



Decentralization of the Mughal Governance and Emergence of Gakhar Chief Muqarrab Khan: A Study of Gujrat

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore the political evolution of Gujrat during the mid-eighteenth century, as reflected by the rise of Gakhar leader Sultan Muqarrab Khan. It also seeks to contextualize this rise within the larger framework of Mughal decline and the rise of regional polities within Punjab. The rise of Gujrat as a politically important region is also linked to the invasion of Nadir Shah and subsequent political fragmentation of North India. The region was fertile ground because of its rich agricultural base and strategic location vis-à-vis the Chenab River. The research seeks to explore Muqarrab Khan's consolidation of power and administration during a time of political flux and turbulence, which was reflected by Afghan invasions, tribal rivalries, and the rise of Sikh military federations. Special attention is given to Muqarrab Khan's political alliance with Ahmad Shah Durrani. The historical narratives suggest that Muqarrab Khan's rule was a transitional phase that linked Mughal administration to post-Mughal polity. It is argued that Muqarrab Khan's rule resulted in an interlude of political stability within Gujrat, which impacted its subsequent incorporation into Sikh and colonial administrations. The research contributes to existing historical narratives on eighteenth-century Punjab by highlighting local leaders who are often overlooked within larger narratives of imperialism.



Introduction

The 18th century represents a landmark in the political evolution of the region of Punjab, as highlighted by the gradual decline of the centralized imperial system and the parallel rise of regional military elites and tribal leaders. The decline of the Mughal administrative framework created a political vacuum across northern India, particularly after the devastating invasions of Nadir Shah in 1739 CE. In this context of change and flux, the rise of Sultan Muqarrab Khan of the

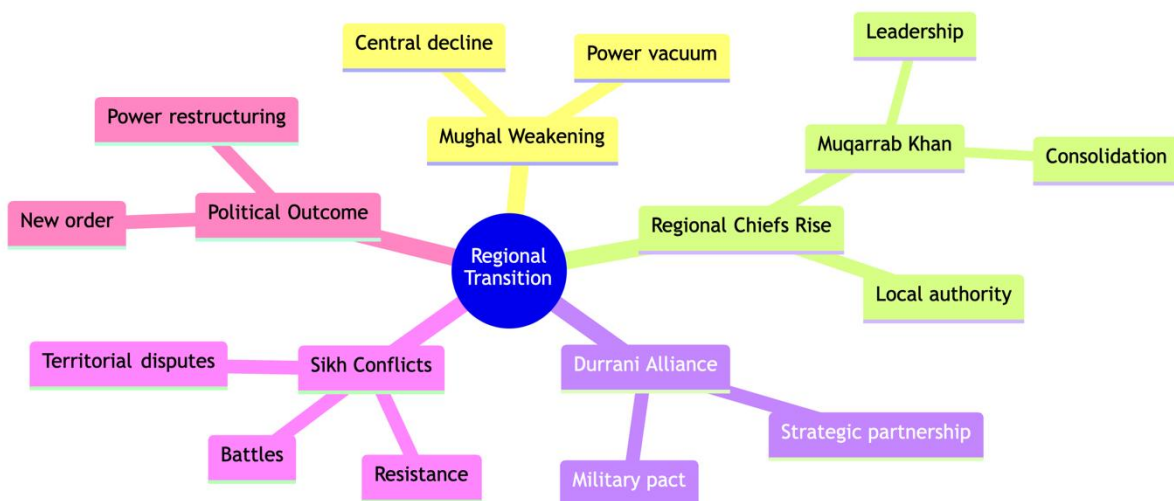
Gakhar tribe has been highlighted as a relatively understudied landmark in the political evolution of the region of Punjab.

Thus, the rise of Sultan Muqarrab Khan to the status of the most dominant force in the region of Gujrat, during the period of 1741–1765 CE, has been highlighted as a landmark in the political evolution of the region of Punjab. Gujrat, being a region situated along the Jhelum and Chenab river systems, has been highlighted as a region that played a strategic role during the invasions of the Afghan tribes into the region of Punjab, especially during their invasions towards the Indo-Gangetic plains.

