The Life of Nasir ud Din Muhammad Humayun

An Honors Thesis (HUNRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

When a general history is written about the beginnings of the Mughal empire, the reign of Nasir ud Din Muhammad Humayun is usually neglected. In fact, his role proves to be an enigma — was he a success or a failure? Many scholars argue that he was an utter failure and the only merit they see in him was the fortuitous siring of Jalal ud Din Muhammad Akbar, the greatest of all Mughal emperors. This, however, is an unfair assessment. Not only was Humayun a kind and generous man, but he was also important because he developed stronger Indo-Persian contacts and reestablished the empire from which Akbar began his career.

This paper provides a general history of Nasir ud Din Muhammad Humayun and his role in the development of the Mughal empire during the sixteenth century. Along with the general history is provided a discussion of several aspects of Humayun's life. This includes his relationship to those around him, his religious beliefs, leadership abilities, and personal character. Also examined is the role which fate played in Humayun's life.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Nasir ud Din Muhammad Humayun (1508-1556 A.D.), the second Mughal emperor of India, is best remembered for the offspring he produced rather than his own personal accomplishments. After all, he was the father of Jalal ud Din Akbar, whose long reign is arguably the greatest of Mughal, and perhaps even Indian, history. However, Humayun's reign does have merit and should not be overlooked. If he had not reconquered India, Akbar would have had to devote much of his life to military campaigns and the consolidation of his rule, rather than to the improvements he was able to make in the structure of the Mughal government. In fact, Akbar might have even missed the opportunity to succeed his father to the throne.

Few people have been as buffeted by the winds of fate as Nasir ud Din Muhammad. Humayun means "the fortunate" which, in the case of Nasir ud Din Muhammad, seems to have been a misnomer given the fact that his life was unusually turbulent and beset with misfortune. During his life, Humayun went from ruling a kingdom that spanned Northern India to being a prince in name only, living on the charity of others. Before his untimely death, Humayun's fate again changed for the better, placing him upon the very throne he had previously lost. This paper will give a brief history of Humayun's life, but its main objective is to examine the character of Humayun as a person. This study not only
includes a look at his personal habits, beliefs, hobbies, and interests, but also examines his interactions with those closest to him -- his father, the amirs and begas (ranks of the Mughal nobility), his brothers, and son. By exploring the personality of Humayun, it may be possible to understand not only why he lost the empire, but also how he won it back.

II. GENERAL HISTORY

In 1508, Zahir ud Din Muhammad Babur (1483-1530 A.D.) was blessed with his first son, whom he called Nasir ud Din Muhammad Humayun. Humayun received a solid education in the Turki tradition, and, in 1520, he became the semi-independent ruler of Badakhshan. Except for an eighteen month period between 1525 and 1527, when he joined his father in Kabul and assisted him in some of his military campaigns, Humayun remained on the throne for nine years. His rule was quite popular, and he had the full support of his subjects. During his time away from the throne of Badakhshan, Humayun proved his bravery by performing admirably at the Battle of Panipat (1526). It was Babur's decisive victory at this battle which opened North India for Mughal conquest. The heir apparent, Humayun, returned to Badakhshan, but Babur, after a period of illness which lasted over a year, died December 26, 1530. Three days later Humayun ascended the Mughal throne at Agra.
Although Humayun initially inherited the throne with minimal opposition, the empire bequeathed to him and his own personal life were soon beset with many problems. Babur left the empire with a depleted treasury and, even though he had conquered much of northern India, neither the Rajputs nor the Afghans had been completely subdued. Another problem arose over the division of the empire among his brothers. He presented Kamran with the provinces of the Punjab, Kabul, and Kandahar. Askari was awarded the fief of Sambhal, and Hindal received the district of Mewar. This division of territory among the brothers was a mistake, especially with regards to the territory granted to Kamran, because these areas had been under Babur's control the longest, and Humayun could have relied on them for regular taxation and as a base for recruitment.²

Shortly after he ascended the throne, Humayun began his military campaigns, at first against Bahadur Shah, the ruler of Gujarat in the south and then against Sher Khan, chief of the Afghan forces in the east. In 1531, Humayun sieged the fort of Kalinjar, only to break off that engagement to meet an Afghan threat at Dourah. He defeated Mahmud Lodi at Dourah and laid siege to Chunar, where he eventually received an announcement of submission from Sher Khan. After a long delay at Agra, he resumed his war with Bahadur Shah. Humayun's campaign against the Shah was quite successful, since he drove Bahadur Shah from the mainland to the island of Diu. As a result, the provinces
of Malwa and Gujarat came under Mughal rule. Unfortunately, due to mismanagement and dilatoriness on the part of Humayun and Askari, both provinces were subsequently lost to Bahadur Shah within a year. Before the Shah could again pose a threat to the Mughal empire, however, he was killed by the Portuguese during their plot to kidnap him. This removed the Mughal emperor's principal adversary of the South.

