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Writing the Inter-Imperial World in Afghan North India ca. 1774 – 1857

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Writing the Inter-Imperial World in Afghan North India

ca. 1774 – 1857

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in History

by

Naveena Naqvi

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Writing the Inter-Imperial World in Afghan North India

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Naveena Naqvi

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Nile Spencer Green, Co-Chair

Professor Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Co-Chair

Drawing upon the writings of service professionals, including soldiers, scribes, legal officials and petty bureaucrats, *Writing the Inter-Imperial World in Afghan North India (ca. 1774 – 1857)* is a study of perspectives on political and social change during the transition to colonialism. From 1774, as the East India Company conquered the semi-autonomous Rohilla state and introduced new administrative measures, service professionals—who were key mediators of changes in governance—were faced with a choice: should they implement, actively resist or escape this development? Departing from historiography that has seen such figures through the eyes of the Company archive, this dissertation seeks to investigate how they documented their encounter with incipient modes of colonial rule. In a range of original works, comprising Persian and Urdu memoirs, biographies, chronicles and poetry, they elaborated their

circumstances within and beyond the former Afghan principalities, reflecting on the regional frontiers that were constantly shifting in their lifetimes as an older skein of imperial provinces was being eroded. My dissertation argues that through their writings these figures generated a political discourse centered on distinctive conceptions of regional and imperial politics, history, service, and customary law. This discourse continued to echo in the provinces through the nineteenth century, even as the history of these actors was obscured by the rise of colonial and nationalist modernity.

The dissertation of Naveena Naqvi is approved.

Michael David Cooperson

Nile Spencer Green, Committee Co-Chair

Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Committee Co-Chair

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2018

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Maps and figures

Transliteration Style Sheet

- I have modified the IJMES system of transliteration for Persian to incorporate diacritical marks that indicate retroflex consonants in Indic words.
- I have prioritized original orthography as found in primary sources, over pronunciation.
- I have used Arabic plurals for Arabic words used in Persian; in all other instances, I have used Persian forms of singular and plural nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

ء	ʾ	ر	r	ق	q
ب	b	ڑ	ṛ	ک/ك	k
پ	p	ز	z	گ	g
ت	t	ژ	zh	ل	l
ٹ	t̲	س	s	م	m
ث	s̲	ش	sh	ن	n
ج	j	ص	ṣ	ه	h, e
چ	ch	ض	ż	و	w, ū, o, au
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ي	ī
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	ے	y, e, ay
د	d	ع	ʿ	ِ	-i, yi
ڈ	ḍ	غ	gh		
ذ	z̲	ف	f		

Acknowledgements

Since enrolling in the History PhD program at UCLA I have accumulated a heavy debt of gratitude to the many individuals who helped steer me to completion. Having finished my dissertation, it is an honor to be able to offer them these thanks.

Through the pre-PhD years, the history classes that I took as a BA and MA student in Delhi University with Shahid Amin, Arup Banerji, Sunil Kumar, Anshu Malhotra, Dilip Menon, Shivshankar Menon, Upinder Singh and Rohit Wanchoo, introduced me to a world of critical thought and historical inquiry. As a student at Jawaharlal Nehru University, I took a transformative class with with Neeladri Bhattacharya on historical methods. I also had numerous enriching discussions with Lakshmi Subramanian and Tanika Sarkar about the social history of music in Rampur and Calcutta in the late nineteenth century, the subject of my MPhil research. Under their guidance, I began what later become a profund attachment to the world of archives and libraries. I felt less alone in this new-found practice in the company of my fellow-researchers at JNU, Meghna Chaudhuri, Mekhola Gomes, Par Larson, Anandaroop Sen, and Charu Singh, among others. Taken together, over the course of a BA, an MA and an MPhil in History, I slowly discovered historical research, aside from being all-absorbing, was grounded in friendship.

At UCLA, I have been fortunate to have had two co-chairs who mentored me as I found my way to a subject of inquiry. Nile Green patiently read every chapter in multiple drafts, printing all of them out and writing detailed comments on the last page, pushing me towards more clarity and skilfull use of my materials. I also learnt from him that one never has an idea until it is down on paper and how to overcome the fear of imperfect prose. How he guided me and remained so accessible to me as he juggled multiple research projects will always be something I remember with tremendous gratitude. On days that I rewrote my prospectus from

scratch or solicited feedback on chapters, Sanjay Subrahmanyam offered comments and was there to speak with me encouragingly and always with characteristically extensive references to works that I had not previously considered or was unaware of. He has illustrated through his own career how to be ambitiously imaginative as one goes about excavating the past. I hope to do some justice to the example of erudition he set in my own career. Besides my co-chairs, it was a privilege to have Bin Wong and Michael Cooperson on the dissertation committee. Bin Wong read and discussed chapters of the dissertation at various stages with me and frequently offered helpful comments. Michael Cooperson made important suggestions at different junctures before I undertook research and after I wrote the chapters.

At UCLA, I also benefitted from the warmth and encouragement of other faculty and staff members who nurtured a sense of community amongst graduate students. Latifeh Hagigi, Vinay Lal, Elizabeth Leicester, Muriel McClendon, Sumita Mitra, Hadley Porter, Teofilo Ruiz, Eboni Shaw, Kamarin Takahara and Stefania Tutino were wonderfully helpful at important moments in my career as a scholar. My peers and colleagues in Los Angeles were unswervingly generous and supportive through classes, research travels and drafting chapters. At different stages of the program, Ceren Abi, Sam Anderson, Jorge Arias, Reem Bailony, Roii Ball, Sohaib Beg, Arnon Degani, Joshua Herr, Suleiman Hodali, Pauline Lewis, Marena Lin, Vivian Lu, Naveed Mansoori, Nana Osei-Opare, Michael O'Sullivan, Michelle Quay, Kathryn Renton, Shana Roth-Gormley, Guillermo Ruiz Stovel, Nir Shafir, Sahba Shayani, Terenjit Singh Sevea, Pallavi Sriram, Eoghan Stafford, Madina Thiam, Levi Thompson, Sarah Walsh, Marjan Wardaki, Angie and Sam Wight, Murat Yildiz, and numerous others, listened to me ramble about my research ideas and shared my struggles and joys as I continually adjusted to life as an aspiring historian of South Asia living in California.

My doctoral research was supported by competitive fellowships from UCLA as well as the Metcalf Junior Research Fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies. During my research travels, I developed important collegial friendships with fellow students, archivists, language instructors and librarians. I also benefited from the hospitality of distant relatives and friends, who kindly housed me and fed me when I was far away from home. In Rampur, Sanam Aly Khan and her loving family hosted me while I spent my days reading in the Rampur Raza Library and the Saulat Public Library. Irshad Nadwi, Isbah Sahab, Islahi Sahab and the other Raza Library staff members helped me access important manuscript materials. Despite missing an entire wall and not having regular electricity, the Saulat Public Library's librarians allowed me to wade through almirahs of uncataloged manuscripts and lithographs. Similarly, in Tonk, I was looked after by the family of Maulana Qamar, the now retired archvist at the Arabic and Persian Research Institute. In Aligarh, my hospitable aunt, Dr. Zulfiya Khan, the late I. G. Khan's family, my dear Mamujan and Mamijan, and Shayesta Bedar and Ata Khursheed at the Maulana Azad Library, all made my visits productive and pleasant. In Patna, the staff at the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Pulic Library, and Iffat Hasan and her family, ensured that I had a smooth research trip during the hot early summer months. In Bhopal, Sonia Rashid and her family were incredibly generous hosts who also took a keen interest in my research. Gita Sabarwal at the Bhopal State Archives was kind and helped me secure permission to go through cupbopards of uncataloged Persian language manuscripts. In Sitamau, the staff at the Shri Natnagar Shodh Sansthan were accommodating and ensured access to valuable copies of manuscripts. In Lucknow, Justice Shabihul Hasnain and Naheed Hasnain were very sympathetic to my research efforts and put me in touch with officers at the Lucknow and Allahabad State Archives. At the British Library, Saqib Baburi made useful suggestions when it came to

consulting materials from then-unpublished manuscript index cards, and the staff at the Asia and Africa Reading Room were always professional.

As I undertook research, I also spent a fair amount of time training to read different types of materials in Persian, Urdu and Marathi. The AIIS supported two summers of Urdu and Marathi training, as well as a couple of months spent learning to read Moṛi with Girish Mandke at the Deccan College, Pune. During my time in Pune, Radhika Bapat and Justin Scarimbolo were the perfect hosts and Aditi Deo, John Matthew and Matt Rahaim were friendly familiar faces in the city. In the course of my study of Persian, I traveled to Tehran to do an advanced literature course at the Dehkhoda Institute. My teachers, Āqā-yi Shahbazi, Āqā-yi Naimi and my friends and acquaintances, Pouya Nekouei, Āqā-yi Dehqani, Hesam Khosravi and Aysan Rashid helped me develop a greater facility with the language. Mohammed Hekmat introduced me to the rich collections at the Malek National Library and to the bookstores and cafes of Tehran. However, when it came to the matter of reading manuscripts, it was the countless hours that I spent with the generous and learned Prof. Sharif Husain Qasemi in Delhi that really gave me the confidence to walk into a library and comprehend eighteenth century hand-written Persian prose.

As my research developed, I spoke with excellent scholars, young and seasoned alike, who helped me sharpen my questions. Andrew Amstutz, Hannah Lord Archambault, Shailen Bhandare, Prachi Deshpande, Purnima Dhavan, Arthur Dudney, Roy Fischel, Kyle Gardner, Domenico Ingenito, Abhishek Kaicker, Razak Khan, Neelam Khoja, Polly O'Hanlon, Francesca Orsini, Will Sherman, Sudev Sheth, Dominic Vendell and Richard Williams each had long conversations with me about my research at various stages of its development. I benefited from discussions with Muzaffar Alam, Thibaut d'Hubert, Philip Engblom, and Tyler Williams, when I was drafting chapters while visiting Chicago for a year. I also appreciate having had the

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Introduction

I. After "Hāfiz:"

Between the years 1788-1795 Warren Hastings stood on trial before the British parliament for corruption during his governor-generalship in India (1773-1784). One of the many charges of corruption against him pertained to the Rohilla War (1774-75) during which the forces of the East India Company and the Nawwāb of Awadh disbanded the Rohilla state and mistreated the family of the Rohilla Afghān chief, Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān (d. 1774). A century later John Strachey, a British civil servant, wrote *Hastings and the Rohilla War* (1892), reconstructing some of the arguments that had been presented in the trial. Strachey mocked some of the factually incorrect statements that were made, particularly one by a member of the House of Commons who mistook Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān for the fourteenth-century Persian poet, Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥafīẓ-i Shirāzī (d. ca. 1390), known by the mononym, "Ḥafīẓ." Strachey wrote:

> By one of the many absurd mistakes of the time, Hafiz Rahmat [sic] was supposed by some of the enemies of Hastings, to be Hafiz, the famous Persian poet of the fourteenth century… Law, in his opening speech in the Defence of Hastings, referred to this absurd blunder. "Hafiz Rahmat Khan" he said, "had been particularly lamented, not only as being a great prince, not only as an hereditary one, but on account of his gallantry, his soldier-like qualities, and also as a poet. I have read an ingenious publication on the subject, which states his being celebrated throughout the East on account, not only of his valour, but for the beauty of his poetic compositions."[1]

Even as Strachey laughed at this clear case of a mistaken identity, in mythologizing Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān as a poetic figure, the hapless member of parliament had unknowingly alluded to

[1] John Strachey, *Hastings and the Rohilla War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), pp. 27-28.

something that was in fact true: the many connections that linked Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān and the Rohillas to the world of Persian literateness.

