

Reassessing the Role and Status of the *Diwan al-Sadarat* in the Mughal State under Aurangzeb (1658-1707)

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Abstract

The Mughal Empire's administrative effectiveness was sustained through a structured system of *diwans* that regulated different aspects of governance. The *Diwan al-Sadarat*, in particular, functioned as the central bureau for religious administration, education and welfare distribution. The institution, despite its formal status, has often been treated as marginal in existing historiography, which tends to prioritise political narratives and imperial personalities. This study re-examined the role and institutional position of *Diwan al-Sadarat* during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658–1707) by adopting an administrative and institutional perspective. This qualitative study employed a historical approach with thematic content analysis involving primary and secondary sources. The analysis was primarily based on the contemporary chronicle *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, supported by selected secondary scholarship for contextualisation and validation. The findings indicate that *Diwan al-Sadarat* had experienced a decline in strategic importance during earlier reigns due to imperial policies that limited its administrative scope and the ulama's participation in governance. However, under Aurangzeb, the institution was deliberately revitalised and reintegrated into the central administrative structure. This study demonstrates that *Diwan al-Sadarat* functioned as an operational mechanism for managing Islamic education, regulating the appointment of religious officials, and administering *madad al-ma'ash* welfare grants. These institutional functions contribute to the standardisation of religious administration and social stability in a plural society. The foregrounding of institutional processes rather than ruler-centric interpretations helped this study contribute a new perspective on Mughal governance and highlight the *Diwan al-Sadarat* as a strategic administrative instrument for sustaining imperial legitimacy.

Keywords: *Diwan al-Sadarat*, Aurangzeb, Mughal, South Asia, India

Introduction

The Mughal Empire developed a sophisticated administrative system that integrated Islamic principles with the socio-religious realities of the Indian subcontinent.¹ Historians have long recognised the Mughal's contribution to political stability, cultural development and religious

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¹ Azharudin Mohamed Dali, *Tamadun India* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2015), 13; A. Wazir, S. Dawar, H. Khan, and A. Khalid, "Ibn Khaldun Theory of Asabiyyah and the Rise and Fall of the Mughals in South Asia," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 2 (2022): 159–69.

administration through the establishment of structured governmental institutions.² Nevertheless, much of the existing scholarship has prioritised political narratives, imperial expansion and the personalities of Mughal rulers, often at the expense of analysing the administrative mechanisms that help implement Islamic governance.³ Consequently, the Mughal rule's institutional dimensions, especially those that mediate between religion and state authority, remain relatively underexplored. This tendency has contributed to a historiography that explains Mughal governance largely through ideological or personality-centred frameworks, instead of employing bureaucratic structures that sustain imperial administration in a vast and pluralistic society.⁴

Religious affairs, in the Mughal administrative structure, were institutionalised through specific departments operating under state authority. One such institution was the *Diwan al-Sadarat*, a central religious bureau responsible for supervising religious appointments, Islamic education, *Sharia*-related judicial matters and the distribution of welfare grants (*madad al-ma'ash*).⁵ The *Diwan al-Sadarat* implemented these functions and served as an official intermediary between religious authority and imperial administration. However, the *Diwan al-Sadarat*, despite its formal position in the Mughal bureaucracy, has often been portrayed in existing historiography as a marginal or symbolic institution.⁶ References to the institution are frequently fragmented, appearing sparingly in discussions on religious grants or the role of the ulama, without systematic attention to its organisational structure or administrative authority.

Aurangzeb's (1658–1707) reign has been frequently portrayed according to religious orthodoxy and intolerance perspectives in early colonial historiography represented by scholars, such as Jadunath Sarkar and Stanley Lane-Poole.⁷ These portrayals tend to attribute religious policies directly to the emperor's personal disposition, with limited consideration of the administrative structures through which such policies were implemented. In contrast, later scholarship by I. H. Qureshi, S. A. Farooqui, and Satish Chandra has demonstrated that religious governance during Aurangzeb's rule operated through formal bureaucratic institutions and not arbitrary royal authority.⁸

The debate on Aurangzeb's leadership and administrative policy continued, leading to two different interpretations. There is another view by Abid based on Shibli Nu'mani's work, *Aurangzeb Alamgir Par Aik Nazar* (1908), which depicts Aurangzeb as a secular ruler.⁹ This diversity of views surrounding Aurangzeb is a strong justification for why his governance and institutions deserve to be reassessed. This historiographical shift highlights the importance of

² R. C. Majumdar, ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People: The Mughul Empire* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1974), xi.

