback to the early days of Islam before the polluting influence of Hinduism.
This longing for pristine Islamic nationhood can be found in textbooks for “Pakistan Studies,” which is compulsory in all schools. Ikram Rab-bani, the author of a widely-used Pakistan Studies textbook writes that Muslims under colonial rule longed for the lost glory of the Mughal Emp-ire. However, under Akbar, “mystics and sufis” had led people astray by making them believe in the miracles of the saints—a form of magic that was “alien to Islam.” Pakistan was the answer to the threat posed to Islam by external forces such as Hinduism, and internal forces, such as mysticism; Pakistan then succeeds where kings such as Akbar failed. Rab-bani is a product of over a century of distancing and erasure on the part of Muslim reformers: The knowledge that all Mughal kings appropriated the power of mystical orders has no place in the narrative of Pakistan.

Arguments about good kings and bad kings, while often specific to Pakistan, are also emblematic of a global imagination in which tolerance is dying in South Asia and can be revived if South Asians can remember that other versions of Islam, as represented by Dara Shikoh, also exist. In the BBC documentary, “The Story of India,” the historian Martin Davidson narrates how a helpless Dara Shikoh was brutally murdered by Aurangzeb while he was cooking lentils for his small son. Davidson then laments what this would come to mean for South Asia. The U.S. based scholar David Pinault, in a similar vein, writes that Dara Shikoh would not have died in vain if his memory can help revive pluralism in Pakistan. Reviews of the nostalgic play, “Dara Shikoh,” penned by the Pakistani playwright Shahid Nadeem and adapted for a showing in London recently, appeal to the tolerant vision of Islam that Dara represented and to the relevance of the play to contemporary times in which Aurangzeb’s fanatical Islam has triumphed. These pleas for tolerance through invocations of Dara ironically subscribe to the same empty binaries through which the intolerance they rage against is constructed.

By representing abstract principles that align with nationalist and global imaginings, the figures of Mughal kings are able to order emotion, and succeed where history—with its insistence on ambiguity and nuance—fails. Once the image of an idealized or vilified king takes root within the psyche, the partitioned self is ordered again, and the world neatly divided into notions of good and evil, self and other. Global images of Islam and Muslims that support these demarcations make them difficult to diffuse; to someone who believes Islam is under attack, praise for Dara Shikoh in London adds fuel to aggrievement. Similarly, any instance of religious violence that is celebrated rather than condemned in Pakistan bolsters the convictions of the liberal supporter of Dara Shikoh that Dara’s Islam is being extinguished. In both cases, if an individual sees herself and her idealized nation as secular/pluralistic (i.e., of Dara Shikoh), then the other is always constructed as religious/sectarian (i.e., of Aurangzeb).
This normative inversion—in which every self has an opposite who functions as other—creates a false sense of stabilization in unstable times.\(^{31}\)

Because we do not remember kingship, past kings and their world remains hazy enough to accommodate both the Dara/Aurangzeb dichotomy and the more elusive desire for pasts we believe were better than the present but to which we cannot return. What lurks beneath longing for Mughal kings is the traumatized citizen’s desire to return to a place in time prior to the injury caused by the loss of kingship and the partitioning of the land. For Amir, Dara Shikoh and Ranjit Singh represent a moment in time when the land was intact and free of trauma; for Ahmed the early community of Muslim believers represents the purest of times and Aurangzeb the last flicker of this purity. Despite supporting heroes at odds with one another, each possesses a consciousness that finds solace from a fragmented present in past kings. A reading of a subject of Aurangzeb’s such as Bhimsen Saxena can bring into clearer focus the unpartitioned selves for which we are actually nostalgic. While normative inversions through reimagined kings are the only form of stabilization available to present-day citizens, Bhimsen is rooted in a geography that contained the multiple sacralities of which Aurangzeb was only one manifestation. Currently, Aurangzeb has been split between two nations; in both, he is a savior to some and an agent of destruction to others but he is no longer allowed to be both as he was to Bhimsen. Once we pull together the two selves of the partitioned king, we can rebuild a missing order of being within ourselves.\(^{32}\)

