

CUET · HISTORY · CLASS XII · CODE 314

# Peasants, Zamindars and the State (Agrarian Society and Mughal Empire)

By UniDrill · NCERT-grounded study material

CUET unit: Theme VIII — The Mughal Empire and Agrarian

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## Snapshot

- In sixteenth–seventeenth-century rural India, 85 per cent of the population lived in villages, and both peasants and landed elites claimed shares of the produce.
- The main source is the **Ain-i Akbari** of Abu'l Fazl (1598), supplemented by regional revenue records from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and the records of the East India Company.
- Four agrarian actors operated — peasants (raiyat/muzarian), village panchayats, zamindars and the Mughal state — bound together by a cash-nexus through markets, mints and silver inflows.
- CUET regularly tests Persian terms (jins-i kamil, milkiyat, polaj, jama, hasil), Akbar's land classification, kharif/rabi cycles and the structure of the Ain.

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

- During the 16th–17th centuries, about **85 per cent of India's population lived in villages**; both peasants and landed elites claimed shares of agricultural produce, generating cooperation, competition and conflict (NCERT Intro, p. 196).
- The Mughal state derived the bulk of its income from agricultural production and deployed revenue assessors, collectors and record keepers to ensure cultivation and tax collection (NCERT Intro, p. 196).
- The chief source is the **Ain-i Akbari** authored by Abu'l Fazl, which recorded state arrangements for cultivation, revenue collection and zamindar regulation — but offers a "view from the top" (NCERT §1.1, p. 197).
- The Ain is supplemented by revenue records from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and East India Company records on eastern India (NCERT §1.1, p. 197).
- Indo-Persian sources called peasants **raiyat / muzarian / kisan / asami**; 17th-century sources distinguish **khud-kashta** (resident cultivators of the village) and **pahi-kashta** (non-resident contractual cultivators) (NCERT §1.2, p. 197–198).
- Average north Indian peasant possessed a pair of bullocks and two ploughs; in Gujarat six acres = affluent, in Bengal five acres = average and 10 acres = a rich asami; cultivation was based on **individual ownership** (NCERT §1.2, p. 198).

- Three factors drove agricultural expansion — abundance of land, available labour and **mobility of peasants** (NCERT §1.3, p. 198).
- Rice was grown in areas with 40+ inches of rainfall, followed by wheat and millets on a descending precipitation scale; monsoons were the backbone of Indian agriculture (NCERT §1.3, p. 198).
- Irrigation technology included the **Persian wheel (rahat)** described in Babur Nama — using two ropes with wooden strips, pitchers and a bullock-driven wheel mechanism at wells in Lahore and Dipalpur; in Agra, Chandwar and Bayana a bucket-and-roller system was used; state dug canals like the **shahnahr** in Punjab under Shah Jahan (NCERT §1.3, p. 199–200).
- A wooden plough with iron tip/coulter (light, shallow furrows, preserved moisture), a **drill pulled by giant oxen** for sowing, broadcasting of seed and a narrow iron-blade hoe for weeding were the main tools (NCERT §1.3, p. 200).
- Two seasonal cycles — **kharif (autumn)** and **rabi (spring)** — produced two crops a year (**do-fasla**), some three; Agra produced 39 varieties, Delhi 43, Bengal 50 varieties of rice alone (NCERT §1.4, p. 200).
- **Jins-i kamil** (literally "perfect crops") were cash crops the Mughal state encouraged for higher revenue — cotton (central India and Deccan) and sugarcane (Bengal) were the par excellence examples; also included oilseeds (mustard) and lentils (NCERT §1.4, p. 200).
- New crops arrived in the 17th century — **maize via Africa and Spain**, tomatoes, potatoes, chillies, pineapple and papaya from the New World; **tobacco** reached Akbar's nobles first in 1604, was banned by Jahangir but became a major article by the end of the 17th century (NCERT §1.4, p. 200–201; box on tobacco, p. 200).
- Population grew by about 50 million between 1600 and 1800 (~33 per cent over 200 years) (NCERT box, p. 200).
- The village community had three constituents — **cultivators, panchayat, and village headman (muqaddam/mandal)** (NCERT §2, p. 201).
- Caste-based inequities were deep — menial agricultural labourers (**majur**) were a large segment; halalkhoran (scavengers) lived outside villages in Muslim communities, and **mallahzadas** in Bihar were compared to slaves (NCERT §2.1, p. 201–202).
- Intermediate castes — Ahirs, Gujars, Malis — rose due to cattle-rearing and horticulture; Sadgops and Kaivartas in the east acquired peasant status (NCERT §2.1, p. 202).
- The **panchayat** was an oligarchy of village elders representing castes/communities; headed by a **muqaddam/mandal** chosen by consensus and ratified by the zamindar; the headman supervised village accounts with the **patwari (accountant)** (NCERT §2.2, p. 202).