³ J. Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzib 1618–1707* (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons Private Ltd., 1972), 14; M. Z. A. H. Ashari, "Pemeriksaan Peranan *Diwan al-Sadarat* dalam Pentadbiran Mughal Era Awrangzib (1658-1707)," *Online Journal of Research in Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2021): 33-46.

⁴ U. N. Day, *The Mughal Government A.D. 1556–1707* (Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969), 51; R. M. Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal Period (1556–1707)* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1984), 1.

⁵ Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments*, 1. M. Z. A. H. Ashari, M. R. M. Nor, N. L. Safian, M. H. Safiai, H. Zainal, & E. A. Jamsari, "Mughal Kingdom in India According to Hamka's Sejarah Umat Islam," *International Journal of Advanced Research* 9, no. 11 (2021): 970–978.

⁶ S. M. Haq, "Influence of Orthodoxy at the Mughul Court (Seventeenth Century)," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 25, no. 3 (1977): 151–76.

⁷ Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzib*, 4–5. Stanley Lane-Poole, *Aurangzib and the Decay of the Mughal Empire* (The Clarendon Press, 1901), 42.

⁸ I. H. Qureshi, "India under the Mughals," dalam *The Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. P. M. Holt, A. K. S. Lambton, dan B. Lewis (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 55; S. A. Farooqui, *Islam and the Mughal State* (Sundeep Prakashan, 2005), 54; J. Chandra, "Aurangzib and Hindu Temples," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 5, no. 1 (1957): 247–54.

⁹ M. J. Abid, "The Many Lives of Mughal King: Secularizing Aurangzeb in Communal India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 84, 4 (2025): 922-44.

moving beyond personality-centred explanation and examining the institutional frameworks that shape religious policy, although institutional studies focusing exclusively on *Diwan al-Sadarat* remain limited.¹⁰

Previous studies have examined specific aspects of Mughal religious administration, such as *madad al-ma'ash* grants, ulama's influence and religious endowments, but these discussions remain fragmented and lack an integrated institutional perspective.¹¹ Consequently, a significant gap emerged regarding the understanding of how the *Diwan al-Sadarat* functioned as a coherent administrative body that supported political legitimacy, social stability and governance in a pluralistic society. Contemporary scholarship on Islamic governance also underscores the importance of structured institutional mechanisms in managing religious authority, education and welfare distribution. Studies on zakat and waqf institutions highlight structured oversight, *Sharia* audit and professionalised administrative systems as key elements in ensuring accountability and social legitimacy that reinforces the continued relevance of institutional approaches in historical and contemporary contexts.¹²

This study addressed this gap by examining the role and position of *Diwan al-Sadarat* during Aurangzeb's reign (1658–1707). It adopted an institutional and administrative approach, instead of focusing on the ruler's personal religiosity, in order to analyse how Islamic principles were operationalised through a formal state mechanism. This study investigated *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s role in religious appointments, Islamic education and welfare distribution, drawing primarily on *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī* by Musta'id Khan and supported by authoritative secondary sources.¹³ The novelty of this study lies in repositioning the *Diwan al-Sadarat* as a central administrative institution in Mughal governance, rather than a marginal religious office, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Islamic governance in a multi-religious society.

Methodology

This study examined historical texts that documented *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s role in the Mughal Empire's governance during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658–1707). The selection of textual sources is appropriate because historical narrative records provide evidence of institutional structures, functions and policy implementation through formal administrative bodies in the areas of religious appointments, Islamic education management and distribution of welfare assistance (*madad al-ma'ash*).¹⁴ The analysis focused on textual content that demonstrated how religious and Islamic administrative policies were formally channelled through the *Diwan al-Sadarat*, thereby enabling an assessment of the institution's position in supporting the legitimacy of early modern Islamic governance.

¹⁰ H. K. Naqvi, *History of Mughal Government and Administration* (Kanishka Publishing House, 1990), 216; I. H. Qureshi, "India Under the Mughals," in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 55.

¹¹ S. R. Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1988), 108; A. Rashid, "Shah Jahan," dalam *The History and Culture of the Indian People: The Mughul Empire*, ed. R. C. Majumdar (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1974).