Shortly after his death in 1774, Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān was remembered as a warrior and statesman by his contemporaries. He had led the Rohilla confederacy, comprised of Afghān migrants from "Roh"—the mountainous region surrounding the Kābul river valley—who had settled in the north Indian region of Kaṭehr between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, claiming land assignments that had previously belonged to a class of Rājpūt *zamīndārs*. The state had been formed in 1745 after decades of regularly asserting its autonomy from the Mughal capital. Adjacent to the Rohilla territories was a settlement of a smaller group of Afghān migrants from the "Bangash" region north of the Sulaymān mountains, who served the Mughal Empire as military jobbers and formed their own state after securing land rights from the emperor Farrukhsīyar along the eastern edges of Kaṭehr in 1714. Like contemporary sub-imperial states, the Rohilla-occupied territories acquired all the trappings of statehood, including a bureaucracy and an army whose members were both Afghān and non-Afghān. After 1774, the Rohilla territories were annexed by the Nawwāb of Awadh, and by 1801, the East India Company had in turn seized these territories from the Nawwāb, barring what became the princely state of Rāmpur.

In the years after Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān died, many of the service figures who had staffed the Rohilla state's bureaucracy and army no longer had the security of state patronage. They recorded these and other realities in commemorative accounts of the Rohillas and the place of the erstwhile Rohilla state within the universe of their time. It is these figures, their accounts and their contexts that are the sum and substance of the present study.

II. Historiographical Engagements:

This dissertation is in conversation with three broad streams of historical scholarship. I will refer to these as "eighteenth-century historiography," "Afghān historiography," and "studies of the Persianate World".

2.1 Eighteenth-Century historiography

Of these three, "eighteenth-century historiography" encompasses social historical studies of the transition from Mughal to colonial rule in the South Asian context. Taken together, such studies of transition constitute something of a rolling inquiry that has continued to resurface in waves since the 1960s. The "eighteenth-century debates"—as they are known to students of South Asian history—have remained topical largely because they are tethered to enduring questions about South Asia's experience of colonialism. In order to appreciate the present dissertation's inquiry into the written worlds of *qaṣbāt* in the Kaṭehr region during the "inter-imperial" period, it is necessary to consider the socio-historical studies of transition upon which it builds.

The first major explanation of Mughal decline to emerge in the post-colonial period was offered by Irfan Habib, in *The Agrarian System of Mughal India: 1556-1707* (1963). Habib argued that not unlike the absolutist European monarchies, the Mughal Empire sustained itself, expanded its frontiers, and ultimately experienced a "crisis" on account of its excessive extraction of the agrarian social surplus, the brunt of which was borne by cultivators.[2] At the heart of this thesis lay the belief that it was a *system* of revenue-extraction that satisfied the interests of an indulgent and extractive "ruling class" of Mughal officials.[3] Habib's thesis did not

[2] Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India: 1556-1707* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963).

[3] Following Habib, a range of similar scholarship emerged from both within and outside Aligarh. Most of the authors of these works continued to see systemic flaws within Mughal rule. While

veer very far from conventional colonial accounts which argued that the empire declined on account of the vice-ridden and corrupt Mughal rulers who followed after Aurangzeb's death in 1707. According to Habib's formulation, the eighteenth-century crisis of the Mughal Empire created the conditions for parvenu groups to threaten the imperial capital. His argument spawned a range of responses in the 1980s—most notably by Muzaffar Alam—which diverted away from a structuralist perspective of "crisis".[4] Drawing upon evidence from the Mughal provinces of Awadh and Punjab, Alam argued that the successful functioning of the empire in North India depended on its effective coordination between a number of different actors: nobles, landholders (*zamīndārs*) and different levels of grant holders. As long as the imperial center was able to impede localized political or economic mobilization, it withstood all pressures. Alam accordingly suggested that what took place in North India in the eighteenth century was not so much a crisis as it was a realignment of political relationships. The *structure* of the state itself did not go through any predetermined changes during the eighteenth century.

C. A. Bayly's *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770 – 1870* (1983), also addressed the question of Mughal decline by shifting the focus away from the Habibian assumption that Mughal state-policy was the ultimate determinant of history. Bayly argued that merchants, moneylenders and other elites underwrote the increased militarization that took place as provinces seceded from the Mughal Empire. He distinguished

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some of them, such as M. Athar Ali, identify a "crisis" in the ranks of the imperial nobility, others like M. N. Pearson suggest that it was the nature of personal ties that bound the Mughal bureaucracy to the emperor that was at the heart of the problem. See M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1966); M. N. Pearson "Shivaji and the Decline of the Mughal Empire," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Feb., 1976): 221-235.

[4] See Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab, 1707-48* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

between changes that took place in the "resurgent Hindu kingdoms in the east," the "social movements" of the Jāts, Marathas and Sikhs that led to the formation of separate polities, "Muslim conquest" states such as those established by Afghān migrants, and former Mughal satrapies. [5] He noted that in varying degrees, what these different trends had in common was the emergence of an "intermediate" commercialized economy that sustained the political changes that took place between the decline of the Mughal Empire and the growth of the East India Company's control over the Indian subcontinent. Like Alam's intervention, Bayly's revisionist position transcended the pre-determined study of "decline." [6]

In this vein, subsequent social histories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in South Asia identified malleable and dynamic political relations in the late-Mughal political order, the emergence of new pockets of vitality and the disappearance of others, "proto-industrial" potential in the pre-colonial period, and the rapid circulation of peoples and goods.[7] Accordingly, after Bayly's intervention, entire monographs were dedicated to studying the independent provinces and landholdings that were formed as the Mughal center weakened and

[5] C.A Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 17-23.

[6] As important as Bayly's contribution was, his views of the political economy of the eighteenth century in India did not go unchallenged. Historians continue to debate whether or not the successor states to the Mughal Empire were simply cases of "refeudalization" and how these "feudal monarchies" stifled commercial enterprise. See for example, Satish Chandra, *The Eighteenth Century in India*: *its economy and the role of the Marathas, the Jats, the Sikhs, and the Afghans* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1986), pp. 19-20

[7] Frank Perlin, "Proto-Industrialization and Pre-Colonial South Asia," *Past & Present*, No. 98 (Feb., 1983): 30-95; Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam eds., *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950* (London: Anthem Press, 2006).

the empire decentralized.[8] Some scholars categorized the newly formed states of the eighteenth century such as Awadh, Bengal and the Maratha Deccan as "successor" and "conquest" states. Others, focused on the formation of "princely states" that were placed under "indirect" colonial rule.[9] Differences of nomenclature notwithstanding, this entire body of scholarship clung firmly to questions of state formation: what status did these conquest/successor/princely states hold under the Company's indirect rule? How were their courts, administrations and military campaigns structured? Each of these works drew extensively from the Company's archives and state-commissioned chronicles and histories to address such questions. In order to depart from this debate on the formation of eighteenth-century states—one that is too frequently limited to determining how Mughal or colonial they were—the present dissertation has a marked preference for referring to them as "sub-imperial" and their context as the "inter-imperial period." These terms do not aim to describe the complete range of political formations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, rather, they serve as heuristics that allow us to explore a set of actors and their experiences of political transition without the teleological framework of colonialism, or the overdetermining shadow of the Mughal Empire.

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[8] See for example, Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Kumkum Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009); Richard B. Barnett. *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720–1801* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Michael Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals* (London: Sangam, 1988).

[9] On indirect rule, see Michael Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System 1764-1858* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Just before Ramusack's work on the Indian princes, two edited volumes dedicated to the study of the eighteenth century in South Asia were published in 2002 and 2003. See Seema Alavi, ed., *The Eighteenth Century in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) and P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

The scholarly interest in zooming in on provinces and sub-imperial states developed in tandem with a turn towards "locality" within studies of the Mughal Empire. Farhat Hasan charted a program for understanding the ways in which the Mughal state functioned in practice at its lowest administrative levels, in order to develop a sense of the *process* of Mughal rule.[10] On first appearances, Hasan's interest in understanding the "local" stands somewhat in contrast to a parallell turn in the historiography of the early modern world towards adopting larger scales of analyses and drawing upon multiple archives to tell the stories of mobile traders, missionaries and political emissaries across the littorals of the Indian ocean. However, social historians of South Asia are increasingly attuned to the profit of considering both scales of analyses—one that takes as its subject sub-imperial worlds and local political processes, and the other, wider transregional connections—within a single frame of inquiry.[11]

Such works that view local events in South Asia in connection with global historical patterns tend to adopt one of two methods. The first method focuses on discrete events of a common etiology, recently exemplified by Eric Beverley's study of sub-imperial Hyderabad and the form of "minor sovereignty" that he argues it shared with other polities scattered across the colonized world in the late nineteenth century.[12] The second more substantive approach focuses

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[10] Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c.1572-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[11] On these two approaches, see Joseph Fletcher, "Integrative History: Parallels and Interconnections in the Early Modern Period, 1500-1800," in Joseph Fletcher, *Studies on Chinese and Islamic Inner Asia,* ed., Beatrice Forbes Manz (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), pp. 1-46.

[12] See Eric L. Beverley, *Hyderabad, British India and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, C.1850-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
This approach is especially current in scholarship on the recent past. See for example, Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

on large historical forces that converged at particular events. The highly militarized and politically competitive inter-imperial period that forms the focus of this dissertation is especially amenable to such analytical treatment. After all, it was abundant in instances of convergences, where local politics and regional sensibilities met complex forces that were unleashed by the waning Mughal Empire and the ascendant East India Company. In this vein, Purnima Dhavan's work analyzes a range of Persian and Punjabi language materials to reconstruct the history of the formation of a martial Sikh community in the region of Punjab—a history which she demonstrates was framed by numerous contemporary eighteenth-century regional sub-imperial political projects such as those of the Marathas, the Jāts and the Afghāns.[13] Similarly, Prachi Deshpande's inquiry into the arc of Maratha historiography is situated at the intersection of Marathi language *bakhar* commemorations of the Maratha past, the East India Company's evolving episteme, and the legacy of the Persianate tradition of chronicling.[14] This crop of scholarship builds on and exceeds the concerns that shaped earlier waves of "eighteenth-century literature,"—i.e. state formation and questions of vitality and decline. Instead, they examine social processes that connected *regional* sub-imperial states in the Punjab and the Deccan to broader political shifts in the era of transition.