II. The King Who Lived in Tents

Bhimsen Saxena belonged to a family who had served the Mughals for generations. Bhimsen was a soldier and news-writer for Aurangzeb’s Deccan campaigns on which he began to compose an account of his life and times, titled the *Tarikh-i Dilkasha*, which can be translated as a history that pleases or pulls at the heart.\(^{33}\) Bhimsen begins by writing that he has left royal service and rank and is facing difficult times in which he has chosen to content himself with stories of old.\(^{34}\) Bhimsen’s memories are ordered according to each successive year of Aurangzeb’s reign and while he does not mention ever meeting Aurangzeb, the services rendered by his father and uncles to the king shape their lives; they move with their families at Aurangzeb’s order and rely on him for promotions.

Aurangzeb appears in the text as an untested prince who Shah Jahan made the governor of the Deccan in 1636. Bhimsen mentions that the young prince gave Subhkaran Bundela, a patron of Bhimsen’s family, a post and an army.\(^{35}\) During the succession struggle between Shah Jahan’s four sons, Subhkaran Bundela and Bhimsen’s elder uncle Bhukandas left their families in Burhanpur to join Aurangzeb and were rewarded upon
Aurangzeb’s victory. Aurangzeb proclaimed himself king in 1658, writes Bhimsen, after which he set off in pursuit of his brother Dara Shikoh who fled towards Lahore and who Aurangzeb captured, paraded through the streets, and beheaded. In Bhimsen’s account, Dara Shikoh’s beheading is a matter of course; his body was relieved of the burden of his head, writes Bhimsen dourly, and does not follow this up with either praise or blame. As succession struggles and fratricide were common, the charge of apostasy leveled by Aurangzeb against Dara appears irrelevant to Bhimsen. In other Mughal accounts, Dara Shikoh is a divisive figure; loved by his father but unsuited for leadership, Dara might not have made for the most able successor.

After establishing his authority through his family’s ties to the Mughals, Bhimsen leads his reader through the landscape of Aurangzeb’s India. Bhimsen’s geography includes Lahore, which is one of the eight cities of Aurangzeb’s “heaven-protected” empire, and a node on a larger map built by the Mughals. The historic city is titled the realm of sovereignty and is one of five cities that remain prosperous despite the ruin that has marked Aurangzeb’s reign. The other four cities Bhimsen names as prosperous and whose longevity he prays for are Ujjain, Ajmer, Shahjahanabad, and Kabul. Of the three cities of the Deccan that fall under Mughal rule, namely Bijapur, Hyderabad, and Burhanpur, Bhimsen writes that all have witnessed population decreases because of Aurangzeb’s campaigns and the villages around them lie desolate. Burhanpur is Bhimsen’s birthplace and he shares with his readers his memories of Burhanpur in better days.

Aurangzeb’s empire, sacred by virtue of being reigned by a king who is the shadow of God on earth, is also part of a Hindu mythic geography. On this land, Bhimsen writes, there are seven famous rivers just as there are seven immortals, unseen to human eyes, and they are Aswathama, Bali, Vyas, Hanuman, Vibhishan, Kripacharya, and Parashuram. These seven immortals will rule for all time. There are furthermore seven blessed places in all of Hindustan: Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya, Kashi, Kanchi, Avantika, and Dwaravati, cities that continue to be pilgrimage centers today. The empire, and the land over which its cities are spread out, is dotted with the actions of mystics and pilgrims, heroes and kings. Bhimsen tells his readers about the River Godawari, sacred as the Ganges, where his father and his father’s friend, the noble Amanat Khan went on pilgrimage together, and Ellora, where local memory held that a king found a spring in the desert which was able to heal him, miraculously, of a skin disease.