¹² Muhammad Iqmal Hisham Kamaruddin et al., "Exploring Shariah Audit Practices in Zakat and Waqf Institutions in Malaysia," *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* 15, no. 3 (2024): 402–421. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIABR-07-2022-0190>; Tika Widiastuti et al., "Innovating Zakat Governance through Good Amil Governance (GAG): A Structural Policy Model Using DEMATEL-ANP in Indonesia," *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity* 12, no. 1 (2026): Article 100711, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2025.100711>; R. M. Napitupulu, R. Sukmana, and A. S. Rusydiana, "Governance of Islamic Social Finance: Learnings from Existing Literature," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 17, no. 3 (2024): 552–571, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMEFM-06-2023-0222>

¹³ Muhammad Saqi Musta'id Khan, *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī* (Asiatic Society Bengal, 1871), 48.

¹⁴ Musta'id Khan, *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, 1.

This qualitative study adopted a historical case study design, in which *Diwan al-Sadarat* constitutes a single unit of analysis in Aurangzeb's administration. This design allows for an in-depth examination of a specific institution through administrative and narrative analysis without extending into a broad political history. This study used the case study design to analyse the *Diwan al-Sadarat's* roles and functions as an administrative mechanism that facilitates the formal and systematic implementation of religious policies.

This study's primary data source was deliberately limited to a single primary source, namely *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī* by Musta'id Khan, a contemporary court chronicle that recorded administrative policies and practices during Aurangzeb's reign.¹⁵ This source was selected based on its chronological proximity to the period under study, its documentary value in recording imperial administrative affairs and its detailed references to institutional mechanisms in the Mughal state, including matters related to *Diwan al-Sadarat*.¹⁶

This single-source strategy, in line with the objective of conducting an in-depth institutional reconstruction, had prioritised analytical depth and interpretive consistency over comparative narrative analysis in multiple chronicles, which often overlap in political description but provide limited systematic institutional detail. This study nevertheless recognised the limitations of relying on a court chronicle that may reflect normative or legitimising perspectives. Therefore, interpretation of the primary data was critically conducted and supported through established source validation procedures.¹⁷

Secondary sources, including works by Sarkar,¹⁸ Day,¹⁹ Bilgrami,²⁰ Farooqui,²¹ and Chandra,²² were selectively employed to provide historical context, historiographical positioning and critical engagement with existing scholarship. These sources served to contextualise and cross-check institutional information derived from the primary text but do not replace the primary data. Where specific procedural mechanisms (welfare registration and documentation practices associated with the *Waqia Navis*) are discussed, they are reported transparently as described in the relevant secondary administrative studies rather than claimed as direct archival analysis.²³

Data collection was conducted through a documentary content analysis of *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*. The process involved identifying passages that directly or indirectly referred to the *Diwan al-Sadarat* and its institutional functions. Data were filtered according to the research objectives and organised into three main thematic categories, namely religious appointments, Islamic education administration and welfare distribution through *madad al-ma'ash*. This thematic organisation ensured analytical relevance and prevented deviation from the core research focus.

Data were analysed using the thematic content analysis method by incorporating explicit source validation procedures to demonstrate the originality and reliability of the primary data. Internal criticism was applied to assess the coherence, terminology and consistency of institutional references in *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*. External criticism was conducted through cross-referencing institutional information with authoritative secondary studies to verify historical context, assess interpretive plausibility and minimise the risk of over-reliance on a single

¹⁵ Musta'id Khan, *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, 102.

¹⁶ R. M. Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal Period (1556–1707)*, 2.

¹⁷ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester University Press, 1954), 23.

¹⁸ Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzib*, 13.

¹⁹ Day, *The Mughal Government*, 17.

²⁰ Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments*, 5.

²¹ Farooqui, *Islam and the Mughal State*, 54.

²² Chandra, *Mughal Religious Policies*, 1.

²³ Day, *The Mughal Government*, 17.

courtly perspective. Findings derived from *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī* were analysed thematically and triangulated with secondary scholarship for validation and interpretive strengthening.²⁴ This study applied this dual validation process to evaluate *Diwan al-Sadarat* as a formal administrative mechanism that supports religious governance, education management, welfare distribution and political legitimacy under Aurangzeb.