Taking its cue from these approaches, this dissertation also adopts a perspective that views a region in dialogue with far-reaching tides of political change. Once circumscribed by the boundaries of the sub-imperial Rohilla Afghān territories, after 1774 the region of Kaṭehr was marked by the absence of a clear state structure. The East India Company and the neighboring

[13] Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[14] See Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

sub-imperial state of Awadh had defeated and disbanded the Rohilla Afghāns and imposed their own forms of fragmentary political control. Under such conditions, those who had been affiliated with the Rohilla state in Kaṭehr attempted to adjust to this transfer of authority. Keeping this in view, each chapter analyzes the writings of the service figures and dispossessed elites who scrambled to make sense of their realities as they oriented themselves in the absence of Rohilla patronage that had once conditioned their lives. In their writings, they mapped out convergences between their own paths in Kaṭehr and the simultaneous ebbs and flows of Mughal, Durrānī Afghān and emerging colonial rule. They thereby recorded how their own actions mediated the distance between regional and imperial centers of authority. Above all, their writings affirm that multiple concentric circles of political transitions unfolded at once—the decentralization of the Mughal Empire alongside sub-imperial states that had seceded from it.

2.2 Afghān Historiography

The foregoing outline of the arc of "eighteenth-century literature" offers the reader a sense of some of the incremental developments in the study of the late Mughal and early colonial period as well as the present dissertation's conceptual claims which are built on this literature. These claims—that the writings of service figures and dispossessed elites who were affiliated with Afghān-occupied Kaṭehr yield insights into the regional dimensions of the inter-imperial world—demand that we ask the question of the identity of the Rohilla Afghāns that continued to dominate this landscape.

The Afghāns who settled in Kaṭehr were Pashto speakers who had migrated from the north-western fringes of the Indian subcontinent to the plains of Hindustān. Understanding who they were necessarily involves contemplating the long history of Afghān migration into the

subcontinent.[15] Jos Gommans demonstrates that the direction of these migrations was ecologically conditioned, and that Afghān soldiers and horse-traders moved in the medieval and early modern periods from "arid zones" to the "wet" plains of Hindustān.[16] Many of them settled down, took up service and even figured into positions of political authority, exemplified by the Lodi Sultanate (1451 – 1525) and the Sur rulers (1540 – 1555), both based in Delhi. However, there are few textual sources that date back to these precise contexts, and historians have had to rely on narratives of their rule that have been refracted through the lens of later Mughal-era Persian language accounts.

In fact, the deployment of the term "Afghān" by Pashto-speaking peoples to refer to themselves as an ethnic group was a distinctly Mughal-era phenomenon.[17] As Nile Green's work demonstrates, it was only in the seventeenth-century during the emperor Jahāngīr's reign (1605 – 1627) that the earliest extant written accounts of "Afghān" ethnogenesis were produced.[18] In these accounts, which were largely in Persian, Green traces a strategic and deliberate shift towards a tribe-based ethnic identity. Prior to this moment, affiliation with specific Afghān Ṣūfī orders were the primary marks of Afghān identification in India. As he sees it, this shift from affiliation with a Ṣūfī order to membership within a specific ethnic group was a means to elaborate Afghān identity within a competitive environment in which several groups vied for Mughal imperial favor. By the eighteenth-century, most genealogical histories ceased to refer to

[15] See Robert Nichols, *A History of Pashtun migration, 1775-2006* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[16] See the introduction to Jos J.L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c.1710-1780* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

[17] Nile Green, "Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 67 (2008): 171-211.

[18] Ibid.

Afghān saints altogether, given that Indo-Persian saints had become popular amongst the Afghān diaspora in Hindustān.[19] Therefore, as the Pashto-speaking diaspora naturalized in Hindustān and came to identify themselves as Afghāns, ethnicity emerged as the most meaningful category of historical identity in the late Mughal period. It was in this context that the Rohilla Afghān *nasab*, or genealogical identity, crystalized.[20]

The Rohilla Afghāns of Kaṭehr acquired their appellation because of their purported provenance from "Roh" or the mountains of the eastern Hindu Kush and Sulaymān ranges.[21] They largely comprised members of the Yūsufzaʾī *ulūs* or tribe, although they also absorbed members of other Afghān tribes into their ranks. Gommans states that by the sixteenth century, the Yūsufzaʾīs had secured their position along the northwestern commercial corridor, playing an important role in the long-distance horse-trade in an area that the Mughals had found difficult to control. Through the seventeenth century, the volume of Yūsufzaʾī migrants to Hindustān increased and they populated the region of Kaṭehr, where they increasingly came to be known as the "people from Roh" i.e. Rohilla.[22] Thereafter, over the course of the eighteenth century and well into the colonial era (after 1857), the term "Rohilla" developed into a fairly porous martial category, absorbing figures from different backgrounds through marriage, adoption, and recruitment. Adjacent to the Rohilla *qaṣbāt* in Kaṭehr were the comparatively smaller settlements of Bangash Afghāns. Like the Rohillas, their appellation was derived from their purported place

[19] Ibid.

[20] On the construction of Rohilla genealogies, see Gommans, *Indo-Afghan Empire*, pp. 163-170.

[21] According to the *Khulāsat al-Ansāb*, Roh is between Iran, Turan, Hind and Sind. Gommans, *Indo-Afghan Empire*, p. 160.

[22] E. I. Brodkin, "British India and the Abuses of Power: Rohilkhand Under Early Company Rule," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 10, no. 2 (1973): pp. 129-156. See pp. 133-134 for a brief account of how the Rohilla Afghāns secured proprietary rights over Kaṭehr.

of origin, the Bangash region in Peshawar, and they migrated into Hindustān over the course of the seventeenth century. Both sets of Afghān migrant communities transformed their initial land assignments in Kaṭehr into sub-imperial polities by wresting greater authority for themselves vis-à-vis local Mughal administrative officials, and by displacing previously dominant communities—the Kaṭehriya Rajputs, for example—from positions of land use and ownership. Soon after, the heads of the Rohilla Afghān and Bangash settlers fashioned themselves as Nawwābs (sg. *nāʾib* i.e. "deputy") and they developed their courts as seats of cultural patronage, literary consumption and the fine arts. As a community that drew its capital from being plugged into niche commercial routes, when they settled in Kaṭehr, the Rohillas developed market towns known as *ganjhā* as well as newer townships that replaced some of the old *qaṣbāt* that had already existed in the region. The Rohilla regent Hāfiz Raḥmat Khān (1748-1774) undertook measures to develop agriculture in the lands adjacent to these new *qaṣbāt* and towns.[23]

Gommans argues that much of the prosperity and relative peace that was sustained in Kaṭehr was an upshot of the strategic alliance that the Rohillas had with the Abdālī—later styled Durrānī—empire (1747 – 1842) in the northwestern frontier of the Indian subcontinent.[24] Yet, in the scenario that he presents, Afghāns in general, and the Rohillas in particular, were incrementally integrated into the fabric of the subcontinent at a slow pace. He therefore describes the "Indo-Afghān Empire" i.e. the Rohilla-Durrānī axis, as one that was built on the edifice of centuries of trans-regional connections of trade and migration between Central and South Asia.[25]

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[23] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan Empire*, pp. 144-159.

[24] Ibid.

[25] That emerged in the wake of Nādir Shāh's campaigns in South and Central Asia. For an alternate conceptual geography, consider Sajjad Nejatie's use of "Indo-Khorasan" Sajjad Nejatie, "Iranian Migrations in the Durrani Empire, 1747–93," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 3 (2017): 494-509.

This picture runs counter to the notion of a "tribal breakout" that C. A. Bayly developed to explain the decline of the old Islamic empires across Eurasia in the eighteenth century and their replacement with new political formations that were organized by ethnic affinity. Rather than the eruption that Bayly pointed to, Gommans illustrates a slow conjoined ascent of Indo-Afghān political authority over centuries, far from a chain reaction of overnight political coups.

However, lest we arrive at the historically inaccurate deduction that all Afghāns *naturally* shared mutual affinity, we might consider the historian Iqbal Husain's findings about the Rohillas' relations with older Afghān settlers in Hindustān. Husain demonstrates how in the eighteenth century, the Rohillas self-consciously distinguished themselves from these older generations of Afghān migrants. In particular he focuses on those Afghān migrants who were incorporated within the Mughal administration: families that were allotted personal fiefs within the province of Awadh during the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (d. 1627). Husain suggests that Afghān *jāgīr* holders who were of the imperial house (*khānazād*) were compelled to relinquish their possessions by the new class of Rohilla Afghān settlers who had the backing of the Bangash Afghān governors of Farrukhābād.[26] Husain therefore implies that there were tensions between Afghāns of the 'old order' and those who made fresh claims to power, notwithstanding the discourse of a Durrānī-Rohilla alliance that was purportedly forged on the basis of a shared Muslim Afghān heritage.

The above outline of scholarship on the migration and settlement of Rohilla Afghāns in Kaṭehr traces the precise mechanisms through which the Rohilla territories were formed within the Mughal Empire. Gommans in particular is especially sensitive to how ecology and commerce

[26] See Iqbal Husain, "Jagirdari in the Eighteenth Century: A Case Study of Two Afghan Families of Western Awadh," in Richard B. Barnett ed., *Rethinking Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), pp. 119-128.

shaped these histories. However, since his focus is on how Rohilla authority was built, his inquiry stops short of asking what happened after the Rohilla territories fell into arrears and were overrun by the joint forces of the Nawwāb of Awadh and the East India Company in 1774. Drawing on mostly East India Company records, Robert Nichols addresses this very question in his survey of the long history of Pashtun migration and circulation, focusing on the evolving relationship between circulating Rohilla service figures and the East India Company. The present dissertation builds upon a problem that Nichols identifies: i.e. What followed in the wake of the Rohilla state? Each chapter seeks to historicize a range of personnel who were affiliated with the Rohilla state as service figures and minor elites, all of whom experienced the unravelling Rohilla state. How did these figures bridge the distance between the change of hands in Kaṭehr and the Durrānī, Mughal and ascendant British empires, as well as the simultaneously devolving sub-imperial Maratha *rājya* and the state of Awadh?

2.3 Studies of the Persianate World

Existing studies of the Rohilla state (1736 – 1774) and the Durrānī Empire (1747 – 1842) have identified historical works that were commissioned or written by rulers in both settings as important sources of Indo-Afghān history. Some observe that Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān's *Khulāsat al-Anṣāb* takes after the notion of a "tribalized" Afghān genealogy advanced earlier by the *Tārīkh-i Khān-i Jahānī* mentioned above.[27] Similarly, others locate accounts of the Durrānī Empire such as the *Tārīkh-i Aḥmadī* within an early-modern Indo-Persian tradition of imperial histories.[28] Although many of these eighteenth-century Indo-Afghān works were later translated into Urdu,

[27] Green, "Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood."

[28] See Christine Noelle-Karimi, "Afghan Polities and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm: The Durrani Rulers and Their Portrayal in Eighteenth-Century Historiography," Nile Green ed., *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes* (London: Hurst, 2015), pp. 53-77.