Taking advantage of Humayun's involvement in Gujarat, Sher Khan consolidated his power in Bihar and engaged upon a campaign in Bengal. Humayun responded to this new threat by laying siege to the fort of Chunar for six months. He then proceeded to Bengal, where he remained for eight months. During this time, Hindal, Humayun's youngest brother, attempted to assume royal power at Agra. Although Humayun tried to return, the road back to Agra, which crossed the river Ganges, was now blocked by the army of Sher Khan. Here, on the banks of the Ganges, the battle of Chausa (1539) took place between the two armies. The Mughal forces were crushed, and Humayun barely escaped with his life by crossing the Ganges on an inflated leather bag. After Chausa, Sher Khan claimed the title of Sultan and took the name Sher Shah. Initially, Humayun was able to reconcile with both Hindal and Kamran at Agra. But Kamran, who became ill, accused Humayun of attempting to poison him and withdrew his troops to Lahore. In 1540, Humayun again faced Sher Shah at the Battle of Kanauj. Like his
experience the previous year at the Battle of Chausa, Humayun was badly beaten. Now, due to the pursuit of Sher Shah's army, he was unable to regroup in Agra, but instead had to flee into exile.

For fifteen years, from 1540 to 1554, Humayun lived in exile. Initially, Humayun had hoped to return to Badakhshan where he had served as governor during his youth. But this move was blocked by his brother Kamran, who denied him passage through Kabul. Therefore, Humayun decided to follow Hindal to the country of Sind or possibly Gujarat, with the desire to rebuild an army and once again challenge Sher Shah. In Sind, Humayun became enchanted with a fourteen year old girl named Hamida Banu Begam, whom he met in Hindal’s camp. His decision to marry her lead to a heated dispute between the two brothers. Deeply angered, Hindal returned to Kamran’s domain, and Humayun became the only son of Babur left on Indian soil. Humayun, however, did not remain in India for long. After traversing the desert near Jodhpur, he had a short period of good fortune in the Rajput domain of Umarkot. It was here that Hamida bore him his son, Jalal ud Din Muhammad Akbar. Humayun's luck again proved fleeting, and, to avoid those who sought his destruction, he was forced to leave Umarkot. Humayun eluded capture several times, including one attempt by his brother Askari. Askari did seize Akbar, however, but he cared for him as his own. Humayun fled from his brother
across the desert into Persia. leaving India unequivocally in the hands of the Afghans.

In order to reconquer his former kingdom, Humayun needed considerable assistance from the Persian emperor, Shah Tahmasp (1514-1576 A.D.). In return for their help, the province of Kandahar was promised by Humayun to the Persians. Supported by the Persian troops, Humayun successfully conquered this province and the city of Kabul. After the death of Shah Tahmasp’s son, who had been installed as the Persian governor of Kandahar, Humayun managed to reclaim this province.

Humayun’s conflict with Kamran had been a long one, but after seven years of struggle he finally subdued his brother and had him blinded. Deprived of his throne and his vision, Kamran was left with few options in life and decided to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. He eventually died in Mecca, on October 5, 1557. Askari, who had left for Mecca a year earlier, also died this same year, somewhere near Damascus. Hindal, the only brother who had supported Humayun’s bid to recover Mughal territory, had already been killed in 1551 during a battle with some of Kamran’s men. Humayun, after securing his position, was now prepared to recover the Indian portion of his father’s empire.

Sher Shah died in 1545, and following the death of his son Islam Shah in 1554, numerous rivals emerged to claim the Afghan throne. Humayun defeated the most important of these rivals, Muhammad Shah Adil, at the Battle of Sirhind.
(1555), and entered Delhi that same year. Humayun began a partial reorganization of the government but, due to an untimely accident, most of his task of rebuilding the empire was left for his son and successor, Akbar. In January 1556, in response to a call for evening prayers, Humayun turned and accidentally fell down the stairs of the Din Panah. He struck his right temple and, even though he made a slight recovery, he relapsed into a coma and died on January 26, 1556 at the age of forty eight.

III. RELATIONS WITH BABUR

The section above provides a detailed account of the events which occurred during Humayun's lifetime. However, it does not provide adequate information about Humayun as an individual. To accomplish this, it is important to examine the many facets of Humayun's personality, including his personal habits, general abilities, and his relationship to those who were closest to him. The relationship which probably had the greatest effect on Humayun was the one he shared with his father, Babur.

As evidenced from his memoirs, Babur was quite fond of his first son. Although with this affection, he also had a certain amount of confidence in Humayun's abilities. By his thirteenth birthday, Humayun had been appointed the semi-autonomous ruler of the Mughal province of Badakhshan. His rule was fairly trouble-free since many decisions
regarding province policy came from the Mughal capital at Delhi and because the people of Badakhshan were extremely loyal to Babur. This should not, however, imply that his rule was meaningless. Not only did Badakhshan provide many men for Babur's army, but as a border province it was constantly being coveted by the Uzbegs. Therefore, Humayun's leadership was important for that region.