Findings

Findings of this study indicate that *Diwan al-Sadarat* functioned as a symbolic religious office under Aurangzeb (1658–1707), as well as an administrative institution with observable implications for social life. The analysis was primarily anchored in *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, which recorded key administrative actions and institutional decisions during Aurangzeb's reign, while secondary scholarship was used selectively to contextualise institutional terminology and validate interpretive claims.²⁵ The findings were organised by tracing institutional mechanisms, administrative outputs and their broader social implications rather than presenting a purely narrative account. Three interlinked domains emerged, such as the restoration of the *Diwan al-Sadarat's* strategic position in the Mughal administrative structure, its catalytic role in Islamic education and the structuring of religious officials, as well as its relationship with *madad al-ma'āsh* as a welfare mechanism with stabilising effects in a plural society.

Table 1: Comparative Summary of the *Diwan Al-Sadarat's* Core Functions Before and during Aurangzeb's Reign

| Aspect | Before Aurangzeb | During Aurangzeb | Evidence Base | Social Implication |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Religious–political coordination | Less strategically central | Restored as an active administrative channel | <i>Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī</i> ; departmental studies | Increased legitimacy and procedural clarity |
| Islamic education | Limited or non-predictable | More systematic institutional support | Educational and administrative studies | Wider access to learning and social cohesion |
| Religious appointments | Less standardised | More structured, competence-based | Studies on appointment procedures | Greater credibility of officials |
| Welfare (<i>madad al-ma'āsh</i>) | Less systematised | More regulated and inclusive | Grant and administrative records | Reduced vulnerability and social tension |

Restoration of Diwan al-Sadarat's Strategic Position in the Mughal Administrative Structure

According to *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, Aurangzeb appointed prominent scholars, such as Sayyid Hidayatullah, Qalich Khan and Sharif Khan, as *Sadr al-Sudur* soon after his accession, indicating a deliberate effort to restore the institutional authority of the *Diwan al-Sadarat*.²⁶ These appointments demonstrated that the office was treated as an operational component of imperial governance and not a ceremonial position. The chronicle presents these measures as part of a broader administrative reorganisation in which religious offices were reintegrated into the state's central structure.

²⁴ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 6th ed. (Routledge, 2015), 45; Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 63.

²⁵ Musta'id Khan, *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, 48; Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments*, 35.

²⁶ Musta'id Khan, *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, 72

Earlier historiographical studies indicated that the *Sadr*'s authority had weakened in previous reigns, especially during the period of Akbar, when religious administration was reorganised under broader imperial policies.²⁷ In contrast, the administrative actions recorded in *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī* suggest a renewed emphasis on institutional religious authority. This shift indicates that Aurangzeb sought to re-establish the *Diwan al-Sadarat* as a formal administrative channel through which religious matters were processed in the imperial bureaucracy.

Other passages in the chronicle describe the *Diwan al-Sadarat* as an intermediary between the population and the court in religious matters, including petitions, appointments and welfare distribution.²⁸ This institutional role suggests that the restoration of the office involved practical administrative restructuring. The Mughal administration created a more structured channel for religious governance in a plural social environment by placing recognised scholars in key positions and formalising the management of religious affairs.

The Diwan al-Sadarat as a Catalyst for Islamic Education and the Structuring of Religious Officials

According to *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, Aurangzeb ordered stipends and land assignments to be granted to scholars, students and learned individuals through the office of the *Sadr*, indicating that educational and religious support was administered through recognised institutional channels.²⁹ These measures demonstrate that educational patronage was linked to formal administrative structures and not informal or personal patronage networks. In addition, Aurangzeb's inclination to focus on Islamic development by employing government institutions, such as the *Diwan al-Sadarat*, is also consistent with his personality and religious attitude, which was influenced by the writings of al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*.³⁰

Evidence suggests that the *Diwan al-Sadarat* played a central role in allocating resources to educational institutions, supporting the teaching of classical curricula and distributing financial or landed assistance to students and teachers through official procedures.³¹ This administrative support helped create a network of scholars trained in state-recognised institutions to form a pool of personnel eligible for religious offices. In comparative terms, the integration of education and administration under the *Diwan al-Sadarat* represents a more systematic institutional arrangement compared to earlier and less coordinated patterns of patronage.

The same institutional framework shaped the appointment of religious officials, such as *qadi*, *imams*, *khatibs*, *muhtasibs* and teachers. Departmental studies indicate that these appointments were conducted through recognised procedures that evaluated candidates' knowledge, character and religious credentials.³² This structured approach contributed to the professionalisation of religious authority, as office holders derived legitimacy from recognised institutional roles. At the community level, the presence of trained officials and better organised educational provision contributed to greater administrative predictability and more structured religious life.