- Panchayat funds came from contributions to a common pool; spent on entertaining revenue officials, calamity relief and constructing bunds/canals (NCERT §2.2, p. 202–203).
- Panchayats enforced caste boundaries (in eastern India all marriages were held before the mandal), levied fines and could expel offenders from the community; each caste/jati also had its own **jati panchayat** that arbitrated civil disputes (NCERT §2.2, p. 203).
- Villagers petitioned panchayats against extortionate taxation and **begar** (unpaid labour) by superior castes/officials; peasants resisted by **desertion** of the village when reconciliation failed (NCERT §2.2, p. 203–204).
- Marathi documents show artisans formed up to 25 per cent of village households; in Maharashtra artisan lands became **miras/watan** (hereditary holdings); a goods-for-services system later called the **jajmani system** existed though the term itself was not in use then (NCERT §2.3, p. 204–205).
- Nineteenth-century British officials called the village a "little republic" — but Deep caste-gender inequities and a strong cash nexus (revenue assessed and collected in cash) belie this image (NCERT §2.4, p. 205).
- Women and men worked together in fields — men ploughed/tilled, women **sowed, weeded, threshed and winnowed**; menstruating women could not touch the plough or potter's wheel in western India or enter betel groves in Bengal (NCERT §3, p. 206).
- Women's labour was central to artisanal tasks — spinning yarn, sifting/kneading clay, embroidery; commercialised products demanded more female labour (NCERT §3, p. 206).
- Peasant communities practised **bride-price (not dowry)** and accepted **remarriage of widows and divorced women** — distinct from elite custom (NCERT §3, p. 207).
- Hindu and Muslim **women inherited zamindaris** which they could sell/mortgage; the 18th-century Rajshahi zamindari was headed by a woman (NCERT §3, p. 207).
- Forests (jangal/dense or kharbandi/scrub) covered an estimated **~40 per cent** of the subcontinent; forest dwellers called **jangli** lived by gathering, hunting and shifting agriculture — among Bhils, spring = forest produce, summer = fishing, monsoon = cultivation, autumn-winter = hunting (NCERT §4.1, p. 208).
- The state called the forest a **mawas** (place of refuge for rebels); levied **peshkash** from forest people that included elephants; the Mughal hunt symbolised the emperor's connection with all subjects (NCERT §4.1–4.2, p. 208–209).
- Tribal chiefs became zamindars and even kings — Sind tribes had 6,000 cavalry/7,000 infantry; Ahom kings had **paiks** rendering military service for land, and made wild-elephant capture a royal monopoly (NCERT §4.2, p. 210).