Babur showed his affection in other ways as well. His letters usually conveyed a warm tone, and he was quick to praise Humayun's triumphs. Babur also showed his son much generosity. He allowed Humayun to keep the Koh-i-Nur, a priceless diamond which Humayun had received in Agra. On yet another occasion, when Babur dismantled the library of Ghazi Khan, a rebellious Afghan noble, he sent some of the rare books from that collection to Humayun. Babur, it would seem, had the utmost love and support for his eldest son.

Even though Babur showed great affection for his son, he would not fail to criticize Humayun when he felt it necessary. Babur disliked Humayun's writing style, and disapproved when Humayun mentioned his desire to retire from the rule of Badakhshan. Humayun also drew a sharp rebuke when his regiment from Badakhshan was slow to arrive for Babur's planned campaign into Hindustan. Usually, Babur's criticism was constructive and inclined toward assisting Humayun rather than merely chastising him for a wrong action.
Perhaps the close bond between father and son is most apparent near the end of Babur's life in 1529. During this time, Humayun had become deathly ill, and the medical doctors could not determine the nature of his sickness. Distraught at his son's condition, Babur offered his own life in supplication. He walked around Humayun's bedside three times and proclaimed: "O God! if a life may be exchanged for a life, I, who am Babur, give my life and my being for Humayun." A short time later, Humayun recovered and his father fell deathly ill. Babur's dying words were to have a profound effect on the empire and Humayun's dealings with the rest of his family. Much advice was given to Humayun on how to run the administration. But of greater consequence to the new Mughal dynasty was Babur's plea that Humayun "Do naught against ... [his] brothers, even though they may deserve it." 

IV. RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS BROTHERS

During his reign, Humayun faithfully adhered to his father's request and showed unbelievable mercy for his brothers' many errors. His bond with his three brothers -- Kamran, Askari, and Hindal -- was never as strong as the one he had shared with his father. But on the occasions when they were together great friendship was generally shown. It was only when the three brothers were apart that
court intrigue and rebellions against Humayun's rule occurred.

Part of the uneasiness between the brothers was due to the weakness of family ties. After Humayun's loss at Kanauj, the brothers split into rival factions. Kamran and Askari were full brothers, but only half brothers to Humayun. It was they who proved to be Humayun's greatest opposition when he tried to recover the lost Mughal territory. Hindal, too, had been a half brother of Humayun. However, since he had been raised by Humayun's mother, their bond was somewhat stronger. In fact, with only a few lapses, Hindal, alone among his brothers, remained loyal to Humayun during most of his rule.

Another factor which affected the relationship between the brothers was the age difference between Humayun and his two youngest brothers, Askari and Hindal. They never spent much time together during childhood since Humayun was finishing his work with the tutors when they were just beginning. Likewise, since Humayun was the first born and had the many responsibilities of being the heir apparent, he spent little time with Kamran. Even though the three half brothers shared similarities in the way they treated Humayun, their loyalty and reactions to him were quite varied and different, depending on how their individual personalities meshed with that of Humayun.
The worst relationship was between Humayun and Kamran. The trouble between these two began soon after Humayun's accession to the throne. Kamran professed his loyalty and admiration for Humayun, but was secretly working for his own gain. After Humayun's dismal performance against Sher Shah, Kamran ended his deception and broke away from Humayun's rule completely, setting up his own kingdom centered in Kabul. The loyalty of Kamran to Humayun during the first ten years of his rule, and prior to his loss at Kanauj, remains the subject of much dispute. The historian Vidya Dhar Mahajan, for instance, claims that Kamran was completely loyal to Humayun during this time. This, however, was not the case. It is true that Kamran wrote an ode to praise Humayun. But this was not composed until after Humayun had confirmed Kamran in the territories he had already seized. Upon the death of Babur, Kamran, from his base in Kabul, had marched into the Punjab as far as the Sutlej. In fact, before he could capture Lahore, he had to besiege the city, which was being held by a governor loyal to Humayun.9

Humayun never completely trusted Kamran. His concession of the Punjab was in part due to his need for Kamran's assistance, since the Afghans and Bahadur Shah were both interested in dispossessing Humayun of his empire. This lack of trust between the two brothers manifested again when Humayun was trying to regroup in Agra after his defeat at the hands of Sher Shah. Kamran had
wished to attack Sher Shah immediately, but Humayun counseled against it, knowing fully well that Kamran had an army of twelve thousand men who were personally loyal to him and a defeat for Sher Shah would most likely benefit Kamran's imperial aspirations.