Madad al-Ma'ash as an Instrument of Welfare and Interfaith Accommodation

According to *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, the *Diwan al-Sadarat* supervised the distribution of stipends and land assignments to scholars, religious students and the poor through the *madad al-ma'ash*

²⁷ Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzeb*, 13–18; Farooqui, *Islam and the Mughal State*, 54; Chandra, *Mughal Religious Policies*, 1–5; Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments*, 10–15.

²⁸ Musta'id Khan, *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, 95.

²⁹ Musta'id Khan, *Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*, 118.

³⁰ H. Shah, "Al-Ghazali and his Interpreters: The Case of the Emperor Aurangzeb," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 55, 1 (2023): 128-133.

³¹ Day, *The Mughal Government*, 51–60.

³² Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments*, 45–60.

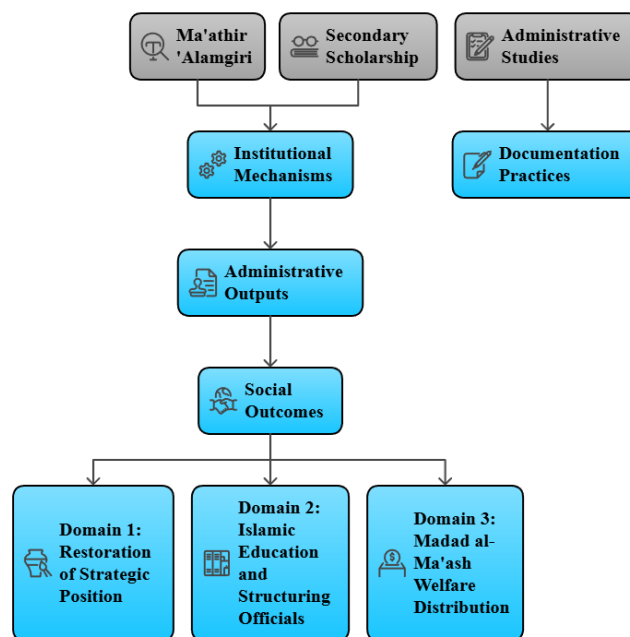
Reassessing the Role and Status of the Diwan al-Sadarat in the Mughal State under Aurangzeb (1658-1707) mechanism.³³ Administrative studies indicate that these grants were directed to identifiable categories of recipients, including scholars devoted to learning, individuals unable to pursue education due to poverty, ascetic religious figures and students seeking advanced knowledge but lacked sufficient means.³⁴ This classification suggests that welfare allocation followed recognisable eligibility criteria rather than indiscriminate patronage.

Contemporary administrative descriptions also refer to procedures involving verification and the recording of beneficiaries in official registers, such as the *Waqia Navis*, indicating that the distribution of *madad al-ma'ash* operated through documented institutional channels.³⁵ Compared with less systematised patterns of patronage in earlier periods, the welfare system under Aurangzeb appears more closely tied to administrative oversight and defined categories of recipients.

Grant-focused studies further documented cases in which *madad al-ma'ash* was extended to non-Muslim recipients and institutions, including Hindu religious figures and temples. Recorded cases include grants to individuals, such as Ganesh Bharati and Ramjiwan Gosa, as well as land assignments to Brahmin groups for charitable purposes.³⁶ These cases indicate that the welfare mechanism, although administered through a religious department, could operate across communal boundaries in documented instances. In plural settings, such cross-communal assistance provided a recognised institutional channel through which different groups could access state support. In comparative terms, a welfare system administered through identifiable procedures and recipient categories reduced the perception of arbitrary patronage and made state assistance more publicly acceptable. These documented cross-communal grants indicate that the *Diwan al-Sadarat* operated as a religious bureau, as well as a recognised institutional channel through which diverse social groups could access imperial support, thereby contributing to administrative predictability and social accommodation in a plural society.

Figure 1: Analytical pathway for interpreting the Diwan al-Sadarat under Aurangzeb Aurangzeb (1658–1707)

Diwan al-Sadarat under Aurangzeb (1658–1707)



³³ Musta'id Khan, *Ma'athir 'Alamgiri*, 130.

³⁴ A. Rashid, "Madad-i-Ma'ash Grants under the Mughals," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 9, no. 2 (1961): 98–108.