The political career of Muqarrab Khan represents the broader process of decentralization that characterized the decline of the Mughal Empire. While the earlier ruling elite in the empire, known as the *mansabdari* system, acquired power through imperial patronage, the rulers in the eighteenth century acquired power through military strength, tribal alliances, and flexible diplomatic relationships. The relationship between Muqarrab Khan and Ahmad Shah Durrani represents the pragmatic shift in political relationships in the empire, in which power was a function of negotiation with multiple imperial and regional forces.

The case of Muqarrab Khan also sheds light on the intricacies of political power in the pre-colonized region of Punjab. In this region, political power was not centralized but was rather dependent on personal relationships, family ties, and regional alliances. The political career of Muqarrab Khan in the region of Gujrat represents the continuities with the earlier Mughal Empire, as well as the emergence of political sovereignty in the region, which had a significant impact on Sikh and colonial styles of governance in the region.

The aim of this research is to reconstruct the political phase of Gujrat under the leadership of Muqarrab Khan through the analysis of regional sources, colonial ethnography, and colonial chronicles. The research aims to contribute to the emerging body of literature on regional political actors in the transition to the post-Mughal Empire in the region. The following mind map explain the political transitions from Mughals to onwards and rise of tribal chief.



**Figure 1: Regional Political Transition in 18th Century Punjab
Regional Context of Gujrat in Historical Perspective**

Gujrat falling under the Punjab province of Pakistan, has always been at the center of strategic and economic importance in the region of northern South Asia. The region of Gujrat lies between the Chenab and Jhelum rivers, whose valleys are agriculturally productive and hence conducive to human settlements (Gupta, 2006; Iqbal & Ali, 2025). The geographical location of Gujrat is marked by Wazirabad and Gujranwala to the south, Sialkot to the east, Mandi Baha-ud-din to the west, Jhelum to the northwest, and Bhimber of Azad Kashmir to the north. The location of Gujrat between two major rivers and along some of the most important communication routes has made this region one of strategic importance, which has managed to capture the attention of various powers at different historical periods.

The historical importance of Gujrat traces back to antiquity. Among the earliest historical records about this region is the Campaign of Alexander the Great in 326 BCE and the Battle of Hydaspes on the banks of the River Jhelum. These incidents marked the beginning of cultural and administrative relations between the Greeks and the local population (Stein, 1932). Over time, various political systems, including Islamic dynasties, the Mughal Empire, and the Sikh Empire, played their due role in shaping the region. These systems have left behind a rich heritage in terms of architectural and cultural achievements. Various mosques, gardens, settlements, and administrative systems constructed during this period demonstrate this phenomenon (Ali, 2017). Various historical areas such as Jalalpur Jattan, Tibbi Sikhwan, Chakina, Barrila Sharif, and Sheikh Chogani highlight the fact that Gujrat has always been a significant region in terms of economic activities, social encounters, and political systems.

In the 18th century, Gujrat proved to be a significant region in terms of geographical importance due to the decline of the Mughal Empire. Various regional players emerged during this period, and Gujrat became one of the most important areas in this respect. This region is situated on the route from the Punjab plains to the northwestern frontier. During Afghan invasions in northern India, this region proved to be one of the most important areas in terms of political confrontations. In this respect, Gujrat provided a favorable environment for military elites and tribal chiefs to come into power in the region. Thus, the emergence of Sultan Muqarrab Khan from the Gakhar tribe in the mid-eighteenth century must be analyzed in this respect.

While Gujrat continues to experience tremendous political changes in subsequent centuries, such as the emergence of Sikh politics and, finally, British colonial politics, culminating in the Battle of Gujrat in 1849, which marked the end of the Second Anglo-Sikh War (Singh, 2008; Talbot, 1988; Iqbal, Ali & Azeem, 2025), the 18th century is still a very important period in Gujrat's political evolution. Colonial literature on Gujrat in subsequent centuries also points to tremendous social, kinship, and religious transformations in Gujrat, even as some aspects of pre-existing cultural identities, such as oral traditions, Sufi movements, and local literature, are preserved (Ibbetson, 1883; Cohn, 1996; Gilmartin, 1988; Iqbal, Ali & Mushtaq, 2025). It is important to understand this larger historical and geographical context in order to understand the emergence of Muqarrab Khan and the larger phenomenon of political decentralization and regionalization in eighteenth-century Punjab.