- **Zamindars** were landed proprietors who lived off agriculture without directly cultivating; their privileges came from caste and from **khidmat (service)** to the state (NCERT §5, p. 211).
- They held extensive personal **milkiyat** (property) lands cultivated by hired/servile labour and freely saleable, bequeathable or mortgageable; collected revenue on the state's behalf for compensation; held fortresses (**qilachas**) and armed contingents (NCERT §5, p. 211).
- According to the Ain, zamindars together commanded 384,558 cavalry, 4,277,057 infantry, 1,863 elephants, 4,260 cannons and 4,500 boats (NCERT box "A parallel army!", p. 212).
- Zamindari was concentrated in an "upper-caste" Brahmana-Rajput combine, with intermediate castes and Muslim zamindars; expansion happened by conquest (with imperial **sanad**), colonisation of new lands, transfer of rights, state order and purchase — and by clan/lineage consolidation (Rajputs, Jats, Sadgops) (NCERT §5, p. 211–212).
- Zamindars settled cultivators with cash loans, established **haats (markets)** and sold milkiyat produce — accelerating monetisation; yet bhakti saints did not condemn them (criticising revenue officials instead), and peasants often joined zamindar-led uprisings against the state (NCERT §5, p. 212–213).
- The Mughal land-revenue process had two stages — **assessment** and **actual collection**; the assessed amount was **jama**, the collected amount **hasil** (NCERT §6, p. 213).
- Akbar instructed the **amil-guzar** (revenue collector) to prefer cash but keep payment in kind open; both cultivated and cultivable lands were measured, and Aurangzeb in 1665 ordered annual asamiwar records of cultivators (NCERT §6, p. 213).
- The Ain (quoting Akbar's classification) recognised four land types — **polaj** (annually cultivated, never fallow), **parauti** (rested to recover strength), **chachar** (fallow 3–4 years), **banjar** (fallow 5+ years); polaj and parauti had three grades (good, middling, bad); one-third of the medium produce was the royal due (NCERT Source 5, p. 214).
- Methods of collection included **kankut** (estimate by appraisal; kan = grain, kut = estimate), **batai/bhaoli** (division after threshing in the parties' presence), **khet-batai** (fields divided after sowing) and **lang batai** (heaps divided after cutting) (NCERT Source 6, p. 215).
- The **mansabdari** system — military-cum-bureaucratic apparatus — included some paid in cash (**naqdi**) and the majority through **jagirs** (revenue assignments), with periodic transfers (NCERT box, p. 214).
- Aurangzeb (1665) ordered amins of parganas to record actual conditions of cultivation (**maujudat**) village-by-village (**asamiwar**) and assess jama considering both government **kifayat** (financial interests) and peasant welfare (NCERT Source 7, p. 215).

- During the 16th–18th centuries massive **silver bullion** inflows from the New World via Europe, Turkey, Persia, the Red Sea and Japan reached India, enabling unprecedented minting and circulation of the **silver rupya**; Giovanni Careri (c. 1690) testified to this flow (NCERT §7, p. 215–216, Source 8 p. 217).
- The Mughal state was contemporary with three other large Asian empires — **Ming (China), Safavid (Iran), Ottoman (Turkey)** — and their stability supported overland trade from China to the Mediterranean (NCERT §7, p. 215).
- The **Ain-i Akbari** was completed in 1598 (Akbar's 42nd regnal year) after five revisions; it was the third book of the larger **Akbar Nama** project (the first two books were historical narrative) (NCERT §8, p. 217).
- The Ain has **five books (daftar)** — (1) **manzil-abadi** (imperial household), (2) **sipah-abadi** (military/civil administration and mansabdar biographies), (3) **mulk-abadi** (fiscal details and Account of the Twelve Provinces), (4) and (5) on religious, literary and cultural traditions plus Akbar's sayings (NCERT §8, p. 217–218).
- Mulk-abadi gave sarkar-level tables with eight columns — pargana/mahal, qila (forts), arazi/zamin-i paimuda (measured area), naqdi (cash revenue assessed), suyurghal (revenue grants in charity), zamindars, and details of zamindar caste and troops (sawar/piyada/fil) (NCERT §8, p. 218).
- Limitations of the Ain — totalling errors (slips of arithmetic/transcription); data not collected uniformly (caste data of zamindars missing for Bengal and Orissa); prices and wages derived mainly from Agra and limited for the rest of the country (NCERT §8, p. 220).
- Strengths — quantitative numbers were reproduced in **words** to minimise transcription errors; oral testimonies were cross-checked; Abu'l Fazl moved Mughal chronicling beyond mere political history to record society, products and people (NCERT §8, p. 220–221).