³⁵ Day, *The Mughal Government*, 70–75.

³⁶ Rashid, "Madad-i-Ma'ash Grants," 102–105.

Figure 1 summarises how evidence from the primary text (*Ma'āthir 'Ālamgīrī*) is interpreted through an institutional logic that moves from institutional mechanisms to administrative outputs and social outcomes, which is then organised into three domains, namely restoration of the *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s strategic position, its role in Islamic education and the structuring of religious officials, and its relationship with *madad al-ma'ash* welfare distribution in a plural society. Secondary data and administrative studies were selectively used to contextualise institutional terminology and validate interpretation, whereby procedural points, such as documentation practices associated with the *Waqia Navis*, were discussed, as reported in administrative studies rather than treated as direct archival findings.

Discussion

This section discusses the research findings on the *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s strategic role in the Mughal administration under Aurangzeb (1658–1707) and clarifies the limits of what the evidence can support when the institution is used as a platform for Islamic governance. The discussion is organised around three interrelated themes derived from the findings, namely the restoration of *Diwan al-Sadarat* as a coordinator of religious and political relations, its contribution to Islamic education and the structuring of religious officials, and the significance of *madad al-ma'ash*'s governance as a welfare instrument in a plural society. Debates on Aurangzeb frequently oscillated between moral evaluation and political narrative, hence, this discussion adopted a critical institutional perspective by tracing the links between mechanisms, administrative outputs and plausible social outcomes, while focusing on the interpretive constraints of available sources and the risk of reading normative claims as direct evidence of uniform practice.³⁷

Restoration of the Diwan al-Sadarat and Legitimacy in a Plural Polity

Findings suggest that Aurangzeb's restoration of the *Diwan al-Sadarat* can be interpreted as an institutional move to formalise religious governance in the administrative system. In a plural 17th century Indian society, legitimacy depended on ideological claims as well as on whether governance appeared procedurally intelligible and predictable to subjects across social and religious lines. The *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s significance, from this standpoint, lies in its function as a bureaucratic platform through which religious authority can be translated into administratively actionable decisions, and through which state priorities can be communicated through public-facing religious administration.³⁸

At the same time, a critical approach requires caution when linking institutional restoration to *success* narratives. Secondary works often described the *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s role through the language of *Sharia* enforcement, religious correctness or imperial piety, but such framing can blur the line between normative expectation and administrative effect. The more defensible claim, consistent with the findings, is that institutionalised religious governance can strengthen perceived procedural justice by clarifying avenues for channelling religious concerns, supervising religious functionaries and standardising the official handling of religiously framed matters. These procedural features have social consequences because they shape everyday encounters between communities and recognised authorities, thus affecting perceptions of fairness, accountability and credibility of governance in local settings.

Islamic Education and the Structuring of Religious Officials as Governance Tools

Findings also support the notion of Islamic education and appointment of religious officials as governance tools as much as religious goods. Scholarship on Mughal institutions frequently

³⁷ A. B. Pandey, *Later Medieval India: A History of the Mughals* (Central Book Depot, 1963), 383; D. E. Streusand, *The Formation of the Mughal Empire* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 91.

³⁸ Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments*, 60; M. L. R. Choudhury, *The State & Religion in Mughal India*, 177–78; Z. Faruki, *Aurangzeb & His Times* (Idarah-i Adabiyat-i, 1972), 433–34.

treats education as part of a broader civilisational project, yet the institutional pathway foregrounded in this study highlights how education policy and office-holding can operate together to stabilise normative order at the community level.³⁹ The state can contribute to the reproduction of authoritative knowledge and the diffusion of shared norms by supporting educational institutions and recognised curricula, while structured appointments shape who held legitimate authority to interpret, teach and oversee religious practice in everyday social life.⁴⁰

However, the discussions must remain critical about idealised claims, especially the language of *meritocracy* and avoidance of patronage. The finding's relevance is not that they prove a uniformly meritocratic system across regions, but that the institutional logic of credentialing, moral scrutiny and role definition is presented as central to the operation of religious offices.⁴¹ Studies of the Mughal judicial and administrative environment help contextualise why structured procedures for appointing the *qadi* and other officials mattered in enhancing public trust, because the credibility of these officials affected dispute resolution, moral regulation and community governance in ways that were blatantly apparent to the public.⁴² In this interpretation, the *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s social significance emerges through the public-facing consequences of who was authorised to act in religious offices and how these offices were expected to operate in the administrative order.⁴³

Madad al-ma'ash Welfare and Social Ordering in a Plural Society

The welfare theme strengthens the argument that religious administration can produce tangible social effects beyond doctrinal enforcement. Findings indicate that *madad al-ma'ash* operated as an organised distributive instrument that could mitigate vulnerability among identified recipient categories and thereby reduce potential grievance. The administrative organisation of welfare is analytically important because distributive practices are among the most socially visible expressions of governance; whereby when they appear predictable and intelligible, they can shape perceptions of justice and reinforce legitimacy.