Pashto and English, they were originally penned in Persian and—at the most basic level of interpretation—reflect attempts on the part of new sub-imperial and imperial states to take up a self-authorizing practice. However, this practice—the patronage and consumption of Persian historical works—was a symptom of a more capacious and complex ethos encapsulated by the notion of the "Persianate" world.

The term "Persianate" has enjoyed enormous staying power since Marshall Hodgson first used it in 1974 to describe the cultural orientation that the Persian language afforded empires ruled by Muslim monarchs across Eurasia through most of the second millennium (ca. 13th – 18th centuries).[29] He argued that this was a cultural space shaped by the dominance of the Persian language within it and the ethical, political, and intellectual orientations embodied in its literature—the martial and kingly virtues of Firdausī's Book of Kings for instance, the ethics of Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī, or the mysticism or cultivated hedonism of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī or Ḥafīẓ. A crucial feature across the Persianate world was the use of Persian as a shared lingua franca that had the potential to permit linguistically and geographically disparate groups and different communities of faith to be mutually intelligible to one another across a large swathe of Islamic empires.[30]

[29] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 40.

[30] John R. Perry, "New Persian: Expansion, Standardization and Inclusivity," in Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway eds., *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 70-94. John Perry argues that Persian's *homoglossia*, or the fact that the essential identity of written and spoken Persian as it expanded and spread remained more or less constant (as opposed to diglossic languages like Greek and Arabic where there is a considerable difference in "high" and "low" stylistic registers) accounts for the spread of Persian. Perry also alludes to Persian's "inclusivity," its secular character and the existence of multiple scripts for Persian that were at a remove from the vernacular.

Drawing on Hodgson's schematization, historians and scholars of literature have identified various imperial and sub-imperial courts and Ṣūfī shrines in South Asia between the 13th and 18th as centers of Persianate culture. Broadly, these works have adopted one of two approaches to the study of Persianate South Asia. The first of these, invokes Hodgson's construal of Persianate practices as the use of the Persian language in multi-lingual communities. Indeed, Persian interacted with and was used in tandem with a dizzying array of Indic literary languages during the "vernacular millennium" in South Asia, attested to by the long-standing relationships between Persian and Indic literatures.[31] One of the earliest direct attempts to analyze this "Indo-Persian" context yielded a volume of essays titled *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies* (2000).[32] These essays span themes such as cultural and intellectual exchanges between Hindu devotionalism and Sufism and the patronage of music and art during Muslim rule, among others.[33] More recently discussions of Indo-Persian literary practices are centered on interactions that were mediated by Mughal rule. Audrey Truschke, for example, analyzes the cultural exchanges between Sanskrit scholars and Persian literati through translation practices at the emperor Akbar's court.[34]

The second approach to the study of Persianate South Asia, locates South Asia in dialogue with the geographical canvas of the wider Persianate world. This perspective considers

[31] On the "vernacular millennium" see Sheldon Pollock "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Feb., 1998): 6-37.

[32] See Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Nalini Delvoye and Marc Gaborieau, *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000).

[33] Tyler Williams, Anshu Malhotra, and John Stratton Hawley eds., *Text and Tradition in Early Modern North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[34] See Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

the movements of scholars and poets from Iran, Central Asia and the subcontinent who circulated within a trans-imperial network of patronage.[35] Several scholars followed suit and analyzed Persian court chronicles, poetry, travel literature and biographical compendia in order to make a case for a shared Persianate identity and a common vocabulary of political and religious references.[36] The editors of a volume titled *Literacy in the Persianate World* (2012) argue that the usage of Persian was sustained over an extraordinarily long period of time and across a wide area on account of bureaucratic heritage and the legal framework of the Islamic legal code (*sharīʿa*). No single administration dominated the usage of written Persian, nor was it the preserve of a single group.[37] Taking a similar tack with regard to Persian literary criticism, Rajeev Kinra makes a case for rejecting the modern geographically distinct traditions (*sabk*) of Persian literature and points out that Persian literary criticism shared mutually comprehensible terms of evaluation across Persophone and Persographic regions during the pre-modern period.[38]

These two approaches mentioned above do not exhaust the spectrum of studies of Persianate South Asia as much as they convey an analytical vocabulary that is available to

[35] For example, Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have studied the movement of autobiographical travelers across these regions. See Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discovery: 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[36] See A. Afzar Moin, *The Millenial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). Moin traces the intricate webs of Sufism and Kingship that bound together the histories of Safavid Iran and Mughal India. See also Mana Kia, "Contours of Persianate Community, 1722–1835" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2011).

[37] See "Introduction," in Spooner and Hanaway eds., *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, pp. 1-24.

[38] Rajeev Kinra, "Make it Fresh: Time, Tradition and Indo-Persian Modernity," in Anne Murphy ed., *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 12-39.

scholars who seek to understand the historical uses of Persian in South Asia.[39] Notably, this vocabulary informed the considerations that shaped how historians have treated courtly Persian histories of Afghāns. Accordingly, they observe that Afghān migrants, like other non-Persian communities took up the use of Persian over the course of the early modern period as they were absorbed into positions of authority in the Mughal Empire, but that this was a gradual process. By the accounts of the emperor Bābar (d. 1526), the Afghāns whom he knew of could not speak Persian. It is also known that the Sur Afghāns (1540 – 1555) who briefly disrupted Mughal power during the sixteenth century recognized Hindawī as a semi-official language of their sultanate. In addition to these anecdotal references to the linguistic tendencies of Afghāns in India, Mughal and later, colonial sources refer to the "barbaric" and "wild" manners of the Afghāns.[40] Even as they were treated with suspicion, the Mughal administration tried to incorporate them into its ranks, and succeeded to varying degrees, through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[41] This process was fraught, and there were instances of Afghān-organized rebellions, such as the one by Khān-i Jahān Lodī before he inaugurated a new Afghān genealogy, as mentioned above. Overall, it was through this halting, tenuous but inclusive relationship that

[39] Muzaffar Alam's *The Languages of Political Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) is an example of the sort of scholarship that uses both approaches. For example, he argues that Mughal texts drew on an earlier corpus of Persian *akhlāq* literature in order to conceptualize ways in which the *sharīʿa* could be reconciled with the imperatives of political rule. He further demonstrates that the Indian subcontinent proved to be particularly fertile ground for a reformulation of the *sharīʿa*.

[40] See Rita Joshi, *The Afghan Nobility and the Mughals, 1526-1707* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1985), p. 2.

[41] For instance, during Shāh Jahān's reign, a sizable number of Afghāns from different tribes participated in military campaigns to Balkh and Qandahar in Central Asia, and still others were deliberately used by the imperial administration as a counterbalancing force against the rebellious Rajput clans of the Ganga-Jamuna Doab. Ibid., p. 15

Afghān elites within the administration associated with the Persian language, which was a mark of prestige in Mughal India.[42]

Scholars of Pashto literature question this teleological narrative of Afghān assimilation into the Indian imperial context. James Caron's forthcoming work on Pashto literature for example, suggests that historical texts that were produced in Pashto between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries enabled the existence and perpetuation of Afghān identity-making at a remove from the overwhelming imperial ethos of Indo-Persian culture.[43] According to Caron, unlike Persian, Pashto was a language that was *chosen* by writers and readers who operated on the fringes of the Durrānī and Mughal Empires.[44] The present dissertation sympathizes with such an endeavor to transcend the elite registers of Persianate courtly histories, but contends that the Persianate tradition itself encompassed multiple internal challenges and uneven tendencies that have yet to be carefully examined. These aspects of Persianate South Asia appear clearest at its farthest chronological, sociological and geographic reaches i.e. in the inter-imperial period, among non-elite writers and in regional contexts. Accordingly, this dissertation sets aside courtly narratives of the Rohillas, or those commissioned by the Rohilla Nawwāb of Rāmpur after 1774. Instead, by examining the often grammatically weak and relatively unsophisticated

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[42] Two such writers wrote Persian histories of the Lodi and Sur Afghāns in India. See Shaikh Rizqullah Mushtaqi, *Waqiat-i-Mushtaqi*, trans., I.H. Siddiqui and W.H. Siddiqui (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1993) and Abbas Khan Sarwani, *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi*, trans., H.M. Elliot and John Dowson (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2006). See also, Simon Digby's essays on the earliest accounts of the Lodi sultanate (1451 – 1524 CE). Simon Digby, "Dreams and Reminiscences of Dattu Sarvani a Sixteenth Century Indo-Afghan Soldier," *Indian Economic Social History Review* (1965): 52-80.

[43] James Caron, "Counter-Empires/Non-Empires of Pashto Verse" (unpublished manuscript).

[44] Robert Nichols makes a similar claim in "Reclaiming the Past: The *Tawarikh-i Hafiz Rahmat Khani* and Pashtun Historiography," in Green, *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes*, pp. 211-234.

commemorative accounts of regional scribes, lower-rung secretaries, soldiers and former elites associated with the Rohilla territories, it accesses a crucial juncture in the history of Persianate South Asia when Persian commemorative works began to disarticulate the use of Persian from actual imperial prestige. The goal at hand, therefore, transcends the question of how Afghān identity was generated in relation to imperial recognition. Instead, it demonstrates how the personnel attached to the Rohilla Afghān state regrouped themselves under early colonial rule and recorded these experiences within a much altered Persianate tradition.

These figures were certainly not alone in their reflexivity. The eighteenth century is remembered for its cosmopolitan men of letters who conveyed in their poetry and prose complex reflections on the revolutions of their time and the effects of the loss of Mughal sovereignty.[45] However, the figures whose works are studied in the following pages were of a different order. Their existence had been made possible by the very process of incorporation that had admitted Afghāns like Khān-i Jahān Lodī into the upper echelons of the Mughal administration. This process of absorbing disparate social and ethnic groups was mirrored at every strata of the Mughal bureaucracy in its regional provinces as well as the capital. [46] During the era of Mughal decentralization, this expanded bureaucracy staffed the newly formed sub-imperial regional

[45] See the introduction to Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark* (London: Routledge, 2016). Similarly, Sunil Sharma argues that by the nineteenth century, the larger Persianate world that lay beyond the subcontinent was increasingly politically and socially fractured and that this sense of grief was expressed in the poetic lamentations of the Delhi-based poet Ghalib. See Sunil Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24.2 (2004): 73-81.

[46] Alam and Subrahmanyam describe the "making" of the Mughal *munshī*, observing that the existence of Kāyastha, Khatrī and Brahmin Persianate munshis was conceivable in Mughal India in the realm of civil and worldly (as opposed to religious) literary practice. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (2004) 24 (2): 61-72.

states. They comprised a mobile class of *munshīyān* (scribes) and *wukalāʾ* (agents) who continued to use Persian as a *lingua franca*.[47] C.A. Bayly argued that the East India Company's ability to harness the Persianate "information order" comprised of polyglot scribes, informants and translators, was a key element in its eventual political successes after 1857.[48] But during the inter-imperial period, as regional sub-imperial states devolved alongside an already decentralized Mughal Empire and an ascendant East India Company, the teleology of colonial rule had not set in, and the Persographic service figures and former elites of the Rohilla territories were in search of security, employment and patronage, and they began to project these realities through their writings.