Territorial Consolidation and Governance under Muqarrab Khan

Sultan Muqarrab Khan belonged to a family that served the Mughal Empire. Both his father and grandfather held the rank of *mansabdar*, which meant they performed military and administrative duties for the Mughals. They were mostly posted in the regions of present day Kohat, Bannu, and Mianwali, which were then part of the Mughal province of Kabul. One of the key Gakhar centers was Muazzam Nagar in Mianwali, and it played an important role in maintaining Mughal control in the area. When Sultan Muqarrab Khan took over after his father, he may also have been

assigned responsibilities in these districts. During this time, the Mughal Empire was weakening because of internal conflicts and power struggle. After Nadir Shah's invasion, Punjab became politically unstable. Sultan Muqarrab Khan took advantage of this situation and expanded his power across the river Jhelum (Delmerick, 1871). The Gakhar chiefs, leaders of the Gakhar tribe, lived in the lower Jhelum valley and the upper Haro valley, southwest of Kashmir. They are all Muslims, though their conversion was relatively recent; before Timur's invasion, they had Indian-style names. The Gakhars have lived in these regions for a long time. They are of Turanian (Central Asian) origin, not Indo-Aryan. One sign of this is their marriage practice: they only marry within the Gakhar tribe, unlike Hindu customs, which forbid marriage within one's own tribe. The Gakhars also lived in parts of the Eastern *Doab*, including Guliana near Gujar Khan and Bugial near the Balnath hills. These areas are not truly part of the hills, but in the 7th century, when the Chinese traveler Hwen Thsang visited, they were under Kashmir's control (Cunningham, 1871). Babur attacked the Gakhar capital Pharwala, a strong hill fort. The Gakhar chief Hati Khan fought bravely but escaped when the Mughal army entered the fort. He later died by poison in 1525 CE. His cousin Sultan Sarang surrendered to Babur and was rewarded with control of the Pothwar region. After this, the Gakhars became loyal allies of the Mughals. The Gakhars kept their lands and status while the Mughal Empire was strong. When Mughal power declined, they became weak and were taken over by the Sikhs (Hunter, 1887). The Gakhars ruled places such as Pharwala near the Behut River, Sultanpur on the Behut River, and Khanpur on the Haro River. In short, it shows the regions and towns under Gakhar control in this area (Cunningham, 1871). According to *Tārīkh-i-Farīshṭa*, *Tārīkh-i-Ṭabaqāt-i-Akbarī*, and *Tārīkh-i-Aqwām-i-Poonch*, the Gakhar tribe remained idol-worshippers during the reign of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, son of Sultan Sabuktigin. When Sultan Mahmud attacked Raja Jaipal, the Gakhars supported him. The Gakhars accepted Islam after the fall of the Ghaznavi dynasty, during the period of Sultan Shahab-ud-din Ghorī. *Tārīkh-i-Aqwām-i-Poonch* describes the Gakhars as brave and capable warriors who often defeated neighboring tribes such as the Awan, Gujar, and Janjua (Siddiqui, 1992). In times of external threat, they selected a wise and competent leader to guide. According to *Tarikh-e-Farishta*, among the Gakhars, several notable chiefs and independent rulers rose to prominence, including Sultan Gakhar Khan, the founder of the tribe, as well as Sultan Jasrat, Sheikha Gakhar, Tatar Khan, Sultan Adam Khan, and Sultan Sarang Khan. Their last ruler was Sultan Muqarrab Khan, whose authority stretched from Gujrat and Bhimber to Attock (Fooq, 1936). The area between the Chenab and Jhelum rivers (*Chaj-Doab*) was ruled for a long time by the Gakhars, a powerful tribe. Sultan Muqarrab Khan became the leader of the Gakhars in 1739 CE, during the time of Nadir Shah's invasion. He was a strong ruler. He defeated the Yusufzai Afghans of Hazara and also defeated Jang Quli Khan Khatak. He took control of Gujrat and made it his headquarters in 1758 CE, after the death of Adina Beg Khan. Muqarrab Khan also supported Ahmad Shah Abdali during his invasions of India. He even married his daughter to Abdali, because of which Abdali treated him with great respect (Chand, 1856). As the Mughal Empire weakened, local chiefs changed their loyalties. During this period, Nadir Shah of Iran invaded India, and Muqarrab Khan, a Gakhar chief, supported him in the Battle of Karnal (1739 CE), where the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah was defeated. In return, Muqarrab Khan kept control of Pharwala fort and received the title of Nawab. He later defeated the Yusufzai Afghans and the Khattaks, captured Gujrat, and extended his rule up to Bhimber (Tareen, 2006). Around 1740 CE, Sultan Muqarrab Khan of the Admal clan became very powerful and claimed to rule from Attock to the Chenab River. At the same time, the Bugial clan grew strong around Domeli (Jhelum) and mocked his claim. Later, Muqarrab Khan was defeated by the Sikhs at Gujrat. After this, the Bugials rebelled. Their leader, Raja Himmat Khan, captured Rohtas Fort, arrested Muqarrab Khan, and killed him. After his death, the clans began fighting among themselves, became weak, and were easily defeated by the Sikhs (Thomson, 1883). After the Mughal Empire weakened, Nadir Shah attacked and destroyed Gujrat. Later, the