These two geographies, which contain what would today be separated as Hinduism and Islam, feature as integrated sources of sacral power in Bhimsen’s known world. The king is the symbolic center of this landscape. Just as Amir used the metaphor of the body to refer to a once unified land, Bhimsen writes that God has made each man an empire, and the heart is
the ruler of the empire that is man. The king, acting as the agent of God on earth, is the heart of his empire and he is meant to maintain order. But Aurangzeb, according to Bhimsen, is flailing and entirely unlike his just and wise father Shah Jahan. Shah Jahan’s subjects were loyal and clean of heart and only required the king to preside over court once a week, writes Bhimsen, but Aurangzeb holds court twice a day and still subjects swarm in with uncountable grievances. Shah Jahan placed effective grandees in each principality, but Aurangzeb has put small men with small armies in charge of conquered provinces and “no one gets any justice.” Bhimsen mentions that Hindus are often not recommended to Aurangzeb’s service but adds that this does not affect his family because of their loyalty. Similarly, he mentions Aurangzeb’s imposition of the jizya (a tax paid by non-Muslim subjects to Muslim kings in exchange for state protection) and complains that tax collectors are corrupt.

How are we to understand Bhimsen’s use of the word “Hindu” when it is not contrasted with any statement about Muslims as being favored by Aurangzeb; rather, it appears that the king unwisely favors small men with small armies who are disloyal to him? Bhimsen’s Aurangzeb lacks discernment; he favors those who may not act in his best interests and Bhimen uses this critique of the king to point to how his own family remains loyal nonetheless and is thankfully still rewarded for it. Bhimsen’s identification with the Mughal family—where Mughal power represents the power of both the king and loyal servants such as Bhimsen—complicates the question of “Muslim” and “Hindu” as mutually exclusive categories. The framework of dissatisfaction through which Bhimsen describes Aurangzeb points to a failure of administration; the corruptness of tax collectors appears to offend Bhimsen more than the tax itself.

The broader cosmological framework through which Bhimsen understands his times is that of Kaliyuga, the last and most destructive of the four ages outlined in Hindu theology. Kaliyuga is reflected in the physical and the moral deterioration Bhimsen sees around him. He writes that Aurangzeb’s ambition has sent him on endless military campaigns that have ruined entire cities or subjected them to poor administration. Kaliyuga is a time in which “firmness of heart, purity of deeds, and improvement of circumstances” are not to be found in either kings or their subjects. Aurangzeb’s itinerant lifestyle is itself a sign of upheaval: “Ever since His Majesty has come to the throne, he has not lived in the city,” complains Bhimsen. “The inmates of his camp, tired of long separations, have now summoned their families to live with them, which has meant that a new generation has been born and raised in the camp.” Although Aurangzeb’s predecessors were as itinerant as he was (in fact, his long stay in the Deccan was a departure from the policies of earlier kings), the prosperity associated with past kings leads Bhimsen to forget their
propensity for tents. As a member of an urbanized elite (an important limb of the body that was the Mughal empire), Bhimsen’s sense of self is unmoored when cities are abandoned by their king and are unknown to his subjects. The sight of men of nobility walking through mud, as exhausted and diseased as their animals while relentless rains pour down and bring more disease, then leads Bhimsen to think of the better times of “sovereigns of old.”

Bhimsen documents Aurangzeb’s prolonged war against the Maratha leader Shivaji and assesses Aurangzeb and Shivaji through a similar moral framework. Bhimsen dislikes the Marathas, who he says have infested Mughal lands, but praises Shivaji for being a good leader to them. According to Bhimsen, a probable cause for Shivaji’s death in 1680 was his plunder of the town of Jalnapur, where Jan Muhammad, a dervish who was “unmatched in his accomplishments of knowledge,” resided. The dervish had repeatedly issued warnings to Shivaji and Bhimsen writes that it could be a curse on the part of Jan Muhammad that led to Shivaji’s departure from this world. Bhimsen’s critique of Shivaji is similar to his trenchant critiques of Aurangzeb, who is also acquisitive. “The men of this world are so greedy,” writes Bhimsen, “that a king like Aurangzeb, who lacks for nothing, is seized with such an obsession for capturing forts that he runs about panting after these heaps of stone.” Bhimsen adds that if this is a king’s conduct, little can be expected of lesser men.