After Humayun had been forced into exile, the relations between Kamran and Humayun became openly hostile. After receiving Persian assistance, Humayun took the city of Kabul, but Kamran managed to reconquer it several times. Each time he recaptured Kabul, he acted with great savagery and cruelty to those who favored Humayun. In fact, during one encounter over Kabul when Humayun was shelling the city's defences, Kamran placed the three year old Akbar on an exposed wall to halt the bombardment from Humayun's guns.¹⁰

Even though the fighting between the brothers had been fierce and at times savage, Humayun still remembered his father's words and forgave his brother every time he was captured. In fact, Humayun even granted his brother a minor province, and Kamran responded to this act of generosity with the following ungrateful retort. "I have possessed Kabul and Badakhshan," he said. "and ... [this province] is only a dependency of Badakhshan. And now I am to accept service for this rief!"¹¹ Kamran revolted several times against Humayun's rule before Humayun reluctantly ordered that he should be blinded.
It would appear that Kamran was the great villain of Humayun's saga.

But it is likely that in his own mind he was behaving within his rights. The tradition among the descendants of both Jenghiz Khan and Timur had been for the sons to divide their inheritance and then, within agreed limits... to struggle to increase their share... Kamran was following an older nomadic tradition of the Mongols and Turks, whereas Humayun was being forced into the ways of strong centralized kingdoms, such as existed in India and Persia, where the inheritance of the whole by one ruler was the established system.  

This admixture of Mongol and Turkish traditions, to an extent, explains the repeated rebellions of Kamran but the reasons for the clemency which Humayun showed towards him are to be sought elsewhere.

Although Humayun's relations with his second brother, Askari, were never as bad as those he had with Kamran, loose family ties and age differences prevented them from developing any strong bonds of allegiance. Before Humayun's defeat at Kanauj, Askari was fairly loyal. Even during this early period of cooperation, however, Askari attempted to rebel. After Humayun defeated Bahadur and made his brother governor of Gujarat, Askari took this opportunity to declare himself emperor. Actually, this attempt by Askari to usurp Humayun's power was probably due more to the bad counsel of his nobles and Humayun's own failure to assist his brother rather than any innate desire on Askari's part to grab the empire.
After the split between Kamran and Humayun, Askari's relationship with Humayun changed. Askari sided with his brother, Kamran, and went to Kabul. In fact, during Humayun's flight across the desert, Askari was sent to arrest him. Askari failed to capture Humayun, but the emperor could only escape to Persia with a few of his followers and even had to leave his fourteen month old son, Akbar, behind. Askari returned with the child, and his wife was noted for treating Akbar with the utmost kindness.

When Humayun began his campaign against Kamran, he first managed to capture Askari, who assumed Humayun would pardon him. This time, however, Humayun had his brother put in chains and held under arrest. There are at least three documented instances of Askari's attempts to escape, but he was always unsuccessful. Even after Humayun arrested his brother, he still followed the wishes of Babur. The Persian soldiers under his command claimed the right to send Askari to their monarch as a war trophy, but this claim was flatly refused by Humayun. Eventually, Humayun relented and released his brother, but when Kamran rebelled after receiving his minor fief, Askari also rebelled. Upon being recaptured, he was sent on a pilgrimage to Mecca, but died near Damascus before he could reach the holy city of the Muslims.

Except for a few occasions, Humayun's relationship with his youngest brother, Hindal, was the strongest. Part of this steadfast allegiance was due to the fact that
Hindal was raised by Humayun's mother. After the disastrous defeat by Sher Shah, Hindal, instead of joining Kamran, remained loyal to Humayun and chose to reestablish the empire in Sind or Gujarat. Hindal did not follow Humayun into Persia, but instead tried to take power from the nobles at Kandahar who were loyal to Kamran. He succeeded, but Kamran soon retaliated and had Hindal imprisoned. Ironically, Kamran, in much the same fashion as Humayun, released his brother and gave him a small fief. After Humayun began his campaign on Kabul, however, Hindal switched sides at the first opportunity. When Kamran heard of his brother's treachery, he replied, "I am paid back in my own coin. Never shall I trust a brother again." During Humayun's campaign against Kamran, Hindal only showed respect and loyalty to his eldest brother. In fact, Hindal died while bravely fighting Kamran's men during a surprise attack. Of the three brothers, Hindal remained the most loyal, even in face of Humayun's reverses and Kamran's insidious offerings of grandeur.

This is not to imply, however, that Hindal was extremely loyal or that he never had any disagreements with Humayun. In fact, part of Humayun's failure against Sher Khan can be attributed to Hindal. Humayun had moved into Bengal with his army, and had left Hindal in the districts to his rear to keep open the communications with Agra. Instead of following his brother's orders, Hindal followed the advise of his legs and amirs and returned to Agra.
There, he took the throne, but was forced to share power with Kamran. Together, they withheld forces which could have been a great benefit to Humayun. This act contributed to the devastating rout which Humayun suffered at the hands of Sher Khan. As usual, upon his return to Agra, Humayun forgave Hindal for this treachery. This was Hindal's worst case of treachery, but it would not be the only breach of faith on his part.