Gakhar chiefs of Rawalpindi took control of the city around 1741CE. In 1765 CE, Sardar Gujar Singh of the Bhangi Sikh confederacy crossed the Chenab River, defeated the Gakhar ruler Muqarrab Khan, and extended his rule up to the Jhelum River (Rose, 1908). However, in 1765 CE, he was defeated by the Sikhs at Gujrat and lost his territories up to the Jhelum River. In 1769 CE, he was betrayed and killed by Himmat Khan, a rival chief. Gujrat, located between the Chenab and Jhelum rivers and approximately 114 km from Lahore, was an old and significant town. From 1741 to 1765 CE, it remained under the control of Muqarrab Khan Gakhar, a supporter of Ahmad Shah Abdali (Rai, 1811).

Frontier Expansion and Tribal Rivalries in Northern Punjab

Until about 1740 CE, their history mainly involved other regions. Sultan Muqarrab Khan, an Admal chief from Rawalpindi, claimed control from Attock to the Chenab River. The Bugial clan of Domeli rejected his claim. After Muqarrab Khan was defeated by the Sikhs at Gujrat, the Bugials rebelled, captured and killed him. Following his death, the clans fought among themselves, became weak, and were easily defeated by the Sikhs (Rose, 1911). In 1741 CE, he established himself in Gujrat and gradually became a leading authority in the *Chaj Doab* region. In Pothohar, however, his authority was challenged by another influential Gakhar chief, Raja Himmat Khan of Domeli (Sohawa). With support from several allies, Raja Himmat Khan used force to remove one of Muqarrab Khan's key officers, who was also his relative by marriage and managed his military and estate matters. During the conflict, this officer was killed. Sultan Muqarrab Khan retaliated fiercely. He attacked, burned, and looted the villages of those he believed were responsible. Later, Sultan Nawazish Ali Khan of Khanpur intervened and restored peace. Some of the rebels, including those formerly working under Muqarrab Khan, were forgiven. Despite this intervention, the dispute between Sultan Muqarrab Khan and Raja Himmat Khan remained unresolved and eventually led to serious consequences for the Gakhar community (Government, 1884). Until 1742 CE, Punjab was ruled by the Mughal Empire, which had been started in India by Emperor Babur (Steinbach, 1845). In 1741 CE, he established himself in Gujrat and gradually became a leading authority in the Jech (Chenab) Doab region. When Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan king, invaded India in 1747–48 CE, the Gakhar chiefs of Pothohar were unsure of his intentions. A section of his army forced the Gakhars to abandon Muazzam Nagar and destroyed it (Government, 1884). The area became populated again when Sultan Muqarrab Khan, along with the Gakhar tribe from Rawalpindi, attacked the city suddenly in 1741CE. They captured the city and took control of the region known as *Chaj Doab* (Elliot, 1902). Sultan Muqarrab Khan, quickly took control of it. The Gakhar's of Rawalpindi settled in Gujrat around 1741CE (Government, 1884). In 1741CE, the Gakhar tribes from Rawalpindi took control of the area (Ashufta, 1991). According to *Gohar Nama*, in 1741 CE Muqarrab Khan, the Gakhar chief of Rawalpindi, attacked Gujrat and took control of the city. He declared himself the ruler (Karamat, 1977).