Shivaji meets his end in a holy man’s curse, but Bhimsen’s Aurangzeb still pays homage to the sufis of the Deccan the way Bhimsen’s father would. Bhimsen mentions Aurangzeb’s visit to the tomb of the sufi Gisu Daraz, which has an air so pure even kings can benefit from it. Aurangzeb’s movements reveal Bhimsen’s awareness of the movements of past kings and holy men; he mentions for instance that Gisu Daraz came to the Deccan in the reign of the king Firoz Shah (d. 1422) of the Bahmani Sultanate. Bhimsen also mentions Aurangzeb’s long illness of 1704, which he writes was only alleviated by the prayers of his subjects; these were well-deserved, says Bhimsen, for Aurangzeb was rare in his piety. Unlike Shivaji, who commits the error of disregarding a dervish’s warnings, Aurangzeb’s adherence to piety is redemptive. Of an earlier time in 1697, when the king’s encampment in Brahmapuri, on the banks of the River Bhima, was flooded by the river on account of rain, Bhimsen reports that Aurangzeb, in response, wrote a prayer and threw it into the water. Immediately after, the flood subsided. “The prayer of the king was accepted by God, and the world composed again,” writes Bhimsen.

The ability of the king to save his camp from being washed away points to how in Bhimsen’s eyes, Aurangzeb still possessed the spiritual charisma associated with his lineage. It also shows how despite his grievances against Aurangzeb, Bhimsen saw the king as able to harness
ZAMAN: Nostalgia, Lahore, and the Ghost of Aurangzeb

Portrait of Aurangzeb. Artist Unknown. Reprinted with permission from Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
spiritual forces to his aid when needed and order the world. This is in keeping with the intense personal allegiances kings commanded; soldiers were known to dream of their king, and kings were both spiritual guides and temporal rulers.\textsuperscript{61}

In Bhimsen’s landscape, other holy guides intervene in the ordinary and he writes that his life has been filled with divine encounters that have made him indifferent to the wealth of this world.\textsuperscript{62} When Bhimsen gets separated from the army in a battle against Shivaji in 1672, he encounters a dervish in a jungle who tells Bhimsen that he knows his name and that of his father’s, having observed them on pilgrimage together. Bhimsen implies that just as he recognizes the spiritual capacity of the dervish, the dervish recognizes his. “Ask anything of me,” says the dervish and Bhimsen asks that he be shown the way back to the imperial encampment.\textsuperscript{63} This comes to pass and Bhimsen’s account of the incident points to his fidelity to values that he shares with dervishes, which the king often betrays.

If Bhimsen’s moral framework is tied to the geography of the land, so is his sense of self and other. The edge of Bhimsen’s known world is the south of India, where Marathas “swarm like ants and locusts.”\textsuperscript{64} Vandivasi, in the southern state of Tamil Nadu consists of people who eat coarse food and might as well wear no clothes, because men roam around in loincloths and women do not cover their breasts. The sea is a billowing green hill that speaks of the mystery of God and sea ports have in them French and Dutch men who sell goods but cultivate no land, make fine weapons, and store grain from Bengal on their ships.\textsuperscript{65} In the sea lies the island of Ceylon, populated with magicians. There are creatures there with the bodies of men and faces of animals, writes Bhimsen.\textsuperscript{66} The king’s rule, and any semblance of order end at the sea, in which lies a magical island of men neither human nor animal. The end of land marks the end of empire and the slipping away of Bhimsen’s known world.