One such dispute occurred when Humayun decided to marry Hamida Banu Begum. Humayun met her at an entertainment held for the ladies of the court at Hindal's camp. When Humayun proposed to marry her, Hindal became quite angry and said: "I thought you came here to do me honor, not to look for a young bride: if you commit this (ridiculous) action, I will leave you."¹⁴ This argument may have occurred because Humayun was thirty three while Hamida Banu was only fourteen. Hindal, who was twenty two, might have had desires to marry her himself. The marriage took place, and Hindal, in anger, left with his followers for Kandahar.

Thus, even though Hindal was Humayun's most loyal brother, there were still occasions when they were in conflict. When Hindal did rebel, he received the same leniency which Humayun showed toward Kamran and Askari. Some claim that Humayun was simply following his father's wishes, but the degree of clemency which he showed his brothers was extraordinary. Actually, it was Humayun's
propensity for good and the kindness of his heart which did not allow him to take severe actions against his brothers. Babur’s dying request only served as a rationale for Humayun to show leniency. The fact that Humayun was naturally kind hearted is also evident in the way he treated the Mughal nobles who rebelled against his rule.

V. RELATIONSHIP WITH MUGHAL NOBLES

Humayun’s interaction with the numerous beggs and amirs of the Mughal dynasty varied according to the loyalty of each noble. Some amirs remained loyal to Humayun even during the most difficult periods in his reign. On the other hand, there were also many amirs who were quite fickle, aligning themselves with whichever ruler appeared the strongest. Even before the death of Babur, there was a movement among the nobles at court to prevent Humayun’s succession to the throne.

Humayun’s general reaction to disloyalty and outright betrayal was to pardon the offender, even if the noble had rebelled on several occasions. The beg Haji Muhammad, for instance, joined Kamran’s forces several times, but Humayun forgave him each time. Finally, he decided to make an example of Haji and had him executed. Another example of Humayun’s inclination to pardon offenders was after his return to Agra from his defeat at the hands of Sher Shah. Not only did he forgive his brother’s attempt to crown
himself emperor, but he also forgave the amirs who had advised him to rebel in the first place.

In each of the previous cases, Humayun's decision to forgive these amirs might have been caused by his desperate need for manpower. But even when the situation did not warrant pardons, Humayun showed amazing clemency. Jouher records the case when the Persian emperor, Shah Tahmasp, captured the three members of Humayun's party who had tried to sow dissension between the two monarchs. Shah Tahmasp ordered the prisoners to be lowered into a deep cavern called the the prison of the Diwan of Soliman.

When the circumstance was communicated to the prisoners, Rushen Beg wrote a petition to the King ... to pardon and intercede for him. In consequence of which, the good-natured King wrote, and implored the Persian monarch, by the tomb of his father Ismael, to release the prisoners. When Shah Tahmasp read the letter he was astonished, and said, "doubtless Muhammed Humayun is a man of greatest forbearance and clemency, thus to intercede for wretches who have endeavored to do him the greatest injury."

Therefore, Humayun's fabled acts of clemency were not only for his brothers, or because of military necessity, but must be attributed to Humayun's moral character and general personality.
VI. HUMAYUN'S CHARACTER

The personal character of Humayun was the determining factor in how he treated not only his brothers, but his nobles and subjects as well. Perhaps the most dominant trait of Humayun's personality was his innate goodness. As mentioned above, he was quick to forgive the mistakes of others. However, he was quick to share his successes as well. Even during the most difficult periods of his life, Humayun retained this trait. As Ishwari Prasad comments, "Few men have endured so much misery and hardship with a heart so entirely unsoured and have retained amidst so much that was evil the noble qualities of human nature."  

Along with the noble virtues of Humayun's heart, his personality also possessed a strong sense of purpose. Few emperors who are dispossessed manage to regain their throne. Yet, Humayun managed to reconquer Hindustan. It may have been the goodness of his heart which initially forced him into exile, but this same goodness, combined with his perseverance, returned Humayun to the throne. He had been extremely popular as the governor of Badakhshan, and when the people around Kabul had to choose between Kamran and Humayun, they became increasingly supportive of Babur's first born son.

Humayun was not without his faults. He was fond of sensual pleasures which made him prone to long periods of inactivity. After his victorious siege of the city of
Champanir in Gujarat. Humayun and his army remained there for many months. Besides these long periods of inactivity, Humayun could also suffer from periods of indecision. His best trait also contributed to some of his shortcomings. Because of his warm human nature, Humayun proved to be a poor judge of character. All of these different aspects of Humayun's personality contributed to this most unusual reign of the Mughal period.