Gakhar–Durrani Political Relations and Frontier Governance

Abdali crossed the rivers Attock, Jhelum, and Chenab, and then reached Lahore in 1746 CE (Browne, 1788). Historians differ in their views on Ahmad Shah Abdali invasions. Ahmad Shah Abdali (also known as Ahmad Shah Durrani) launched 10 invasions into India between 1748-1767CE. He appointed Sultan Muqarrab Khan of the Gakhar tribe as the ruler of Gujrat (Saleem & Bhatti, 2012). When Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan king, invaded India in 1747–48, the Gakhar chiefs of Pothohar were unsure of his intentions. A section of his army forced the Gakhars to abandon Muazzam Nagar and destroyed it. At Rohtas, Abdali ordered the looting of the Tilla Jogian temple complex, and there may have been other acts of violence against the local population. Realizing that Abdali would not tolerate their resistance and could transfer their lands

to others, the Gakhar chiefs eventually surrendered. After their submission, Abdali redistributed the territories of Pothohar. Sultan Muqarrab Khan received full ownership of Pharwala and Dangali, and his control over the lands across the River Jhelum was officially confirmed. Sultan Muqarrab Khan held Pothohar firmly, but his rule over Gujrat and the *Jech Doab* region remained unstable, shifting with the political turmoil of Abdali's invasions (Chand, 1856). However, the city remained in trouble because Ahmad Shah Abdali repeatedly invaded Punjab during this period, and Gujrat was destroyed several times. Muqarrab Khan was ruler only in name real power and order did not exist, and chaos spread throughout the region. His nominal rule continued until 1765 (Karamat, 1977). According to *Gohar Nama*, the city remained in trouble because Ahmad Shah Abdali repeatedly invaded Punjab during this period, and Gujrat was destroyed several times. Muqarrab Khan was ruler only in name real power and order did not exist, and chaos spread throughout the region. His nominal rule continued until 1750 CE (Mughal, 1992). Between 1748 CE and 1761, Gujrat served as battlefield where Durrani fought against the Mughals (Elliot, 1902). The district was the target of Ahmad Shah Abdali advancing and retreating armies from 1748 CE to 1761 CE, with little to no respite, as their route to and from the Punjab crossed it. Muqarrab Khan, who had been officially confirmed in his possessions by the Durrani monarch, oversaw the government during this time (Government, 1884). On March 5, 1752, Ahmad Shah Abdali launched his third invasion and successfully compelled the Timurid ruler to cede the provinces of Punjab and Multan. A formal treaty was signed and sealed in a public court, permanently transferring Punjab to Abdali control. Additionally, Abdali granted a royal decree of governance to Sultan Muqarrab Khan Gakhar, affirming his regional authority (Malik, 2002). Ahmad Shah Abdali held authority over this region from 1752 to 1765CE (Qiladari, 1967). In the middle of November, 1756 Ahmad Shah Abdali reached Peshawar. His son Timur Shah led the army ahead and came to Hasan Abdal. A small group was then sent to Gujrat to collect food for the army. Everyone believed that Abdali was planning to attack Dehli (Sarkar, 1934). In 1756–57 CE, when Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India for the fourth time, Sultan Muqarrab Khan sent his sons, Nadir Ali Khan and Asadullah Khan, along with Gakhar troops to support Abdali. They were present when Abdali's forces captured Dehli and looted Mathura. At this time, Punjab was in constant political chaos. Different groups Afghans, Mughal officers, and rising Sikh chiefs kept shifting alliances whenever it suited their interests (Chand, 1856). Until the year 1756 CE (1173 Hijri), this city affiliated with State of Rohtas under Ahmad Shah Abdali rule (Beg, 1868, p. 92). In 1756CE, Ahmad Shah Abdali made Sultan Mukkaram (also known as Muqarrab), one of his nobles, the governor of Gujrat (Beg, 1868). Until 1756, Ahmad Shah Abdali ruled over the Gujrat region. Rohtas served as his administrative headquarter. Gujrat was under the jurisdiction of Rohtas (Qiladari, 1995). During his fourth invasion in 1756 CE, Ahmad Shah Abdali consolidated his authority over Punjab and designated Rohtas as his administrative headquarters (Saleem & Bhatti, 2012). In the Gujrat region, Abdali's rule continued from 1756 CE to 1769 CE (Qiladari, 1995). Sultan Muqarrab Khan seized Gujrat and established his headquarters there in 1758 CE after the death of Adina Beg Khan. He overran the Chib territory up to Bhimber in the north. He supported the Ahmad Shah Abdali in his Indian invasions (Gupta, 2007). After the death of Adina Beg Khan, about the end of September or beginning of October 1758 CE, some Afghan's and Gakhar's from beyond the Jhelum plundered the *parganna* of Gujrat. After some time Nur-ud-din also marched to Gujrat and plundered *parganna*, and crossed Chenab River into Rachna Doab (Singh G. , 1959). Maratha armies arrived one by one in Lahore and nearby areas and settled there. Meanwhile, Afghan and Gakhar forces together looted the Gujrat area and then crossed to the eastern side of the Jhelum (Sarkar, 1934). In 1758 CE, some Afghan and Gakhars plundered the *parganna* of Gujrat (Rehman & Wescoat, 1993). Muqarrab Khan took control of Gujrat and made it his headquarters in 1758, after the death of Adina Beg Khan (Ali-ud-din, 1961). During the decline of the Mughal Empire, the conditions for the inhabitants of this district were extremely unfavorable, situated along the