Compared to a natural expanse that ends at the sea, the modern nation is a bounded entity cut off from parts of what used to be whole and it cannot accommodate what is seen as other. The particular premodern holiness of Aurangzeb in Bhimsen’s text is manifest over the landscape, where the king built mosques and went to shrines, threw a prayer into a river, and asked his sufis or his god for intervention while simultaneously chasing after wealth. The often overlapping power of holy man and king—so prevalent in Mughal India—once rested in Aurangzeb too. This is the aspect of Aurangzeb that is lost to both his supporters and his opponents in Lahore. He is seen by all sides as a praying, fasting, religious Muslim (a set of attributes that represent good Islam to his supporters and bad Islam to those that support Dara), but he is not seen as a shrine-visiting, miracle-performing holy man (a set of attributes that represent bad Islam
to his supporters, and good Islam to those that support Dara). The holiness of kings and mystics in Bhimsen’s geography cannot translate when that geography is fragmented into Hindu and Muslim, Pakistan and India.

Pieces of this geography still survive. In the Deccan, guardians of shrines tell stories of Aurangzeb’s visits in which Aurangzeb is a penitent son who begs sufis for intervention, comes to them in remorse about his deeds, and asks them to summon the spirit of his dead father to ask for forgiveness. Another version of the River Bhima story appears in an eighteenth century text that contains biographical anecdotes of two sufis who came to India in 1674–1675. One of these sufis, Baba Palangposh, traveled with Aurangzeb’s armies and it was his concentration rather than the king’s that made the water of the river subside. Yet another version of the story is now repeated in Maharashtra at Macnur, on the River Bhima, according to which Aurangzeb wanted to divert the river to destroy a temple for Shiva, but the river washed away Aurangzeb’s camp instead. These stories show overlapping aspects of beliefs about kings, gods, and holy men. Divine will affects the elements for better or worse and is concentrated in men favored by God. The story also shows change over time; the Hindu temple Aurangzeb wanted to destroy seems a later addition in which Aurangzeb is not favored by the divine.

In Pakistan too, shrines of sufis contain lost pieces of the sacred; frowned upon by some as evidence of an Islam polluted by Hinduism, and valued by others as legitimate sources of divine intervention, shrines in Lahore occupy an ambivalent space. They are also often the targets of armed attacks. Spectacular acts of destruction aimed at mosques in India or shrines in Pakistan in the name of cultural purification always attract attention. On a global theater, denunciations of spectacular violence themselves contain the violence of the binaries through which destruction happens in the first place. A subject such as Bhimsen meanwhile, finds meaning through the view that he is living in the Kaliyuga, in which great kings fail, and purpose through the act of writing about the past by emphasizing his own role in accessing the divine. In Bhimsen’s world, a flawed king who functioned as the failing heart of an empire did not mean kingship itself was lost.

I posit here that modern citizens contain within them shadows of earlier selves that still attach easily to images of kings. David Edwards writes that Afghan refugees living in Pakistan in the 1980s saw their last king, Zahir Shah, then in exile in Rome, as a man on horseback returning to them. Even though the actual king, Zahir Shah returned to his country in a plane, the archetypical image of the king on horseback points to recollections of a leader who could unify the land and save his people. In my classrooms in Lahore, Mughal kings surfaced along a continuum of pain each time we talked about the end of empire. When we visited Mughal
monuments, students said Mughal ruins filled them with a combination of wonder and loss, a sense that a part of them—like the ruined buildings we saw—had been amputated. This acute sense of missing a part of the self, always articulated through metaphors about the body and often through tears, haunted all of us, as did our proximity and distance from Mughal kings.

As I wrestled with questions about the meaning of kingship, I was aware of the pull of a present cluttered with so many emergencies that talk of kings seemed frivolous, escapist even. Between natural disasters, assassinations, drone attacks, and passionate demands by academics and activists that Pakistan be framed through a lens other than calamity, the kings who occupied my hours would often waver. And yet, they kept returning, with the insistency only ghosts possess by virtue of being neither fully buried nor entirely alive. Even though modern historians and anthropologists have written about Pakistan, their expertise in the present has meant they cannot speak to the particularities of the pre-colonial past, in which a unifying cultural ethos was shaped by the sacred symbol of kingship. Historians of the pre-colonial Islamicate world, meanwhile, remain grounded in the epistemologies of the past without analyzing the present; we work with subjects who cannot talk back to us and we leave the present to those who can study it without recoiling from its voices and its chaos. In conversations among ourselves—especially those among us with roots in South Asia—we admit the present is too painful to study, and we escape it by losing ourselves in a different world whose textures are vivid and intricate, and whose disappearance we too mourn.