VII. PERSONAL LIFE

Humayun had a wide array of physical and artistic interests. Until the later years of his life, Humayun was quite vigorous and strong. He enjoyed wrestling, and he also excelled at horsemanship and hunting. His skill at hunting, in fact, greatly impressed the Shah of Persia. While on a hunting expedition, Humayun successfully brought down sixteen birds in flight without missing a shot. Shah Tahmasp responded by saying, "This is excellent, Humayun. I wish you could liquidate your enemies with the same accuracy." In accordance with his nature, Humayun responded with a Persian couplet: "Always shoot a bird when it is in flight, never an enemy." 17

Besides his love for outdoor sports, Humayun was also deeply moved by a love for the arts. His libraries were of great importance to him. After Kamran was forced out from the fort of Talican in Badakhshan, Humayun's first concern
was the safety of the library. Even during his flight from India, it was reported that he kept his most precious books with him, and his faithful librarian, Lala Beg, accompanied him in exile to Persia.\textsuperscript{18}

Humayun loved reading and cherished books. But he also enjoyed writing poetry. Although Babur had superior verbal skills, Humayun made up for this deficiency with his powerful emotional style. Poetic discussions were common at his court. Along with his love for poetry, Humayun also enjoyed science, art, and music. He had a garden especially designed in such a fashion that it floated on the surface of the river Yamuna, and his carpenters built a three story palace that appeared to have been made from a single piece of material but could actually be splintered into many parts.\textsuperscript{19} In fact, Humayun established a new city called Din-panah or "Asylum of Faith." and:

\begin{quote}
its foundation gave notice to the entire Muslim world that here was the capital of a liberal empire where philosophers and poets of no matter what Islamic sect would be welcome, in deliberate contrast to the bigotry and persecution practiced by the present ruling dynasties in Persia and Turkey.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

In harmony with his love for the arts, Humayun had a great fascination for astrology and the supernatural. He classified the court nobles by the positions of the planets, and each day would correspond to a particular heavenly body. Also, he would enter a house or mosque only with his left foot, and if someone entered otherwise, Humayun would instruct them to leave and come in with their
left foot first. His deep interest in astronomy is clearly shown in a story from his youth. When Humayun was ten, his tutor suggested that he should ask three random people who passed by a certain point what their names were, which would prove to be an omen for Humayun's future. The first person who passed by was named "Murad" (Desire), and the second person to pass was called "Daulat" (prosperity). After waiting for some time, Humayun finally received the name of the third person. "Sadat" (success). This incident greatly affected Humayun and during the difficult situations he later faced in life, it served as the foundation for his moral belief that God had chosen him to have fame and prosperity.²¹

It was during his semi-autonomous rule of Badakhshan that Humayun first began to use opium. His addiction to this drug would continue throughout his life, but the extent of this addiction is still under debate. Numerous historians claim that opium left his mind befuddled, which made him a day dreamer. In fact, the long term side effects of opium on Humayun's physical health did contribute to his death since he needed a cane to support his weakened legs later in life. The extent of its effect on his mind, however, is questionable. Before his flight to Persia, one finds many examples of his indolence which lasted months at a time. Even during this early period, however, Humayun could have sudden bursts of energy and recklessness such as his initial pursuit of Bahadur Shah.
After his return from Persia, his occasions of indolence were less frequent and of shorter duration. If Humayun had a serious addiction, then the periods when he acted with authority and confidence can not be explained. It is possible that his opium usage was greater during the first ten years of his rule, but in all probability it was never great enough to cause extreme harm to Humayun's mental state.

VIII. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Humayun was a devout Sunni Muslim, but he was free of the religious bigotry which would mark the reigns of later Mughals. His faith in the Sunni doctrine was firm, and he was frequently seen talking with Sufi saints. This faith, however, did not prevent Humayun from accepting and adhering to other religious practices which he deemed pure. Jouher records an incident when Humayun returned to Kabul where he received some provisions from a widow of the late emperor, Babur. When he realized that the dish was beef, Humayun cried:

Oh unfortunate Kamran! was this the mode of your own existence? and did you feed the Asylum of Chastity on the flesh of cows? what! could you not afford to keep a few goats for her subsistence? this is not fit food even for the devout persons who wait on the tomb of our father. 

Therefore, while steadfast in his faith, Humayun did not
fail to show reverence for other religious beliefs which he considered morally correct.

Humayun's ability to be free of religious bias and bigotry is most apparent in his relationship with Shi'a Muslims. He received assistance from Shah Tahmasp and, to show the proper respect for his benefactor, he even adopted the traditional Shi'a dress. Besides the Persian emperor, one of Humayun's best generals, Bairam Khan, who later served as Akbar's regent, was also of the Shi'a sect. Although his policies towards the Shi'a sect showed great toleration, his treatment of Hindus proved to be more moderate. Humayun did not actively attempt to subvert Hinduism, but his credit with the Rajputs was severely damaged when he failed to attack Bahadur Shah out of Muslim courtesy for his war against an infidel. Thus, even though his action toward another Muslim was chivalrous, it alienated an important section of the population of Hindustan. On the whole, however, Humayun's religious policy was just and lenient.