route that the Afghan forces took from Peshawar towards the central regions, this part of the *Chaj Doab* lay directly in the path of Ahmad Shah Abdali armies. Between 1747 and 1767 CE, these forces repeatedly traversed the area, both while advancing and retreating. As a result of this continual military movement, the local population suffered greatly and experienced little peace or respite (Mackenzie, 1861). When foreign armies invaded Punjab, the whole region became disturbed. People felt unsafe in every way their honor was in danger, their property was not protected, their lives were at risk, and even their work was insecure. Because of this, the economy was destroyed and people had no hope for justice or peace from the rulers of that time. Everyone wanted a strong and fair leader who could protect their lives and belongings (Browne, 1788). From 1741 to 1765 CE, Gujrat remained under the control of Muqarrab Khan Gakhar, a supporter of Ahmad Shah Abdali (Badehra, 1965). From 1748 to 1761 CE, the region remained under the influence of Ahmad Shah Abdali. Since Gujrat lay on his route, it suffered devastation whenever his armies passed through. Ahmad Shah had granted a formal decree of rule to Raja Sultan Muqarrab Khan Gakhar, who remained the ruler of Gujrat until 1765CE (Ashufta, 1991). Muqarrab Khan thus ruled Gujrat until 1765 CE (Government, 1884). According to *Tarikh-e-Farishta*, in 1765 CE, he was defeated by Sardar Gujar Singh Bhangi, the governor of Lahore (Fooq, 1936).

Collapse of Gakhar Political Dominance in Gujrat

The exact circumstances of Sultan Muqarrab Khan's death are unclear, and historians have given different versions of what happened. Native accounts state that Sultan Muqarrab Khan escaped from the fort of Gujrat with his family and soldiers. According to these sources, he was either killed in a clash with Sikh forces or drowned while trying to cross a flooded stream on an elephant (Elliot, 1902). British historians, however, tell a different story. They claim that Sultan Muqarrab Khan escaped from Gujrat and reached the west bank of the River Jhelum, where he was captured and executed by Raja Himmat Khan, a rival Gakhar chief, who used this opportunity to settle an old dispute (Griffin, 1940). When the Sikhs attacked Gujrat and Sultan Muqarrab Khan was killed, Nawab Sarbuland Khan a relative of Ahmad Shah Abdali and the military governor of Rohtas suspected that some local leaders had betrayed Muqarrab Khan. He ordered the execution of Raja Himmat Khan and his two brothers because they did not support Muqarrab Khan during the attack. Nawab Sarbuland Khan also took back control of Gujrat and had Chaudhary Rahmat Khan of Jalalpur Jattan killed for helping the Sikhs instead of Muqarrab Khan. But Nawab Sarbuland Khan's success did not last (Government, 1884). In 1181 Hijri (corresponding to 1764), Sardar Gujar Singh Bhangi and Charat Singh crossed the River Chenab and confronted Sultan Muqarrab Khan, the ruler of Gujrat, which was the nominee of Ahmad Shah Durrani. This city was burned down after the victory, and its residents were banished and relocated to the neighboring settlements. The fort was still in its original configuration at that time, making it fit for the army to live in (Beg, 1868). In 1765 CE, Sikh leader Sardar Gujar Singh Bhangi defeated the last Gakhar ruler, Muqarrab Khan, near Gujrat. Muqarrab Khan fled across the Jhelum River but was killed by his own tribesmen. The tribesmen then fought among themselves and were easily defeated by the Sikhs (Hunter, 1887). However, in 1765 CE, he was defeated by the Sikhs at Gujrat and lost his territories up to the Jhelum River. In 1769 CE, he was betrayed and killed by Himmat Khan, a rival chief (Tareen, 2006). The Sikhs initially plundered Muqarrab Khan's camp. Then they struck the town of Gujrat. Everything they could find, they took. Shops and homes were set on fire. Many fled to other locations, such as Akhnur, Shadipur, and Jalalpur. The Waraich Jats, who controlled 41 villages in Gujranwala and 170 in Gujrat, gave up without a fight (Badehra, 1965). Sultan Muqarrab Khan, the last powerful chief of the Gakhars, was defeated in 1764 CE at Gujrat by two Sikh leaders Sardar Gujar Singh of the Bhangi Misl and Sardar Charat Singh of the Sukerchakia