Historians are only now fully appreciating these developments. Purnima Dhavan's study of Persian-language Sikh histories in the nineteenth century is among the few attempts to engage with regional historiography in Persian.[49] Dhavan argues that *munshīyān* who authored these histories selectively drew from an older tradition of historiography in Punjabi (*gurbilas* literature) and brought an unprecedented analytical spirit to bear on their sources. Rather than seeing this as a direct influence of rational colonial scholarly ethics, Dhavan argues that

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[47] Prior to C.A. Bayly's *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Michael H. Fisher, "The Office of Akhbār Nawīs: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Feb., 1993): 45-82. made a similarly emphatic case for the *transition* of the office of the *akhbār nawīs* (reporter) from a Mughal form to a British one. He suggested that modes of information gathering evolved from the days of the formalization of the office of the *waqāʾiʿ nawīs* and *akhbār nawīs* during the Mughal emperor Akbar's reign, to the development of the British Residency system.

[48] And even when the East India Company abolished Persian as its official language in 1835, more Persian books were published in nineteenth century India than in Iran, during the same period. See Charles Melville ed., *Persian Historiography* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), p. 603.

[49] See Purnima Dhavan, "Redemptive Pasts and Imperiled Futures: The Writing of a Sikh History," in Murphy ed., *Time, History, and the Religious Imaginary*, pp. 40-54.

munshīyān were no longer responding solely to the conventions of courtly literature, but to the evolving literary practices of the new "information order" of early colonial rule. The questions that Dhavan asks of Sikh Persian histories could well be brought to bear upon the scribes of the former Rohilla state.

III. Sources and Methods:

The raw materials that form the substance of this dissertation exist in manuscript form in disaggregated collections of regional libraries in north and central India and, to a lesser extent, in the form of printed works in collections of rare books. A number of these manuscripts belong to the collections and libraries of the Rohilla state and its offshoots, namely the princely states of Rampur (formed in 1775 under Fayzullah Khān) and Tonk (formed in 1832 under the independent Rohilla soldier, Amīr Khān). These collections filtered through the mutations that these libraries underwent even as they found their way into the libraries of private collectors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Accordingly, the larger share of the research presented here was conducted at the Raza Library in Rampur, the Saulat Public Library in Rampur, the Arabic and Persian Research Institute in Tonk, The Shri Natnagar Shodh Sansthan in Sitamau and the Khuda Bakhsh Library in Patna. In the course of research, the use of manuscript materials from these libraries was supplemented by primary sources from the British Library in London, including Persian and Urdu manuscripts and the India Office Records. However, it merits mention that major well-funded libraries with Oriental manuscript collections—such as the British Library—tend to have amassed works from a more conventional canon of Persian writing to which the materials consulted in this dissertation do not belong. An account of Persian epistolography by an unknown scribe, or the ruminations of an Afghān soldier on the lookout for

work were probably not as valuable to European orientalists and collectors as say, an illustrated manuscript of the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī,* or an account of a diplomatic mission that was of interest to the Company. This is not to suggest that such collections are entirely comprised of well-known works; nor has the use of reproduced and widely circulated materials approached the remotest degree of exhaustion. It is simply to observe that archiving practices reveal the general biases and priorities of their collectors as well as trends in the relative valorization of manuscript materials today.[50]

This dissertation is therefore, shaped by a particular regional archive that lurks in the background and informs its methodologies. As outlined in the foregoing pages, the materials here consulted shed light on the inter-imperial period and the service figures and minor dispossessed elites who were affiliated with the sub-imperial Rohilla territories. Reading their works is not an exercise in recovering "subaltern voices" or an attempt to develop deep focus on an under-represented subject. Rather, it is to address the particular problem of how life is experienced in moments of political mutability in the imaginations of the very figures who mediated that flux. How does one write a history in the absence of definite state structures? How does one write histories of contexts in which a panoply of political actors made multiple overlapping claims to political authority?

Notably, the works analyzed here do not offer the structure of a familiar universal history, in which writers distinguish between the past, present and future in self-evident ways. Instead, these materials offer a glimpse into what François Hartog describes as a "crisis of time," wherein

[50] There are exceptions to this trend. Private collectors who worked for the East India Company like William Irvine commissioned copies of several unknown works from Farrukhābād for example. It is also true however, that these were only recently catalogued.

certain realities muddy the universality of historical periods.[51] Unlike Persian chronicles that trace the history of a particular king back to the early caliphate, as they often do, the eighteenth century witnessed a sheer irruption of a range of commemorative writings that did not follow such conventions.[52] A number of these works, as historians note, were produced in the sub-imperial court, the Mughal aristocrat's household and the offices of the East India Company. Less acknowledged is the fact that there were others that were written by a freshly unrooted crop of middling and lower-rung Persographic regional personnel who mediated the distance between multiple centers of authority, carrying their regional cachet with them as they went about their way.

Their writings reflect variations in self-reflexivity about the time that they inhabited, the nature of political authority and their own prospects in a rapidly changing world. Would the Mughal Empire continue to exist as a nominal entity? Would the Company's growing pattern of conquest that had led to the disbandment of the Rohilla state lead to a subsumption of full sovereign powers? What would happen to their jobs and would customary law receive recognition in a colonial court of law? These are some of the questions that descended on them as they looked back and commemorated their own versions of the past—their own regimes of historicity.[53]

IV. Dissertation Outline:

[51] See François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and the Experience of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[52] See Mohammad Tavakkoli-Targhi, "The Homeless Texts of Persianate Modernity," *Cultural Dynamic*s, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Nov., 2001): 263-291.

[53] See Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity* (2015).

The dissertation introduces its reader to a cast of actors whose writings, careers and thoughts are as yet scarcely known to historians of India and the Persianate empires. The opening chapter launches into an account of two *munshīyān* i.e. Persographic scribes and secretaries, based in the region of Kaṭehr during a period that was bookended by the Rohilla Afghāns' occupation and rule in the 1740s and their subsequent disbandment from the region in the 1770s. In the decentralizing Mughal Empire, regional successor states like Rohilla-occupied Kaṭehr, which were eventually conquered by the East India Company, were at best short-lived sources of patronage for such figures. And yet, it was precisely the breakdown of the concentric circles of the older imperial state, and the regional polities that had emerged from within it, that rendered regions like Kaṭehr especially rich in opportunities for service. How did this come to be? And what substantive consequences did these conditions have for the ways in which *munshīyān*—and the other service figures examined in subsequent chapters—documented the worlds in which they lived?

In addressing these questions, the chapter describes the avenues that were available to some of the *munshīyān* of Kaṭehr as they transcended their longstanding dependence on the offices of the Mughal state and its regional Rohilla Afghān successors, for patronage and employment. As the scaffolding of state structures came apart in north India, small towns and parcelized land assignments became the bargaining chips in the piecemeal political reorganization that characterized the inter-imperial period. In regions such as the *qaṣbāt* of Kaṭehr that rapidly changed hands between competitors for sovereign authority, secretaries and scribes were absolutely essential to the granular processes of negotiating and exchanging political control. These conditions made it possible for them to find alternate patrons and consumers of their services. The *munshī* Yatīmī, for one, kept himself busy by tutoring scribes-

in-training who were based in the *qaṣbāt* of Kaṭehr in the art of epistolography. To this end, he produced a letter-book as a pedagogical device to educate this burgeoning regional constituency of scribes. In fact, Yatīmī's letters could very well have been instructive to Aḥmad ʿAlī, the other *munshī* whose writings are analyzed in this chapter. Approximately forty years after Yatīmī wrote his letter-book, Aḥmad ʿAlī wrote a diary of his travels through Kaṭehr at the behest of a retired Company official who was collecting debts from potentates in the region in the 1780s. Aḥmad ʿAlī's case exemplifies the growth in opportunities available to secretaries to work in the service of individual non-state actors who either brokered political authority or claimed it for themselves in the political flux of the inter-imperial period.

Furthermore, both Yatīmī and Aḥmad ʿAlī were able to bring an unprecedented level of self-reflection, personal insight and authority to their draftsmanship. Through the medium of their letters and their notes, they commented on the political fault lines that ran through the *qasbāt* where they lived and from where they witnessed the tectonic shifts in the contest for imperial authority in the decentralizing Mughal Empire. Rather than viewing political change as a process that emanated from urban centers like the imperial capital of Shāhjahānābād or the East India Company's base in Calcutta, and radiated towards regional locales, they perceived political transformation as a force that they could most accurately calibrate through their immediate circumstances in Kaṭehr. For Yatīmī, the maintenance of law and order; agrarian unrest; codes of public civility and virtue; and tensions between the imperial capital and the provinces as the Rohilla Afghāns settled in the region, together constituted the prism through which he experienced political transformation. In contrast, for Aḥmad ʿAlī, the Rohilla Afghāns' disbandment from Kaṭehr in 1774, their lasting imprint on the history of its landscape, and the

relationships that obtained in the region in their wake, were the primary indices of political change that feature prominently in his diary.

While the opening chapter focuses on *munshīyān* who forged careers within Kaṭehr in the absence of significant state patronage, Chapter Two investigates how some of the more mobile *munshiyān* who were affiliated with this region seized career opportunities in the service of imperialist state-building projects across north India in the period following the disbandment of the Rohilla confederacy in 1774. Accordingly, this chapter draws upon the Persian memoirs of a set of secretaries from north India who were recruited as *wukalāʾ* or agents for two competing nascent state-builders—the Durrānī Afghān Empire (ca. 1747 – 1826) to the "west" of Kaṭehr, and the pre-colonial Company (ca. 1757 – 1857) in the "east". It posits that in the late eighteenth century, these were two distinct state-building political imaginaries that were conceivable to *wukalāʾ* who were circulating between different regional states in north India.

The first half of the chapter draws from the experiences of one of these "west-facing" diplomats by the name of ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān, who joined forces with a set of alienated nobles, power-brokers and princes and made his way to the Durrānī ruler, Zamān Shāh's court in Kabul in a bid to secure support for the Mughal prince Mirzā Ahsan Bakht's candidacy for the imperial throne in Shāhjahānābād. Zamān Shāh's father had staged numerous campaigns in north India and had secured ties of tribute with regional states and political strongmen, particularly with the Rohilla chiefs whose authority in Kaṭehr was fractured by the time of this mission. Though it ultimately failed to achieve its end, the diplomatic mission revived an older discourse on pre-modern Islamic kingship and fostered—albeit briefly—the prospect of an imperial continuum into the nineteenth century.