Conclusion: Past Kings Present

The blasphemy law, which Salman Taseer died for challenging in Pakistan, and the law against offending religious sentiments which was invoked against Wendy Doniger in India to pulp her book, “The Hindus,” both originate from the writings of Thomas Macaulay (d. 1859) who designed the Penal Code for British India. Enshrined into these laws is the idea of the excitable and excessively religious primordial subject whose sentiments the state must protect. Such a subject—easily offended, strangely fragile—did not exist before colonial rule broke the link between subject and king. Prashant Keshavmurthy writes that ambiguity in the pre-modern world had its locus in the body of the king and its interpretive base in a body of jurists and scholars and—I would add—sufis. The end of kingship meant that the king’s body “vacated an altar whose emptiness began to constitute democracy.” According to Keshavmurthy, “people’s awareness of the impossibility of legitimate power inhering in an individual’s body justif[ied] their sense of its dispersal across themselves.” Instead of residing in an individual’s “mysteriously inherited radiance,” politi-
cal legitimacy came to be sought among the masses that were shaped by definitions of religious community in British censuses. New religious identities came to be “consolidated around rage at the hurt caused by signs taken to be unambiguously meaningful.”

This rage ignites across South Asia in events such as Taseer’s assassination or through the threatened destruction of perceived others. The scholar James Laine, who wrote a book on Shivaji that challenged notions of him as a Hindu nationalist hero, received death threats for tampering with memory shaped by parents, schools, and textbooks in Maharashtra where Aurangzeb is seen as a Muslim invader and Shivaji as the Hindu champion who stood up to him. The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, where Laine conducted research was vandalized for assisting Laine, its manuscripts destroyed, and Laine’s local colleague assaulted for working with him. Laine’s suggestion that Aurangzeb and Shivaji had more in common with one another than either their supporters or detractors would like to admit was unpalatable, even though to Bhimsen, this was certainly the case.

Events such as this mean that we live with a pervasive fear of symbols. The person whose need to destroy has already expressed itself in physical violence is difficult to reach. But there are acts of violence and disavowal still within the reach of our interventions. Students often come to classrooms certain of their Hindu or Muslim others, or even certain of the religious other that secular commitments create. Because sustaining the idea of the inverted other is an escape from pain, dismantling a student’s worldview carries the risk of causing more pain. However, as James Baldwin writes, “any real change requires the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety.”

Showing students that their sense of self and other is based on colonial legal codes created after the passing of kingship means being responsible for the end of another’s safety; this must be remedied by creating empathy with a past consciousness such as Bhimsen’s and allowing stories of kings and the stories kings read to populate the imagination with different ways of being in the world.

In the same way, we must interrogate the contours of our own safety. We are trained to study the primordial other from a safe distance each time he destroys a shrine or finds his way into headlines that scream of sectarian violence. Those to whom symbols matter the most do not read our work or alternatively, appropriate it to ignite those very symbols, as was the case with Laine. But we have yet to engage with the radical possibility that longing for the past and for futures that could have been cuts across people who appear, on the surface, to have nothing in common including those who idealize Aurangzeb and imagine a pristine Islamic past, those who see Dara Shikoh as representative of South Asia’s lost
tolerant future, and even the historian who sees the retreating figure of the king in stories of tunnels beneath Lahore. All of us are drawn, often for reasons we cannot explain, to a world that no longer exists.