IX. LEADERSHIP ABILITY

On the battlefield, Humayun's military style reflected his character. He never lacked in personal courage or valor, which was reflected in the number of serious injuries he received. In fact, one enemy who struck him on the head nearly ended his life. His abilities as a
general, however, were lacking in several key aspects. Humayun was not always a good judge of men, which lead him to underestimate his enemies and at the same time accept bad counsel. He never suspected that Sher Shah’s peace offering might be a ruse, and this led to his colossal defeat at Chausa. Also, Humayun tended to put his trust in one or two military advisors rather than the whole council of generals, which led to several bad decisions that had an adverse effect on the outcomes at Chausa and Kanauj.

Another problem with Humayun’s military policy was his indecision and long periods of inactivity. After his initial success against Bahadur Shah, he spent six months with his harem at Mandu. This time was well used by Sher Shah and Bahadur Shah in their attempt to capture Hindustan. Humayun never fully appreciated the full strength of these two enemies, and this also contributed to the loss of his north Indian possessions.

Humayun, however, was not without his successes. Initially, he had a successful campaign against Bahadur Shah, and he even forced him out of the country altogether. He also reconquered his former empire, and although this act has usually been attributed to his able commanders, Humayun still played an important role in this victory. Unfortunately, Humayun was not a strategist or general of Sher Shah’s caliber. But then, Sher Shah was avowedly an extraordinary man. In fact, one historian argues “that if Babur, instead of fighting against Ibrahim Lodi, had to
fight against Sher Khan, it is doubtful if he would have been successful. Therefore, it is apparent that Humayun, who had many flaws as a general, could not match the military prowess of Sher Shah.

During much of his reign, Humayun was engaged in battle. For this reason, not only was the treasury of the Mughal empire increasingly depleted, but Humayun could never establish a firm administrative apparatus. As the semi-autonomous ruler in Badakhshan, Humayun had always remained under the watchful eye of Babur and had used the government apparatus already in place. After he ascended the throne, however, Humayun decided to base the government on astrological signs. In fact, his greatest improvements to the Mughal administration during this time were in court ceremony. When he returned to the throne from his exile, Humayun first began to refill the food reserves and treasury which had been depleted. He also recognized the value of Sher Shah's administrative structure. Thus, a more mature Humayun planned to continue, and perhaps improve upon, this system which functioned well in Hindustan. Before Humayun could prove himself an able administrator, however, he suffered the accident which ended his life. Therefore, it was left for Akbar to make the impressive reforms which would mark his reign.
X. RELATIONSHIP WITH AKBAR

Akbar was born during Humayun's flight across the desert and for the first eight or nine years of his life had little chance to see his father. In spite of this separation, a strong bond grew between Humayun and Akbar. This bond may have started when Akbar's horoscope was presented to Humayun, who "examined it within closed doors and Abul Fazl [Akbar's court historian] says he danced with joy."25 Akbar was separated from his father because he had been captured by Askari. After Kamran's defeat, however, Humayun vowed never to be parted from Akbar again. Humayun provided for Akbar's education and also showed confidence in Akbar's leadership abilities. At the age of twelve Akbar began his military career alongside Humayun when he marched out of Kabul to reconquer Hindustan. Later, Humayun would entrust Akbar with a force of ten thousand to assist Bairam Khan. In fact, Bairam Khan was appointed by Humayun to be the guardian of Akbar, and this decision would be of great benefit to Akbar after his father's untimely death.
XI. ROLE OF FATE

Humayun's name means "the fortunate." But an overview of his life would suggest that fate was usually cruel to this emperor. Even his death was ignoble. Humayun did not die in battle or after a long period of rule. Instead, he simply fell down a set of stairs while attempting to answer the muezzin's call for the evening prayer. In fact, one historian claims that "Humayun tumbled through life and he tumbled out of it." However, a closer examination of Humayun's life, particularly on those occasions when total destruction appeared imminent and hope was bleak, seems to show that fate played Humayun a kind hand.

During the Mughal debacle at Chausa, most of Humayun's troops were massacred by Sher Shah's matchlockmen or drowned while attempting to flee across the river. Humayun, on the other hand, managed to escape by floating on an inflated water skin across the river, and merely suffered a minor wound to his arm. This escape is his most celebrated turn of luck, but there were other instances, especially during the worst times of his life, when fate was kind.