The second distinct state-building enterprise that caught the attention of a range of *munshīyān* in the latter half of the eighteenth century was generated by the East India Company after it secured a political foothold in Bengal in 1757. The Company solicited the service of these secretarial figures as it entered into diplomatic relations with other contemporary regional powers in the subcontinent. In these conditions, the prospect of an "east-facing" career path in the service of the Company appeared attractive to secretaries like Ghulām Ḥusayn Tabatabaʾī, who operated as agents or *wukalāʾ* on behalf of the Company in its dealings with the Rohilla Afghāns among other regional potentates. By the early nineteenth century, as the Company assumed an unquestionably dominant position vis-à-vis other regional powers, it began redirecting its Persographic recruits from diplomatic positions to administrative ones. Having successfully overrun the Rohilla territories in 1774 and reduced what remained of the Rohilla Afghān stronghold to the status of a princely state in Rāmpur, Company officials in Kaṭehr funneled their new appointees in the region, like ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, to low-ranking positions within their police stations and revenue offices.

Significantly, all of these east- and west-facing agents and administrative officers were trained in literary skills and the mystical arts by scholars and blessed men who hailed from long-established intellectual and spiritual lineages. This chapter contends that even as these newly-minted *wukalāʾ* adapted their forms of service, initially, to the requirements of diplomacy, and by the mid-nineteenth century, to the Company's new administrative centers, they continued to maintain relations with the intellectual and mystical preceptors from whom they had learned their craft and acquired their skills. Furthermore, they commemorated both their teachers and their new careers in their memoirs. This observation runs counter to a tendency among some

scholars to view the formation of a new cadre of bureaucrats and administrators under pre- or early colonial rule as a form of Weberian disenchantment and rationalization of service culture.[54]

Chapter Three continues the spirit of inquiry into the written worlds of Persographic service figures affiliated with Kaṭehr in the period after 1774 by drawing on the writings of soldiers, who have until now rarely featured in historical scholarship as the authors of original works in Persian. It advances the notion that as the Rohilla Afghān chiefs were disbanded, and their former regional "successor state" was parcelized and redistributed between Awadh and the Company, their families and attendant armies in turn splintered into "independent" bands of soldiers. Many such soldiers traveled across Awadh and the neighboring Afghān court of Farrukhābād in search of *naukrī* i.e. employment. Others moved south towards the Deccan plateau eventually finding work in the central Indian lands that were under the control of two major Maratha households in the early nineteenth century. These groups of independent soldiers wrote memoirs and poetry in which they recorded their experiences navigating the military labor market in the early nineteenth century; their struggles to find consistent and regular employment; and their shifting conceptions of their own identities and the identities of those whom they served. Unlike the scribes and secretaries who feature in Chapters One and Two, literary pedagogues barely figure into their narratives. Instead, through these soldiers' written works, the reader is inducted into the realm of military recruiters, paymasters and employers who were jostling for space under increasingly straitened conditions as the East India Company made a bid to monopolize the military labor market. Far from its courtly connotations in the early modern

[54] For examples of these approaches See Margrit Pernau, *From Ashraf to Middle Class: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013); Claudia Liebeskind, *Piety on its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

period, Persianate commemorative writing in the early nineteenth century had expanded sufficiently to include the imaginative worlds of the independent soldiers of "failed" regional successor states. These imaginative worlds are replete with social and political commentary that indicate how soldiering figures conceptualized their own sense of community, regional affiliation and political and ethical commitments during early colonial rule.

The fourth and final chapter further elaborates the responses that emerged from within the Persianate manuscript tradition to the formation of the Company's legal regime in Kaṭehr after it formally seized administrative control of most of the region in 1802. Through the writings of bureaucrats like ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, the chapter offers a glimpse into the precise mechanisms through which the Company's legal regime struck root in the *qaṣbāt* of Kaṭehr. Notably, the Company relied on lower-ranking local officials like him to staff its offices and to uphold and interpret law and order in ways that scholars have yet to fully appreciate.[55] The first half of the chapter elaborates some of the social processes that undergirded the formalization of early colonial institutions of justice in the former Rohilla territories. The second half turns to the writings of disenfranchised former Rohilla Afghān elites who invoked their own customary traditions or *ʿurf* in order to resolve disputes over the division of the shrunken Rohilla patrimonial estate amongst multiple claimants. It is argued here, that in advancing the idea of acceptable customary practice that was in keeping with the *sharīʿa*, the Nawwāb of Rāmpur's grandson described a "canon" for the Rohilla household, one that he invoked in response to the Company's efforts to decide his family's disputes. This form of writing about custom and law was also marked by a tradition of petitioning the colonial government. Taken together, these

[55] By way of exception, see Lauren Benton and Richard Ross, "Empires and Legal Pluralism: Jurisdiction, Sovereignty, and Political Imagination in the Early Modern, World," in ibidem., ed., *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

written responses to the colonial legal regime constitute a final adoption of Persographic practices as a vehicle to express a newly demoted groups' interests

Chapter 1

Taking Note: Scribal Authority in Afghān North India

I. Introduction

The list of "Books Read in Persian and Arabic," in a report written in 1853 on the state of "Indigenous Education in the Dehlie Division", includes a book of letters called *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā*.[1] The East India Company officials who drafted the report lamented what they deemed the use of inapposite teaching materials, such as the *Inshāʾ*, in North Indian classrooms. What was the nature of this work that raised the hackles of the utilitarian administrators?[2] The *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā*, or *The Elevating Epistles*, is a book of eighty-eight letters in Persian, compiled by one Kabīr Khān "Yatīmī" in ca. 1762 for the erudition of future draftsmen, and it was completed in the *qaṣba* of Sahaswān in the district of Badāyūn, which was part of the Kaṭehr region of the Mughal province of Delhi.[3]

These letters ranged from mundane matters, for instance, offering counsel to friends and students on the dangers of over-sleeping, to far weightier epistles asking Mughal officials for

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[1] *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for the year 1851-1852* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1853): 223-225.

[2] The copy of the *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā* cited here is a late nineteenth century manuscript housed at the Shri Natnagar Shodh Sansthan in Sitamau, Madhya Pradesh. The title was entered in a hand list that does not include shelf-marks. All folio numbers are based on my own pagination as the folios have not been numbered.

[3] The term "qaṣba" suggests a small garrison town in the context of early modern and colonial North India. F. J. Steingass translated it as 'township' in Persian. See F. J. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary: Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to be Met with in Persian Literature, Being, Johnson and Richardson's Persian, Arabic, and English Dictionary, Revised, Enlarged, and Entirely Reconstructed*. (Reprint, 1992), p. 972. In India the formation of a *qaṣba* is an expressly North Indian phenomenon. Historically, *qaṣbāt* emerged as settlements that embodied the qualities of a *maḥalla* or neighborhood but resembled a village or small city in size and spatial organization.

help in the wake of the Rohilla Afghān conquest of Badāyūn.[4] In this way, Yatīmī's letters mirrored the world of an influential teacher based in an up-country town, who was able to liaise with students, friends and military service figures stationed across the province of Delhi, as well as with officers of the law and officials at the Mughal court in Shāhjahānābād. How did his compilation of letters reach a threshold of circulation, renown and use such as to catch the attention of the East India Company's educationists almost a century later, before it was jettisoned from the pedagogical repertoire?

In order to gauge the value and currency of Yatīmī's letters, it is necessary to consider his location in Sahaswān and its surrounding small towns within the Kaṭehr region, comprising the *qaṣbāt* of Barelī, Āonla, Murādābād, Farrukhābād and Shāhjahānpūr. Throughout the eighteenth century, this region was under discontinuous and patchy forms of political control. First, a number of Afghān migrant families from Swāt seized power in the region from Rajput landholders and created a base for themselves in north India in the early-eighteenth century. These Afghān families eventually established control over and reconfigured the Kaṭehr region into two neighboring semi-autonomous Afghān states. A land grant made by the Mughal emperor to one such Afghān migrant, Muḥammad Khān Bangash, in 1713 developed into the state of Farrukhābād, which alternated between challenging and supporting Mughal authority throughout the eighteenth century. Similarly, the Rohilla state, based in Barelī, was founded in 1737 by ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla, the leader of a contingent of Yūsufzāʾi Rohilla Afghāns i.e. Afghāns from "Roh." Thus, by the 1740s, the adult lifetime of Yatīmī, two Afghān-led regional

[4] The Bangash Afghān chief, Muḥammad Khān, was given Jalālābād, Sahaswān and Badāyūn in 1713 in grant by the Emperor Farrukhsīyar. ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla seized control over the Bangash-controlled territories in ca. 1737 and was joined by large numbers of Rohilla Afghāns after Nādir Shāh's invasion of North India in 1739. Yatīmī does not specify which of these events he is referring to, and most of his letters are undated. See Balwant Singh, ed., *Gazetteer of India Uttar Pradesh: Badayun* (Lucknow: Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1986).

states had been established. Both states would go on to be annexed to the colonial Ceded Provinces. The Rohilla territories were formally placed under the Company's administrative control in 1801, approximately two decades after they were wrested from Afghān control by Awadh and the East India Company in 1774. Farrukhābād joined the Ceded Provinces a year later in 1802.[5] The present chapter takes as its context this chain of successive political reorganization beginning with Mughal decentralization, regional state formation under the Rohilla Afghān chieftains, and finally, the redistribution of the Rohilla territories between Awadh and the Company. In such times of heightened political competition, the demand for scribes and secretaries rose, as they mediated the collection and dissemination of intelligence, the formation of alliances, the articulation of political claims as well as the declaration of war and peace. [6] The following pages demonstrate that not only did regional scribes like Yatīmī thrive in the absence of the co-ordination and continuous patronage of states, some of them began to write with an unprecedented sense of personal authority and historical self-reflexivity about their immediate small-town circumstances. Their insights shed light on a subject of inquiry that has long troubled historians of the Mughal and early colonial regimes: the social channels of authority at the regional level and the ways in which these were rewired as the empire and its successor regimes were simultaneously parcelized.[7]

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[5] For an account of the establishment of the Rohilla Afghān state, see Jos Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire: C. 1710-1780* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); and Iqbal Husain, *The Ruhela Chieftaincies: The Rise and Fall of Ruhela Power in India in the Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[6] Regarding the role of the *akhbār nawīs*, see Chapter 2.

[7] Farhat Hasan has characterized this perspective as a "local" one. See Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The first half of this chapter draws upon the *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā* by the aforementioned Yatīmī, a *munshī* who taught other *munshīyān* (sg. *munshī*, secretaries), and whose letters reflect the changing political tide in Mughal India as it was experienced by the residents of Sahaswān and its neighboring towns in Kaṭehr during the emergence of Rohilla autonomy in the early eighteenth century. The second half of this chapter considers the period after 1774—following the Nawwāb of Awadh's conquest of the Rohilla state. It is centered on the writings of a relatively unknown and newly minted scribe, Aḥmad ʿAlī, from the *qaṣba* of Murādābād, who wrote *Kawāʾif al-Sayr*, a diary of his travels with a disaffected East India Company official across the Kaṭehr region. Through his recollection of the journey, Aḥmad ʿAlī magnifies the visible effects of the disintegration of the Rohilla state on the historical landscape of Kaṭehr, and on the relationships between dispossessed Rohilla elites, the Company and other local potentates. Put simply, while Yatīmī's *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā* closely mirrors the density of the overlapping social worlds of a body of scribes; the imperial provincial administration; and the formation of the Rohilla state, Aḥmad ʿAlī wrote of the fragmentation of those worlds in the wake of the Rohilla Afghāns' losses. His *Kawāʾif al-Sayr* records the lingering echoes of the Rohilla administration in the built landscape of Kaṭehr, and in the lives of its remaining minor potentates.

