

MAMDANI'S DIAMOND FETISH AND THE BRITS

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On April 29, Zohran Mamdani, the Marxist millionaire Muslim Mayor of New York City, met briefly with King Charles in Manhattan. He later said that if he had had a moment alone with him, he probably would have told him to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond to India; the British acquired it in 1849. The 105-carat diamond is now part of the British Crown Jewels.

Why is it important to Mamdani that the diamond be returned to India? It matters to him because in his ideologically charged mind, the Brits are the bad guys. They were colonialists, weren't they? True enough. But the Muslims who had it before them were barbarians, weren't they?

What about the Pakistanis and the Afghans? They say they deserve to have the gem, and their case cannot easily be dismissed. Why doesn't Mamdani mention them? Because his mother is from India?

The history of the diamond begins with Zahir-ud-din-Babur. He and his followers invaded India in 1526 and established the Islamic Mughal dynasty. He was a descendant of Genghis Khan, and at the ripe old age of twelve he ascended to the throne. Not a peaceful man, he conquered one region after another. Indeed, he took over what is today Pakistan, Bangladesh and eastern Afghanistan.

According to Anita Anand and William Dalrymple, who wrote a book on this subject, "it's impossible to know exactly where the Koh-i-Noor came from and when it first came into the Mughals' possession." That being the case, it makes sense that multiple claims of ownership would exist.

Though Zahir-ud-din-Babur had nothing to do with the coveted diamond, his Mughal dynasty did. The authors say that in 1628 Mughal ruler Shah Jahan commissioned "a magnificent, gemstone-encrusted throne." It took seven years to make; the diamond was lodged at the very top, surrounded by rubies, garnets and other jewels.

The year before Shah Jahan commissioned the jewel, he defeated his youngest brother and crowned himself emperor. He was involved in one military operation after another, and he came out on top when he killed all of his surviving brothers.

The Islamic Mughal's reign ended when Persian ruler Nader Shah invaded Delhi in 1739. He proved to be one of the most powerful rulers in Iranian history. His empire was enormous and he made Shia Islam the state religion of Iran.

He was also a mass murderer, responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people. In addition, he was a notorious rip-off artist: he stole so many gems that it took 700 elephants, 4,000 camels and 12,000 horses to pull it. As for the Koh-i-Noor, he wore it as an armband. When he fled, he took the diamond with him, traveling to modern-day Afghanistan.

The diamond did not return to India for 70 years. After decades of bloody wars among competing rulers, it was returned to India and claimed by Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh in 1813. When he died in 1839, years of non-stop violence followed. It was after the bloodshed stopped that the British laid claim to it, securing a legal transfer.

In other words, there are many heirs to the Koh-i-Noor. Everyone who once possessed it said it was theirs to keep. Until the next conquerors claimed it. It is therefore presumptuous for Mamdani to say that the British should give it back to India.

The British colonialists were the last to possess it. If this

is unfair, how fair was it for Muslim warriors to claim ownership? How fair is it that the Pakistanis don't have it today? What about the Taliban in Afghanistan? Shouldn't they have first dibs?

The problem with Mamdani is his childlike innocence in assessing historical quarrels. The fact is that history is strewn with injustice and no one comes to the table with his hands clean. But in Mamdani's Marxist mind, there are good guys and bad guys, victimizers and victims, and in this case the British colonialists are the bad guys and the Muslim barbarians are the good guys.

Mamdani reeks of self-righteousness. There are winners and losers in history, and only a fool believes the losers are always morally superior to the winners.