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Raiyat / muzarian	Indo-Persian terms for peasant (also kisan/asami)	197
Khud-kashta	Peasants resident in the village whose lands they cultivated	197
Pahi-kashta	Non-resident cultivators farming lands on contract in another village	197–198
Jins-i kamil	"Perfect crops" — cash crops like cotton and sugarcane that gave higher revenue	200
Do-fasla	Two-crop cycle in a year (kharif + rabi)	200
Kharif / Rabi	Autumn / spring cropping seasons	200
Muqaddam / Mandal	Village headman	201–202

Term	Definition	Page
Patwari	Village accountant assisting the headman	202
Begar	Unpaid forced labour demanded by superiors	203
Jajmani	Goods-for-services exchange between artisans and peasant households (term coined later)	205
Miras / Watan	Hereditary artisan landholdings (Maharashtra)	205
Jangli	Forest-dwellers living by gathering, hunting and shifting agriculture	208
Mawas	Forest as a "place of refuge" for rebels (from the state's view)	208
Peshkash	Tribute (often including elephants) collected from forest people	208–209
Pargana	Administrative subdivision of a Mughal province	209
Paiks	People obliged to render military service in exchange for land (Ahom kingdom)	210
Milkiyat	Zamindar's personal property lands, cultivated by hired/servile labour	211
Khidmat	Services (rendered by zamindars to the state)	211
Qilachas	Fortresses held by zamindars	211
Sanad	Imperial order confirming a zamindari	212
Haats	Markets, often established by zamindars	212
Jama	Assessed revenue amount	213
Hasil	Amount actually collected	213
Amil-guzar	Revenue collector under Akbar	213
Amin	Official ensuring imperial regulations in the provinces	214
Polaj	Land cultivated annually for every crop, never left fallow	214
Parauti	Land left fallow to recover strength	214
Chachar	Land fallow for 3–4 years	214
Banjar	Land uncultivated for 5+ years	214
Kankut	Revenue assessment by appraisal/estimate of standing crop	215
Batai / Bhaoli	Division of harvest after reaping and stacking	215
Khet-batai	Fields divided after they are sown	215
Lang batai	Division of heaps after the grain is cut	215
Mansabdari	Military-cum-bureaucratic Mughal administrative system	214
Naqdi	Cash payment to mansabdars (vs jagir assignments)	214

Term	Definition	Page
Jagir	Revenue assignment given to mansabdars in lieu of salary	214
Maujudat	Actual conditions of cultivation (Aurangzeb's 1665 order)	215
Asamiwar	Peasant-wise (village-level revenue records)	215
Manzil-abadi	Book 1 of the Ain — imperial household	217
Sipah-abadi	Book 2 of the Ain — military/civil administration	217
Mulk-abadi	Book 3 of the Ain — fiscal data and the Twelve Provinces	218
Suyurghal	Revenue grants in charity (column 5 of mulk-abadi tables)	218

### 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Fig. 8.2 (p. 199)** — Reconstructed Persian wheel (rahat): two rope-circles with wooden strips holding pitchers, bullock-turned wheel mechanism.
- **Fig. 8.3 (p. 201)** — Early 19th-century painting of a Punjab village showing women, men and architecture.
- **Fig. 8.4 (p. 203)** — Village elders and tax collectors meeting (panchayat scene).
- **Fig. 8.9 (p. 208)** — Shah Jahan hunting nilgais (Badshah Nama) — symbolic of just rule.
- **Map 1 (p. 214)** — Expansion of the Mughal Empire under Babur (1530), Akbar (1605) and Aurangzeb (1707).
- **Fig. 8.11, 8.12 (p. 215–216)** — Silver rupya of Akbar and Aurangzeb.
- **Eight-column sarkar table format of the mulk-abadi** (p. 218) — pargana/mahal, qila, measured area, naqdi, suyurghal, zamindars, zamindar castes, zamindar troops.