While scribal figures have formed a significant subject of research, the thrust of existing studies has been to show that *munshīyān* and *kātibān* (sg. *kātib*, scribes) were crucial to the elaboration of Mughal and British imperial authority. During the height of Mughal rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, secretarial positions were filled by writers skilled in the arts of Persian *tārīkh nigārī* (historiography), *inshāʾ* (epistolography) and poetry, among other literary genres. It is well-known that figures such as ʿAbu al-Fażl Allāmī (d.1602) developed *ars epistolaris* as an extension of Mughal imperial culture in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth

centuries. As the empire ramified, sophisticated draftsmen were solicited and sought after at the sub-imperial level. *Inshāʾ pardāzhā* (writers of epistolography) such as Munīr (d.1644) and Harkaran (fl. 1622) flourished in the provinces, generating templates of writing to train future generations of scribes who would seek employment in the Mughal bureaucracy. As a consequence of this state-driven surge in demand at the court and at the sub-imperial regional administrative level, the body of secretaries and scribes underwent several changes and widened considerably to include members of more communities than ever before.[8] Although acknowledging the value of these pioneering studies of the expansion and development of scribal culture in the early modern period (ca. sixteenth – eighteenth centuries), the present chapter inverts their view of the conjoined trajectories of the state and its attendant scribes, to focus on the continuing momentum of scribal penmanship in the absence of enduring state structures.[9]

Yatīmī and Aḥmad ʿAlī's writings enable substantive insights into the social and intellectual worlds of two figures who were based in the very same *qaṣbāt,* located at a remove from the more urbane and cosmopolitan centers of cultural exchange. In the context of continuous regional political reorganization, paper-pushers like them found opportunities to articulate their views as *arbāb-i qalam* (men of the pen). Like well-known contemporary intellectuals, they added their voices to comment on instability in the Mughal Empire, law and justice, regional politics, history, and everyday life, but inhabited a less conspicuously elite level

[8] For example, Hayden Bellenoit has argued that Persographic *Kāyastha* scribes who had already increased in number during the Mughal period, played a crucial role in the formation of the early colonial state in north India. See Hayden J. Bellenoit, *The Formation of the Colonial State in India: Scribes, Paper and Taxes, 1760-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[9] For an account of the history of a seasoned imperial secretary in seventeenth-century Mughal India, see Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

in the social hierarchy of writers.[10] And even though they did not reach the ranks of scholars and poets like Khān-i Ārzū (d. 1756) or Āzād Bilgrāmī (d. 1786), their efforts represent a widening culture of Persian language epistolography and the role that scribes took on as reflexive observers of political change at the regional level during the transition from Mughal to colonial rule.

II. *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā*: Letters from a *Qaṣba* under Siege

2.1 The *Munshī* and Mughal Decentralization:

Over the course of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries—a period bookended by the decline of the Mughal Empire and the formation of British colonial rule—the production of original Persian-language works swelled before declining sharply in the mid-nineteenth century.[11] Scribes and secretaries whose pedigree and station remain relatively unknown produced works which were part of this trend. To the extent that they have taken cognizance of Persographic *munshīyān* during the inter-imperial period (late eighteenth – early nineteenth centuries), historians have foregrounded the role that they played in the formation of

[10] Over the course of the eighteenth century, the broad efflorescence in Persographic writing was marked by a widening stratum of scribes as well as a growth in scholarship and literature among sophisticated men of letters. The latter has been the focus of recent scholarship. See for example, Arthur Dudney, "A Desire for Meaning: Ḳhān-i Ārzū's Philology and the Place of India in the Eighteenth-Century Persianate World," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013) and Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark* (New York: Routledge, 2016). As I have suggested here, some newly minted scribes who were unaffiliated with cosmopolitan scholarly circles nevertheless aimed to express their views on politics and history in their writings.

[11] On the expansion and contraction of the Persianate World, see Nile Green, *The Persianate World: The Reach and Limits of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, forthcoming).

the early colonial state and have largely focused on how they were co-opted into the colonial "information order."[12] C. A. Bayly, for instance, emphasized the role of such figures as native informants who shaped the formation of colonial rule. But he was less concerned with the lineages they belonged to, or how they perpetuated the trend of increasingly opinionated and authoritative Persian prose writing with its roots in the Mughal Empire. Instead, studies such as Bayly's inadvertently reinforce the notion that, by the latter half of the eighteenth century, all forms of knowledge, information and writing were unequivocally directed towards the service of the East India Company. An examination of Kabīr Khān "Yatīmī"'s compilation, *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā*, serves as a corrective to such approaches, yielding insight into the otherwise inaccessible reflections of a teacher and retired *munshī* who witnessed an imminent regional political coup against the Mughal administration, led by a set of Rohilla Afghāns who established a state that spanned Āonla, Badāyūn and Barelī in his home region. As a keen observer of provincial politics and local affairs, Yatīmī was uniquely positioned to comment on the interplay between imperial rule and the tendency towards administrative decentralization.[13]

While Yatīmī's letterbook reflects the details of his social context, it does not offer much information about his background and personal history. In the opening pages of the *Inshāʾ*, Yatīmī mentions no more about his family than his father's name, Karīm Khān, and his son's name, Yūsuf Khān. The reason he offers for compiling the volume is a well-known *topos* i.e. he had reached the ripe age of sixty-six and his son and other students who were interested (*ṭabaʿ*

[12] For the definitive formulation of the colonial "information order" in South Asia, see C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Political Intelligence and Social Communication in North India, 1780-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[13] See Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Witnesses and Agents of Empire: Eighteenth-Century Historiography and the World of the Mughal Munshī," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1-2 (2010): 1-2.

rasā) in the art of *inshāʾ* pressed him to share the fruits of his wisdom and experiences with them. Though he felt unqualified to do so, he "wrote down a few letters by way of advice and guidance [*naṣīhat o pand*]."[14] Among the recipients of the letters in his collection are the names of a number of peers whom he addresses casually as well as certain Nawwābs whom he greets with more formal salutations.[15] Like other well-known works of *inshāʾ*, Yatīmī's letters are peppered with poems, occasional verses by Saʿdī Shirāzī, or choice couplets that carried metaphors for the essential subject of the correspondence.[16] Unlike the *inshāʾ* writers of the early modern period who were attached to Mughal governors, it is quite likely that Yatīmī did not have a Mughal official for a patron.[17] If he did have one, he did not take the trouble to dedicate his work to him. According to the literary historian Nabi Hadi, besides *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā*, Yatīmī was the author of a few essays on ethics as well as verses on the Sayyids of Bārha and their control over the Mughal seat of power during the emperor Muḥammad Shāh's reign (1719 – 1748).[18] Indeed, even the letters in *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā* indicate that ethical concerns and the

[14] *Hosh Afzā*, f 1(b).

[15] The term *nawwāb* is the plural of *nāʾib* or "deputy. While it was used primarily as a title for provincial governors, in the eighteenth century, many landlords used it as well.

[16] The tradition of writing couplets in letters is one of many literary conventions associated with *inshāʾ*. For a summary of the range of conventions associated with *inshāʾ*, see H.R. Roehmer, "Inshāʾ," in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Consulted online on 1 August 2018 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3577. In Yatīmī's letters, the couplets are analogous to the contemporary e-mail "subject" heading.

[17] M. Mohiuddin, *The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals: From Babur to Shah Jahan (1526 – 1658)* (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1971), pp. 215 – 227.

[18] It should be noted that Nabi Hadi's notes though impressionistically correct are not entirely accurate. He refers to Yatīmī's son by an incorrect name and attributes eighty-four letters to him rather than eighty-eight. See Nabi Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1998), p. 672.

political disruptions created by the Sayyids of Bārha permeated his correspondence. These concerns were part of the new social realities, moral codes and political dynamics that unfolded in his lifetime and informed all of his correspondence. Yatīmī's efforts were directed at communicating these concerns to his students, in order to train them to be successful scribes within the Mughal bureaucracy.

Though they do not have any formal rubrics, the letters fall into two broad categories. The first group consists of letters that contain Yatīmī's advice to local acquaintances on quotidian affairs as well as more practical suggestions for resolving dilemmas in the carriage of justice in Sahaswān. The second group of letters consists of his political commentary on rebellions and political unrest. When considering both groups of letters, it is worth remembering that they are peculiar artifacts, and like any other work of *inshāʾ* cannot be read in an unmediated fashion as archival data to be mined for hard facts. They are, however, overlaid with textures of contemporary life in a provincial non-courtly context. They articulate a small-town figure's views on big questions, ranging from abstract ruminations on the nature of political power, to observations on the granular processes by which everyday life and political change were braided into one another. In the spectrum of historical documents, these letters thus occupy a space somewhere between exempla for future draftsmen and a contemporary snapshot of a view of the world in eighteenth-century Sahaswān.[19]

2.2 Yatīmī's Letters on Employment and Administration in Sahaswān

[19] In contrast to the context outlined here, for an overview of the historical association of secretarial writing with imperial courts across the Persianate world, see Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway, eds. *Literacy in the Persianate world: writing and the social order* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

The precise nature of Yatīmī's relationship with the Mughal provincial bureaucracy in Sahaswān is not explicitly stated in his letters, but readers can deduce that it was cordial if not warm. Based on the figures whom he addresses and the advice that he offers, it appears that he had a deep understanding of how the various cogs in the bureaucratic machinery worked. He knew, for instance, whom to contact for favors, and he was tuned into the latest information about available administrative positions that were agreeable and secure as well as those that were uncertain on account of a bad working environment or political instability. He was aware of who was in search of work and who was looking to hire, and match-made between the two wherever he could. He wrote to a friend, for example, about a job prospect in the house-hold of Nawwāb ʿIttiqād Khān, who was placed as the chief magistrate (*faujdār*) in the *chakla* of Murādābād:

> Concerning the issue of the conditions of employment (*mānd o būd-i naukarī*) in the household (*sarkār*) of the benevolent and kind Nawwāb ʿIttiqād Khān and Regarding the matter of moving to the district (*chakla*) of Murādābād. Even though on close inspection, he [the Nawwāb] is himself an abundance of joy and friendship, the vices of his officials (*muttaṣadīyān*), who are deceptive and unjust, troubles the mind. At the end of the day, service with deceptive and unjust people is no different from raising a plane tree (*chinār*), which does not bear fruit without sunlight…[20]

This letter was most likely drafted in ca. 1717, when the Mughal Emperor Farrukhsīyar (d. 1719) appointed ʿIttiqād Khān to the *faujdārī* of Murādābād. ʿIttiqād Khān was subsequently dispossessed of his estates by the Sayyids of Bārhā, so there possibly was some substance to Yatīmī's advice to avoid working for him in Murādābād. Similarly, Yatīmī also counseled those who felt that they had outgrown their provincial livelihood and were hoping to make a fortune in Shāhjahānābād. He writes to one Mīr Lutfullah by way of advice:

[20] *Hosh Afzā*, f 7(b).