Humayun's luck seemed at its worst when he was a king without a country, wandering through Hindustan till he eventually took refuge in Persia. But even during this time, he had success at key moments. Most importantly, it was during this time that he met Hamida, and she bore him
his son Akbar. Also, Jouher relates that during Humayun's flight across the desert in northwest India, a small group of Mughal archers managed to hold off a superior force through uncanny accuracy. This allowed Humayun to elude capture, which could have meant death or blindness for the emperor.27 Another instance of Humayun's good luck is evidenced during his battles with Kamran. Humayun received a grievous head wound which almost ended his life, and the only reason his assailant did not strike him the second time was due to Humayun's quick reaction. He shouted, "Oh, wretched man, hold your hand! How dare you attack your King?"28 This frightened his attacker, and gave Humayun a chance to escape. No one could consider Humayun an extremely lucky man, but during those moments in his life when danger was greatest and everything appeared hopeless, he was indeed "fortunate."

XII. CONCLUSION

Many historians minimize the role of Humayun in Mughal history. Lane-Poole comments that: "His character attracts but never dominates. In private life he might have been a delightful companion and a staunch friend ... But as a king he was a failure."29 Also, Bamber Gascoigne claims that "Among the first six Great Moghuls the image of Humayun is inevitably that of the nonentity, the one
obvious failure.\textsuperscript{30} This judgement, however, seems rather harsh and unfair.

Humayun's life bears a certain resemblance to the life of Babur who is generally considered a success. Both started with an empire, lost it, and eventually regained it. And, Babur never had to face the military genius of Sher Shah. Humayun does have many faults. He had an addiction to opium, but the extent to which it affected his judgement and bearing may be somewhat exaggerated. Humayun frequently followed the wrong advice, especially early in his career, and was overly lenient with those who betrayed him. Muni Lal rightly observes that "He would have been a greater monarch had he been a lesser man."\textsuperscript{31} However, it can be argued that these very human attributes of generosity and warmheartedness were partly responsible for bringing him back to the throne. When the populace had to choose between Kamran and Humayun, they overwhelmingly preferred Humayun. Few emperors ever regain their throne, but Humayun persevered through his exile and triumphantly returned to claim what was rightfully his -- an act, which by itself, was an amazing feat.

As an administrator Humayun was not effective, but he never really had the chance to show his abilities. During the first ten years of his rule he was constantly at war with powerful enemies to the south and east. After his return from exile, he recognized the value of Sher Shah's government and made no immediate changes to its structure.
What future changes -- good or bad -- he might have made can only remain a speculation since his untimely death occurred in 1556, shortly after he regained the throne.

Although the extent of his administrative capacities are unknown, it is undeniable that Humayun was a great patron of the arts. He set about creating a court which would have a reputation for religious toleration and for honoring the works of great artists and poets. Scholars did indeed come from all over the Muslim world, and his exile in Persia reinforced and stimulated the Indo-Persian contact. This contact continued under his son, and had far reaching consequences on the history of Indian civilization.

Compared to the splendor of Akbar's court or the relative obscurity from which Babur began, Humayun may seem to have failed as an emperor. But Humayun was not without his merits, which are generally ignored. Due to his early death the extent of his greatness and abilities can never be known. His desire for religious toleration and his patronage of the arts was carried on by his immediate successors. A kind, generous man, Humayun managed to regain the Mughal empire from Sher Shah's offspring for his progeny. It was from this newly conquered empire that Akbar could begin his long and glorious career. Therefore, it is important to remember Humayun not only for his kind and generous nature, nor simply because he was the father of Akbar the Great, but because he left an indelible mark
on the direction, development, and spirit of the Mughal empire.
# Mughal Emperors 1526-1605

| 1526-1530 | Zahir ud Din Muhammad Babur          |
| 1530-1540 | Nasir ud Din Muhammad Humayun       |
|           | (first reign)                        |
| 1540-1555 | Suri Sultans of Delhi               |
| 1540-1544 | Sher Shah                           |
| 1545-1554 | Islam Shah                          |
| 1554-1555 | Muhammad Shah Adil                  |
|           | Ibrahim\(^1\) Dispute               |
|           | Sikandar\(^2\) succession           |
| 1555-1556 | Nasir ud Din Muhammad Humayun       |
|           | (second reign)                      |
| 1556-1605 | Jalal ud Din Muhammad Akbar         |
The Reign of NASIR ud DIN HUMAYUN
1530-40; 1555-56
HUMAYUN ON THE THRONE
Crossing a river on inflated skins: detail, c. 1590
Hamida Banu Begam, the mother of Akbar
ENDNOTES


6. Ibid., p. 457.

7. Ibid., p. 702.

8. Ibid., p. 708.


15. Ibid., p. 72.


19. Ibid., p. 42.


22Jouher, Private Memoirs, p. 83.


24Mahajan, Muslim Rule, p. 33.


26Stanley Lane-Poole. Medieval India under Mohammdan Rule, cited in Mahajan, Muslim Rule, p. 31.


28Lal, Humayun, p. 173.


30Gascoigne, Great Moghuls, p. 68.

31Lal, Humayun, pp. 227-228.

32Sharma, Medieval History of India, p. 301.
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