Misl. The Sikhs attacked and surrounded Gujrat, the town where Muqarrab Khan had been ruling for some time. During the siege, Muqarrab Khan managed to break out and attempted to flee with his soldiers and family (Singh K. , 1963). Recognizing the strategic importance of Gujrat, Gujjar Singh Bhangi, in alliance with Charat Singh Sukerchakia, advanced towards the city in December 1765 CE. Muqarrab Khan resisted strongly at the Chenab River and later outside the city walls, but was eventually defeated and took refuge in the fort. The Sikhs besieged the fort, forcing Muqarrab Khan to attempt an escape at night. Although he initially broke through the Sikh cordon, he was later captured by his rival, Himmat Khan Gakhar, and killed. Following this, the Sikhs plundered Muqarrab Khan's camp and the city of Gujrat (Rai, 1811). The Waraich Jats, who held numerous villages in Gujrat and Gujranwala, submitted to Gujjar Singh. The Sikhs fortified the city and Gujjar Singh established Gujrat as his capital, appointing Takhat Singh as its administrator. He further subdued the chiefs of Islamgarh Rahmat Khan and Sikander Khan and made them tributaries (Badehra, 1965).

Challenges to Power and Local Rivalries

There was no stable government, and power changed hands frequently. Sultan Muqarrab Khan held Pothohar firmly, but his rule over Gujrat and the *Jech Doab* region remained unstable, shifting with the political turmoil of Abdali's invasions (Chand, 1856). The date on the coin is partly missing. Historians think Muqarrab Khan started issuing coins after Nadir Shah's death in 1747 CE and stopped after 1179 AH (corresponding to 1765 CE). Only 11X8 AH is visible on the coin, and the missing number is likely 6, making the date 1168 AH. It is unclear whether he issued silver or gold coins, but this is unlikely because he was only a local chief. His area was poor, with little trade or economic activity. The coin is unusual because it mentions his rule clearly, stating: "Between Attock and Jhelum, Muqarrab is king." (Tareen, 2006).

Around 1765 CE, Sardar Gujjar Singh Bhangi, a Sikh leader from Lahore, marched against Muqarrab Khan. A battle took place outside the city of Gujrat. Muqarrab Khan was defeated and had to retreat across the Jhelum River, leaving the *Chaj-Doab* and Gujrat under the control of Gujjar Singh (Rose, 1911). From 1745 to 1761 CE, the city suffered repeated hardships due to Ahmad Shah Durrani's invasions of Punjab, which caused frequent destruction in Gujrat. Although Muqarrab Khan was officially the ruler, his authority was mostly in name only, and disorder was widespread. His nominal rule over Gujrat lasted until 1765 CE (Karamat, 1977). Chaudhry Rahmat Khan Waraich of Jalalpur Jatta wrote to Gujjar Singh, inviting him to attack Gujrat to end the rule of Muqarrab Khan. Although Rahmat Khan had earlier been an ally of Adina Beg against the Sikhs, he now approached the Sikhs in response to the changing political situation in Punjab, showing his political awareness. Diwan Shivnath Handu of Jalalpur Jatta, a close associate of Rahmat Khan, also supported this invitation (Tariq, 1956).