### 2.5 Timeline / Key events

Year / Period	Event	Significance
1526 CE	Babur defeats Ibrahim Lodi at the first battle of Panipat	Foundation of Mughal rule (NCERT §8.1, p. 213)
1530 CE	Reign of Babur ends; Humayun succeeds	(NCERT map 1, p. 214)
1540–55 CE	Sher Shah Suri displaces Humayun; revenue reforms begin	Basis for Akbar's revenue system (NCERT §8.5, p. 215)
1556–1605 CE	Reign of Akbar	Apex of Mughal consolidation (NCERT §8.5, p. 215)
1571–85 CE	Akbar's capital at Fatehpur Sikri	(NCERT p. 215)

Year / Period	Event	Significance
c. 1580 CE	Todar Mal's <b>dahsala</b> settlement (ten-year average)	Standardised revenue assessment (NCERT §8.5, p. 216)
1598 CE	Abu'l Fazl completes the <b>Ain-i Akbari</b>	Definitive Mughal source on agrarian society (NCERT §8.4, p. 211)
1605–27 CE	Reign of Jahangir	(NCERT p. 213)
1627–58 CE	Reign of Shah Jahan	Apex of Mughal court culture (NCERT p. 213)
1658–1707 CE	Reign of Aurangzeb	Maximum territorial extent (NCERT map 1, p. 214)
17th c.	Persian-wheel ( <b>rahat</b> ) widely used in Punjab and north India	Major irrigation technology (NCERT Fig. 8.2, p. 199)
17th c.	Maize, tomato, potato, chilli, papaya introduced from the New World	Agricultural diversification (NCERT §8.2, p. 200)
17th c.	Jins-i kamil cash crops (cotton, sugarcane, indigo) expand	Commercialisation (NCERT §8.2, p. 200)
1665	Bernier observes Indian villages and writes on agrarian society	European outsider source (NCERT p. 212)
1707 CE	Death of Aurangzeb; decline of central Mughal authority begins	Empire fragments into provincial states (NCERT p. 213)
18th c.	Zamindari power expands as Mughal centre weakens	Long shadow on colonial agrarian system (NCERT §8.5, p. 219)

## 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Jama vs Hasil** — jama is the **assessed** amount; hasil is the **actually collected** amount. NTA loves swapping these.
- **Khud-kashta vs Pahi-kashta** — khud-kashta are villagers cultivating their own village lands; pahi-kashta are outsiders cultivating elsewhere on contract.
- **Polaj / Parauti / Chachar / Banjar** — the duration of fallow distinguishes them (never / temporary / 3–4 years / 5+ years). Polaj and parauti (only) have three grades.
- **Kankut vs Batai** — kankut is estimation of standing crop; batai (bhaoli) is division of the actually-reaped heap. Khet-batai = after sowing; lang batai = after cutting.
- **Jins-i kamil ≠ all crops** — only cash crops (cotton, sugarcane, oilseeds, lentils), not basic staples like rice/wheat.
- **Ain's five daftars** — only the first three deal with administration; books 4 and 5 are on religious-cultural traditions and Akbar's sayings.

- **Ain's limitations** — caste data of zamindars missing for **Bengal and Orissa**; prices/wages mostly from Agra. Don't confuse with strengths.
- **Bride-price vs dowry** — peasant/artisan communities had **bride-price**, distinct from elite dowry custom.

## Practice MCQs

## PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a high-yield CUET History area: questions almost invariably appear on Persian vocabulary (jins-i kamil, milkiyat, jama-hasil, polaj-parauti-chachar-banjar), Akbar's revenue methods (kankut, batai variants), the structure and limitations of the Ain-i Akbari, and the roles of the panchayat, zamindar and village headman. Expect 1–2 direct factual MCQs and at least one statement-based or match-the-following item per CUET paper drawn from this theme.

### CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.79 (CUET 2023)** The Mughal Empire was founded by:

- A) Babur B) Akbar C) Humayun D) Shah Jahan **Tests:** Foundation of the Mughal Empire — Babur **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.80 (CUET 2023)** The battle that established Mughal rule in India was:

- A) Battle of Plassey B) Battle of Panipat (1526) C) Battle of Buxar D) Battle of Haldighati **Tests:** First Battle of Panipat (1526) and Mughal expansion **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.81 (CUET 2023)** Akbar introduced the policy of:

- A) Sulh-i-kul B) Jizya C) Mansabdari D) Jagirdari **Tests:** Akbar — sulh-i-kul and policy of religious tolerance **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.82 (CUET 2023)** The Mansabdari system was introduced by:

- A) Babur B) Humayun C) Akbar D) Jahangir **Tests:** Mansabdari and jagirdari systems under Akbar **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.83 (CUET 2023)** The Mughal capital built by Shah Jahan was:

- A) Agra B) Fatehpur Sikri C) Shahjahanabad D) Lahore **Tests:** Mughal capitals — Shahjahanabad **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.84 (CUET 2023)** The Taj Mahal was built by:

- A) Akbar B) Shah Jahan C) Jahangir D) Aurangzeb **Tests:** Mughal architecture under Shah Jahan **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.85 (CUET 2023)** The Mughal administrative language was:

- A) Sanskrit B) Persian C) Arabic D) Urdu **Tests:** Persian as the Mughal administrative language **Answer:** Not in extracted key

### CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.11 (CUET 2024)** Which of the following statements are true about the Zamindars? (A) Milkiyat lands were cultivated for public use. (B) Zamindars could sell or mortgage milkiyat lands. (C) Zamindars collected revenue for themselves. (D) Many Zamindars had fortresses and armed forces. (E) Military control was a source of power. Options:

- A) (A), (D) and (E) only B) (C), (D) and (E) only C) (A), (B) and (C) only D) (B), (D) and (E) only **Tests:** Zamindars — milkiyat lands, revenue collection, armed retinues **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.29 (CUET 2024)** Mughal chronicles viewed emperors as supreme because:

- A) Nobility wanted it B) Vision of empire saw emperor as sole ruler C) Chronicles were rich sources D) Administration was weak **Tests:** Mughal chronicles and the imperial vision **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.30 (CUET 2024)** Which part of the Mughal court was very significant?

- A) Imperial vision B) Empire C) Nobility D) Chronicles **Tests:** Nobility and the Mughal court **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.31 (CUET 2024)** Which chronicle stated that the entire kingdom follows the king?

- A) Urdu Akhbar B) Badshah Nama C) Akbar Nama D) Kitabkhana **Tests:** Badshah Nama and Mughal court chronicles **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.32 (CUET 2024)** Mughal administration depended on:

- A) Travellers B) Nobles C) Masses D) Mir Bakshi **Tests:** Mughal administration and the role of the nobility **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.33 (CUET 2024)** Author of Akbar Nama:

- A) Chandrabhan Barahman B) Muhammad Kazim C) Lahori D) Abu'l Fazl (Comprehension Passage on Indian Constitution) **Tests:** Abu'l Fazl and the Akbar Nama / Ain-i-Akbari **Answer:** Not in extracted key

### CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.15 (CUET 2025)** Which statement about Ain-i-Akbari is not true?

- A) Completed in 1598 B) View of regions from the centre C) Provides quantitative data on provinces D) Completed during Shah Jahan **Tests:** Ain-i-Akbari — composition, contents and date **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.16 (CUET 2025)** Match List-I with List-II (Revenue Collection) List-I List-II (A) Crops reaped and divided by agreement (I) Bhaoli (B) Crops cut and estimated in three lots (II)

Lang-batai (C) After cutting, grain heaps divided (III) Kankut (D) Fields divided after sowing (IV) Khet-batai Options:

- A) A-II, B-I, C-III, D-IV B) A-I, B-III, C-IV, D-II C) A-III, B-II, C-I, D-IV D) A-IV, B-I, C-II, D-III

**Tests:** Revenue collection methods — bhaoli, kankut, khet-batai, lang-batai **Answer:**

Not in extracted key

**Q.17 (CUET 2025)** In seventeenth-century agrarian society, women of Rajasthan sent petitions to \_\_\_\_\_.

- A) Village Panchayat B) Amin C) Diwan D) Subedar **Tests:** Women and the village community — petitions in seventeenth-century Rajasthan **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.23 (CUET 2025)** Arrange Mughal-era events chronologically: (A) Babur defeats Ibrahim Lodi (B) Humayun exiled to Safavid court (C) Nadir Shah invades Delhi (D) Diwani of Bengal transferred to EIC Options:

- A) A, B, C, D B) A, C, D, B C) B, A, D, C D) C, B, D, A **Tests:** Chronology of Mughal-era events — Panipat, Humayun, Nadir Shah, Diwani **Answer:** Not in extracted key