I have sought, through this reading of Bhimsen, to show that directing longing back to the forgotten injury that created it, namely the loss of kingship, can bring together those who see themselves as opposites along fault lines of good Islam and bad Islam, Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb. Understanding how kingship actually shaped the psyche can refashion our inheritance of the past: In cities such as Lahore, where the resurfacing of kingship sustains national binaries while possessing the potential to erase them, narrative accounts such as Bhimsen’s can knit together the fractured psyche. Recently, there has been a resurgence in Pakistan of interest in stories known to Mughal kings that are now being translated into English; many have remarked that long before there was Harry Potter, our own land produced tales as captivating. These tales we have left behind and an acknowledgement of loss is one way forward; in the absence of an intact landscape, they exist as entry points into a consciousness less fragmented than ours and allow for the possibility of building within ourselves the infinite field that comes into being when we forget where our other ends and we begin.

Notes

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3. For a genealogy of Aurangzeb and Dara Shikoh’s Islams, see Ahmed, Pakistan Society, 12–13.
5. See Zaman, “Instructive Memory.” See also Butalia, The Other Side of Silence; Menon and Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries.
7. I use “pre-colonial” to refer to the period prior to the British conquest of Bengal in 1757. After the conquest, colonial epistemological categories began to shape political, social, and legal discourses that eventually produced identities severed from sacred kingship. The formal conquest of India in 1857 solidified this rupture.
8. See Bhattacharyya, “Predicaments for Secular Histories.” See also Guha, “On Speaking Historically.”
9. See Nora, “Between Memory and History.” See also Pandey, Remembering Partition, 7–20.
12. For a brief historiographical essay on 1857, see Wagner, “The Marginal Mutiny.”
14. Iqbal, Stray Reflections, 47.
15. Ahmad, “Power, Purity, and the Vanguard.” For Pakistan’s aspirations to statehood, see Khan, Muslim Becoming, 22–23.
16. See Mehta, “Ur-national and Secular Mythologies.” For nostalgia among Muslim reformers, see Ali, Tarikh ki Daryaft, 12–15, 56–58. See also Jalal, “Exploding Communalism.” See also Khan, Muslim Becoming, 56–90.
17. The conceptual framework I use for self-fashioning and kingship owes a debt to the work of Azfar Moin and Aziz Al-Azmeh. See Moin, The Millennial Sovereign; and Al-Azmeh, Muslim Kingship.
19. See “Has Aurangzeb Reincarnated in Form of Police?,” Hindu Janajagruti Samiti. For Hindutva politics in Chennai, see Hancock, The Politics of Heritage, 82–118.
21. The popular blog “Lahorenama” says it is in search of the city that “was and ought to be” and painstakingly documents Lahore’s Mughal past. See http://lahorenama.wordpress.com/.
22. I am using a pseudonym to protect privacy.
23. See Jai, “Dara Shukoh and the Fate of Pakistan.”
24. See the connected history of Lahore and Amritsar, see Talbot, Divided Cities, 130–53.
25. “Ahmed,” too, is a pseudonym.
27. Mahmood Mamdani has pointed to how popular American discourse divides Muslims into “good”—i.e., secular and Westernized—and “bad”—i.e., religious and medieval. See Mamdani, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim.
29. See Pinault, Notes from the Fortune Telling Parrot, 210–26. For a persuasive historiography, see Brown, “Did Aurangzeb Ban Music?” For temple destruction, see Cynthia Talbot, “Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self”; and Ian Talbot, “Temple Desecration.”
30. Ajoka Theater, started by human rights activists in the 1980s, staged Dara Shikoh after Salman Taseer’s death. See Rumi, “Ajoka’s New Play on Dara Shikoh.” See also Usman, “Ajoka Theatrical Tribute to Taseer”; and Alawadhi, “Bid to Promote Cultural Relations with Pakistan.” For a note on the play in London, see Halliburton, “Dara.” For a more nuanced analysis, see Green, “Past Concerns.”
31. See Assmann, Moses the Egyptian, 30–32. See also Wimmer, Ethnic Boundary Making, 57, 72–76. Wimmer believes there is no pre-modern equivalent to normative inversion, though
Assmann would disagree. I agree with Wimmer because nationalism magnifies the scope of previous inversions and lacks the mediating figure of the king.