Sultan Muqarrab Khan's Administration

Although Sultan Muqarrab Khan is often remembered for his strict attitude and military achievements mentioned in the *Kaigoharnama*, historical accounts from that period describe him as a fair and just ruler (Delmerick, 1871). He cared about the welfare of the people living under his authority in Pothohar. He was also well respected in Gujrat. His final battle against the Sikhs, and his death, became so famous that a local poet composed a heroic ballad about it. In Gujrat, a ruined baradari (a pavilion with a garden), located about one mile from the city, is believed to have been originally built by Sultan Muqarrab Khan (Chand, 1856). Because of his sympathies, Muqarrab Khan was made the governor of Gujrat. He brought back peace and order and built a garden and a

baradari in the city. However, the district of Gujrat took a long time to recover from the damage caused by Ahmad Shah Abdali (Saleem & Bhatti, 2012).

After returning from Panipat, Ahmad Shah Abdali appointed Sultan Muqarrab Khan as the governor of Gujrat. He restored law and order in Gujrat as a result of which the city began to flourish. To the north of city, Muqarrab Khan laid out a garden and constructed a *baradari* (a pavilion or building with 12 doors) for his residence (Qiladari, 1995). Later, Maharaja Ranjit Singh rebuilt the pavilion by his *Kardar* Pandit Kashi Ram and used it as a resting place whenever he visited Gujrat (Ashufta, 1991).

After the death of Sultan Muqarrab Khan, his sons Sultan Nadir Ali Khan and Asadullah Khan returned to the Pothohar region and briefly controlled Pharwala and Dangali. However, in 1765 CE, Sardar Gujjar Singh attacked Pharwala, looted the fort, and forced both brothers to surrender. The final resting place of Sultan Muqarrab Khan is unknown. In the confusion after the battle, his men were likely unable to recover his body. The last strong Gakhar ruler died without receiving the honorable burial he deserved a reminder of how unpredictable and harsh a warrior's fate can be (Tariq, 1956).

Conclusion

The political career of Sultan Muqarrab Khan represents the broader transformations in the politics of eighteenth-century Punjab in the face of declining imperial authority. The rise of Sultan Muqarrab Khan cannot simply be seen as the rise of a tribal leader in the region of Gujrat; rather, it represents the ways in which regional leaders adapted to the collapse of traditional imperial politics and the rise of heterogeneous, militarized politics. The basis of Sultan Muqarrab Khan's power in Gujrat was a combination of military power, favorable location, tribal leadership, and political expediency. The alliance with Ahmad Shah Durrani provided him with temporary political legitimacy and security, yet at the same time, it placed Gujrat in the domain of repeated Afghan invasions. Therefore, despite brief periods of relatively ordered politics, the region continued to experience political turmoil.

The defeat and ultimate demise of Muqarrab Khan underscore the precariousness of regional power during the period in question. The internal factionalism among the Gakhars and the shifting loyalties among the regional powers, coupled with the growing military strength of the Sikh confederacies, collectively led to the decline of the Gakhars from their dominant position in the *Chaj Doab*. The defeat of Muqarrab Khan also marks the end of the political hegemony of the Gakhars in the region and, by extension, the transformation of the political landscape from the Mughal provincial administration to the Sikh regional administration and, ultimately, the colonial administration. The current study, therefore, underscores the importance of local political actors in the broader context of macro-history and the changes that characterized the period in question. The political history of Gujrat during the mid-eighteenth century underscores the role played by the frontier regions in the broader context of political experimentation during the period of imperial decline and the role played by the administration of Muqarrab Khan, no matter how brief, in the broader context of the political and administrative continuity in the region.

Ultimately, the case study undertaken in the current analysis underscores the proposition that the decline of an empire does not occur in an instantaneous manner but rather in a gradual manner, with the local rulers playing an important role in maintaining stability and shaping the political geography of the region in question. The historical memory of Muqarrab Khan, therefore, plays an important role in the broader context of the political history and evolution of the province of Gujrat

and the broader Punjab frontier during a century marked by significant political changes in the history of the sub-continent.

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