Discussions of procedural aspects, such as verification and documentation practices, including references to recordings through the *Waqia Navis* mechanism, are therefore treated cautiously as reported in administrative studies rather than as direct archival findings.⁴⁴

The discussion critically engages with claims about intercommunal tolerance. Studies of grants and land-rights practices provide comparative support for the proposition that state-linked distributive mechanisms can, in particular cases, extend beyond Muslim beneficiaries to include non-Muslim religious recipients and institutions.⁴⁵ The findings indicate that welfare and grants can function as instruments of social management in a plural polity, where selective inclusion can reduce perceived exclusion and support accommodation under specific administrative and political conditions, rather than treating such instances as proof of a

³⁹ Pandey, *Later Medieval India*, 383; Day, *The Mughal Government*, 52.

⁴⁰ S. M. Jaffar, *Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India* (Idarah-i Adabiyat-i, 1972), 67; F. Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors and the Islamic Dynasties of India, Iran and Central Asia* (Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2007), 160.

⁴¹ Khalid 'Abd Allah Hammad al-Hamuri, "Al-Imbratur al-Mughuli Abu al-Muzaffar Muhammad Muhyi al-Din Awrangzib wa Siyasatuhu al-Islahiyyah (1659–1707)" (master's thesis, Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Yarmouk, 2000), 40; Faruki, *Aurangzeb & His Times*, 433–34.

⁴² M. S. Hussain, "Judicial System in India During Mughal Period with Special Reference to Persian Sources" (PhD diss., Centre of Persian and Central Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2009), 292; Qureshi, "India under the Mughals," 56.

⁴³ Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments*, 60; Choudhury, *The State & Religion in Mughal India*, 177–78; Faruki, *Aurangzeb & His Times*, 433–34.

⁴⁴ Pandey, *Later Medieval India*, 383; Day, *The Mughal Government*, 52.

⁴⁵ B. R. Grover, "Nature of Land-Rights in Mughal India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 1, no. 1 (1963): 1–23; J. Chandra, "Alamgir's Grant to a Brahmin," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 7, no. 2 (1959): 99–100; Chandra, *Mughal Religious Policies*, 190.

uniformly inclusive welfare regime. This interpretation also avoids turning *tolerance* into a moral label and instead treats it as a potential institutional effect of distributive governance in a multi-religious society.

Contemporary Relevance, with Conditions and Limits

The positioning of *Diwan al-Sadarat* in a contemporary context should consider the fact that present-day conditions differ fundamentally from those of early modern imperial governance. Modern states operate through different constitutional frameworks, citizenship regimes and institutional expectations of religious freedom and equality; therefore, the *Diwan al-Sadarat* cannot be treated as a policy template.⁴⁶ What the historical case can offer is an analytical lens for understanding how religious governance becomes administratively legible, how authority is routinised through offices and procedures, and how distributive mechanisms intersect with legitimacy and social order. The implication is conditional in contemporary discourse on Islamic governance, since institutional policies that clarify roles, routinise authority and procedural pathways may contribute to stability and trust, but only insofar as they align with present-day legal constraints and plural social expectations.⁴⁷

Overall, this discussion affirms that the *Diwan al-Sadarat* under Aurangzeb is most convincingly interpreted as a stabilising institutional platform in Mughal administration. Its strategic restoration, linkage to education and structuring of religious offices, as well as its association with *madad al-ma'ash* welfare distribution together suggest pathways through which religious administration could shape community-level authority, perceived procedural justice, and social order in a plural society. At the same time, the discussion remains critical by distinguishing normative chronicle claims from institutionally plausible effects, by treating procedural details, such as *Waqia Navis*'s documentation, as reported through administrative studies, and by considering comparative cases of non-Muslim grants as bounded evidence of distributive governance rather than as proof of uniform inclusivity.