32. For building an older order of being within oneself after historical loss, see Banac, “Introduction,” xiii.

33. See Richards, “Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers.”

34. I have used the British Library manuscript of the Tarikh-i Dilkasha. See British Library MS. Or. 23 completed in 1727. For a translation, see Saxena, Tarikh-i Dilkasha: Memoirs, trans. Jadunath Sarkar. Sarkar’s folios do not always overlap with those in the MS, which I will refer to as “Bhimsen.” I will refer to Sarkar’s translations as “Sarkar.” For Bhimsen’s introduction, see Bhimsen, fol. 2b and Sarkar, 2.

35. Bhimsen, fols. 9a–9b and Sarkar, 10–11.
37. Sarkar, 28. Folio missing in original.
40. Bhimsen, fol. 14a and Sarkar, 18. For the symbolism of rivers in Hindu sacred geography, see Eck, “India’s Tirthas.”
41. Bhimsen, fol. 104a and Sarkar, 180. The folio is blurred. Sarkar has translated the third city to be Prayag, another name for Allahabad. I read the third city as “Maya,” which is the city mentioned in the Puranas in the verse that refers to seven sacred cities. Maya is understood to refer to Hardvar. See Goldman, “A City of the Heart.”
42. See Eck, “The Imagined Landscape.”
43. Bhimsen, fols. 20b–21b and Sarkar, 32–33. See also Bhimsen, fols., 50a–50b and Sarkar, 81–82.
44. Bhimsen, fols. 4a–4b and Sarkar, 2.
46. Bhimsen, fol. 157a and Sarkar, 255.
48. Sarkar, 83. Folio blurred in MS. For a contrary point of view about the tax, see Kruijitzer, Xenophobia in Seventeenth Century India, 266–76.
49. For debates during the Kaliyuga, see O’Hanlon, “The Social Worth of Scribes”; and Granoff, “Tales of Broken Limbs and Bleeding Wounds.”
50. Bhimsen, fol. 134a and Sarkar, 223. See also Bhimsen, fol. 141a and Sarkar, 233.
51. Bhimsen, fols. 4a–4b and Sarkar, 2.
52. Bhimsen, fol. 141a and Sarkar, 233. See also Gommans, Mughal Warfare, 187–89.
55. Bhimsen, fols. 76a–76b and Sarkar, 127.
56. Bhimsen, fol. 134a and Sarkar, 223.
57. Bhimsen, fols. 93a–93b and Sarkar, 159.
58. Bhimsen, fol. 131a and Sarkar, 220.
59. Bhimsen, fol.149a and Sarkar, 244.
60. Bhimsen, fol. 128a and Sarkar, 215.
63. Bhimsen, fols. 56b–57a and Sarkar, 92.
64. Bhimsen, fol. 138a and Sarkar, 229.
66. Bhimsen, fol. 115b and Sarkar, 196.
68. See Green, “Stories of Saints and Sultans.”
69. See Digby, Sufis and Soldiers in Aurangzeb’s Deccan, 46–47. The historian Khafi Khan reports Aurangzeb’s throwing of prayers into the river, but says this had no effect. Khan, Muntakhab-ul Lubab, 446–47.
70. Feldhaus, “Goddess as Sister.”
71. On this, see Ewing, Arguing Sainthood.
72. I am influenced by the idea that damage to the land is echoed in the psyche. See Duran and Duran, Native American Post-Colonial Psychology, 142–55.
73. Edwards, Heroes of the Age.
74. See Ahmed, "Specters of Macaulay.”
75. Keshavmurthy, “Profanations I.”
76. See Laine, Shivaji. See also Laine, “Resisting My Attackers.”
77. Amitav Ghosh uses the phrase “an Indian’s fear of symbols.” Ghosh, In an Antique Land, 204–10.
78. Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name, 117.

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