These qualifications strengthen the study's contribution by keeping the argument historically grounded while still demonstrating the *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s importance in the social life of past societies and for broader debates on the institutional dimensions of Islamic governance. The reality of *Diwan al-Sadarat*'s function during Aurangzeb's reign proves that he is not the religious fanatic he is often portrayed as by critical Indian historians. Zaman and Ahmad asserted that Aurangzeb's religious policies were driven more by political and administrative interests, and not the main cause of the Mughal's Empire decline, rather, the decline occurred gradually after his death in 1707.⁴⁸

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the *Diwan al-Sadarat* had played an important, multifaceted and strategic role in the administrative structure of Aurangzeb's reign (1658–1707). Far from being a merely symbolic religious department, it functioned as an administrative mechanism that integrated Islamic *Sharia* principles with the needs of state governance. Its primary function included the merit-based appointment of religious officials, development of Islamic education, and implementation of inclusive social welfare through *madad al-ma'ash*, benefitting both Muslims and non-Muslims.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *The Mughal Emperors and the Islamic Dynasties of India, Iran and Central Asia*, 160; Streusand, *The Formation of the Mughal Empire*, 73.

⁴⁷ Choudhury, *The State & Religion in Mughal India*, 177–78; Qureshi, "India under the Mughals," 56.

⁴⁸ A. Zaman & M. Ahmad, "Reevaluating the Religio-Political Policies of Aurangzeb Alamgir: A Critical Insight from Indian Historians," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, 2 (2023): 121-33. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.132.08>

The findings confirm that Aurangzeb utilised this institution to consolidate his political legitimacy, shape the identity of the empire as a just and authoritative *Dar al-Islam*, and preserve harmony in India's pluralistic society. His approach demonstrates that Islamic judicial principles can be practically applied in governance, thereby countering the notion of Aurangzeb as a fanatical ruler who oppressed non-Muslims.

The main strength of this study lies in its focus on the *Diwan al-Sadarat*, an institution often overlooked in the historical discourse on South Asian Islam. This study employed a historical approach with thematic content analysis to systematically identify the structure, role and influence of the *Diwan al-Sadarat*, grounded in authentic primary and secondary evidence. The article enriches the literature on Islamic administrative history by showing that religious authority served as a moral symbol and operated as an effective apparatus for shaping state policy, building a transparent Islamic bureaucracy and providing a formal channel through which the public can convey their social and religious concerns to the government. The *Diwan al-Sadarat* also acted as a bridge uniting political power with *Sharia* principles, proving that religion and state need not be viewed dichotomously, but rather as complementary forces ensuring stability and public welfare.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges several limitations. Its scope focused solely on the Aurangzeb era without comparison with other Mughal rulers, such as Akbar or Jahangir, which might have provided a more balanced context. The study employed a qualitative approach relying entirely on written historical sources, without field data triangulation or quantitative methods. Moreover, issues related to the geographical, gender and social status dimensions of this institution's beneficiaries were not analysed in depth. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should adopt comparative and interdisciplinary approaches by incorporating diverse sources and methodologies in order to broaden and contextualise the understanding of Islamic institutions' functions.

Findings of this study offer opportunities for linking institutional models, such as the *Diwan al-Sadarat*, with the needs of contemporary Islamic governance. Principles, such as meritocracy in appointments, bureaucratic transparency, prioritisation of education as the foundation of civilisation and inclusive welfare transcending religious and ethnic boundaries are all values aligned with the *maqasid al-shariah* and worth emulating. In today's world, which faces the challenges of pluralistic societies, an inclusive Islamic ethos (*rahmah*) can serve as an inspiration for developing a more just, authoritative and people-oriented Islamic governance. Therefore, it is anticipated that the findings of this study can benefit the academic field and policymakers seeking to re-articulate Islamic values in modern state administration.

Finally, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical relationship between religion and politics in the context of the Mughal Empire, while reinvigorating the debate on the role of Islamic institutions in creating social stability and political legitimacy. Aurangzeb's success in managing a pluralistic society through the *Diwan al-Sadarat* demonstrates that *Sharia*-based governance can be wisely and inclusively adapted to local realities. Therefore, the *Diwan al-Sadarat* should rightly be regarded as an exemplary model in historical scholarship and contemporary discussions on the concepts of justice and Islamic *rahmah* in governance.

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