> My dear brother, in relation to the matter about the revolutions of the kings (*gardish-i sulṭānī*) and the decision regarding that matter since you are depleted in resources and materials… Those who are matured (*rasa*) through brave resistance and who are the pillars of the sultanate, make advances in rank and become nobles… [but] rushing forth blindly to follow that which one cannot see (*bamunsalik nādīda shatāftan*) is like frantically digging a mine without being able to find the jewel (*wa gauhar nayāftan*)…Until that time that the disturbances in the revolutions of kings do not lead to a clear direction (*yek sū*), you should not even entertain such ideas! And serve the beneficent army (*lashkar-i munʿim*) that has given you your bread and butter.[21]

It appears that from his perch in Sahaswān, Yatīmī was aware of the goings-on in Shāhjahānābād, or at least was aware enough to suggest that the rapid turnover of emperors and regular instances of rebellion did not foster a climate that was conducive to secure employment. He drafted many such letters enclosing advice for friends, acquaintances and young students who wanted to relocate themselves for work.[22] It should also be noted that the extent of his connections with the provincial administration was not limited to his awareness of opportunities for work. That Yatīmī was plugged into channels of communication in various offices of the provincial bureaucracy is also apparent from his appeals to local authorities to reconsider decisions in matters of law and the administration of justice. While a few of these letters contain platitudinous emphases on the importance of virtuous behavior, others offer ethical recommendations grounded in the shifting contours of provincial administration. For instance, writing in response to one Shaykh Mahtāb on a case involving a local notable's agent, Pānḍe Pahlād, who was accused of lying, Yatīmī writes, "Even though the person referred to (Pānḍe

[21] Idem., f 5(b)-f 6(a).

[22] Chapter Three of the present dissertation includes a longer discussion about the changing nature of military and administrative appointments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Pahlād) is a liar (*durūgh gū*) and is given to misrepresenting facts, he is however, gainful and successful in every undertaking [*kāmrān*]. His dishonesty is acceptable."[23] In short, Yatīmī argues that Pāṇḍe Pahlād though a liar, was productive and useful, and ought to be released.

The fact that Yatīmī's opinion should be solicited in a matter concerning a *muttaṣadī*'s dishonesty suggests that though he was not formally a judge or magistrate, he had cultivated a reputation as an unofficial source of sound judgment. Yatīmī possibly fashioned his sense of rectitude as a sort of stock-in-trade in Sahaswān. For instance, in another letter, addressed to one Yaʿqūb Khān, he writes in defense of his friend from Sahaswān (*yekī az dūstān-i īn jānib*), Yūsuf Khān, whom he claims had been mistakenly arrested for a crime he did not commit. Yatīmī writes that his friend's face resembled that of the actual criminal (who was presumably still at large) and proceeds to make an impassioned plea for the release of his friend, comparing him to his Qurʾānic namesake, the Prophet Yūsuf.[24] Similarly, Yatīmī writes in defense of yet another friend, Diler Khān, "the emblem of brotherhood [*akhwat nishān*]," whom he believes was wrongfully arrested. He flatters the recipient of his plea, a judge by the name of Kāmil Muḥammad ʿĀdil, by comparing him to the Persian king Naushīrwān, a renowned champion of justice. The letter entreats Kāmil Muḥammad to investigate Diler Khān's alibis and to "not give up the reins of justice [*ʿanān-i insāf rā az dast na dahand*]."[25] In this manner, the letters that he drafted as petitions and suggestions for the release of certain figures shed light on his insights on the delivery of justice, and his social standing among officers of the regional administrative apparatus in Sahaswān.

[23] Idem., f 34(a-b).

[24] Idem., f 34(b).

[25] Idem., f 23(b).

This selection of letters—in which he advised those in search of work as well as those who administered justice—indicates that he deemed it important for his students to learn how to gauge the rhythm of the labor market and to look for secure employment away from scheming officers in provincial households, such as ʿIttiqād Khān's officers, and the competitive and uncertain conditions of the imperial capital. He wanted them to learn to engage with administrative officers as he had done, to appeal to their better judgment, to flatter them just enough with verbose and florid prose that indicated social rank, literary ability and sophistication. These were life skills that were required of anybody who needed to communicate with the provincial administration.

2.3 Epistles on Etiquette and Correct Behavior

Apart from sharing correspondence with provincial service figures, Yatīmī, like earlier writers of *inshāʾ* of the Mughal Empire, was committed to informing his reader about social etiquette. However, Yatīmī's compilation differs from most *inshāʾ* collections in its concern with a specific type of social etiquette. For instance, the seventeenth century "mirror for *munshīyān*" *Nigārnāma-yi Munshī* (Secretary's Letterbook) is organized so that the young *munshī* might learn how to draft letters and address recipients in socially appropriate ways.[26] Other Mughal-era works of *inshāʾ* were written as guides for sons and grandsons in the *munshī*'s family, offering letters, biographical details of family members, literary advice and notes taken when traveling for work.[27] Even though Yatīmī shared an interest in propagating social propriety with these two

[26] See Muzaffar Alam, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 61-72.

[27] See Rajeev Kinra, "Master and Munshī: A Brahman secretary's guide to Mughal governance," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 4 (2010): 527-561.

types of works—the mirrors for *munshīyān* and the family-based diaries—his letters focus on the behaviors of people he knew in his immediate environment. Through his letters, he corrects the behaviors of students, friends and neighbors, and occasionally gossips about the embarrassing personal attributes and weaknesses of those who fell short of his standards. Therefore, rather than instructing the reader to peruse certain books or how to address people of rank in specific ways as many other collections of *inshāʾ* do, Yatīmī's letters offer the reader instructive examples from his own world.

For instance, apart from the many letters advising students not to lie to their teachers or to plagiarize their teachers' writings, *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā* also includes advice to a friend on how best to manage his laziness. In a note to one "Janāb Sarmast Khān," Yatīmī offers his thoughts on the subject of prohibitions on sleep (*dar muqaddama-yi naṣīhat-i manaʿ khwābī nigārish yāft*). He writes with genuine concern that it had come to his attention that his friend was in a constant stupor, over-sleeping and drinking excessively (*ghaflat wa bīhoshī besiyār khwābī wa bādah noshī*) and this was no better than courting death. He then helpfully suggests acceptable ways for one to rest during the day. One could essentially take a nap (*qailūla*) after offering prayers. "Those who offer their prayers early in the morning (*saḥar*) and take a nap need not worry, for that nap is *sunnat* [in the way of the Prophet]," he observes.[28] He has similar advice on the etiquette of drinking, especially at gatherings of intoxicated men. "Wait until an intoxicated man is sober before speaking with him," he proposes.

In another letter, Yatīmī writes to a friend about poets whom he found lacking in skill. He writes to one ʿAbd Allah Sahaswānī about a poetry contest where one Sāhib Rāi presented another poet's verses which he interpreted incorrectly:

[28] *Hosh Afzā*, f 45(b).

> Mīr ʿAbd Allah Sahaswānī… Knower of True Meaning! Even though the Munshī Sāhib Rāi is likable, and even though he is an elegant writer, and he participated in a competition of poetic elegance (*sukhan sanjī*) where he presented poetry that was of a delicate imagination…however, the twist is that this bird of verses (*murgh-i ashʿār*) cannot fly by flapping his famous wings! In fact, he presents stolen verses that do not bear the color and scent of deeper meaning, and he mistakes weird meanings for unique ones![29]

Like writers of *inshāʾ* before him, Yatīmī's advice and interjections foreground social etiquette as an extension of a broader morality. However, it is the range of Yatīmī's *realia*—though restricted to Sahaswān and its surrounding towns—that serves as the conduit of his lessons in proper behavior. His prescriptions for the reader reflect the concerns that occupied the thoughts of a socially well-connected teacher in a north Indian *qaṣba* during a time of political unrest. It was a time when contemporary observers of the troubled Mughal Empire heavily criticized what they saw as the vice-ridden world of the emperor, his courtiers and administrators. Yatīmī might have intended to prepare successive generations of students whom he anticipated would find themselves living in a similarly unmoored world.

2.4 Yatīmī's Views on Political Unrest and Ethnic Identity

Yatīmī's sense of urgency in managing and grounding his immediate surroundings extends to another set of letters in the same anthology that focus on rivalries between different communities, rebellions, and other acts of political revolt that he witnessed in Badāyūn. In a letter to an unspecified addressee in the imperial capital, Yatīmī claims that the "soldiers in the service of the *sarkār* [*bahādurān-i kārzār-i mulāzim-i sarkār*]" attacked the inhabitants of Bagdhar, a village in Badāyūn that neighbors Sahaswān where he lived. Given the unstable and

[29] Idem., f 2(a-b).

historically evolving meaning of the term "*sarkār*," Yatīmī could have been referring to a nobleman or a landowner, but it is most likely that he was referring to a provincial administrative official. The soldiers of this *sarkār* apparently responded to complaints lodged by the barley and wheat sellers of Bagḍhar, about the "monks clad in red [*atītān-i surkh posh*]" and the "mendicant wanderers [*jogīyān-i khāna ba dosh*] who have lived in the area since ancient times."[30] Yatīmī describes the chaos created by the soldiers' assault on these groups, and engages in a substantial amount of ethnographic exoticism:

> Many of these figures [who were attacked] spread out to other lands in big groups… I do not have words to describe them! ... Some of them raised both hands in supplication to their maker… some stood on one foot in penance, others gave up their clothes and only kept a leopard skin on their shoulders… still others walked around with ashes rubbed on their bodies… Please bring this to the attention of the imperial capital (*dār al-khilāfat*)… I think it is in the *sarkār*'s best interest to extend an olive branch to these people.[31]

Yatīmī probably had multiple acquaintances and colleagues in Shāhjahānābād to whom he would direct such descriptive petitions and pleas, or at the very least, he was keen that his students believe that he did.

His graphic account of the bodies of the long-standing inhabitants of Bagḍhar appears similar to well-known tropes that colonial officials would use half a century later to describe their native subjects in nineteenth-century India, the difference being that Yatīmī was asserting the rights of the purportedly older inhabitants of a region against intrusion. Why did Yatīmī feel the need to spring to the defense of these people against the misguided actions of the servants of

[30] *Hosh Afzā*, f 19(a). The term *atīt* figures repeatedly in this letter to refer to a specific community.

[31] Idem., f 19(b).

the *sarkār*? Why did he dramatize them as hapless figures who were running amok? While the reader does not receive a direct answer in the letter itself, it is instructive to note that Yatīmī applies a similar ethnographic lens to a whole range of communities in other letters as well. As Bayly suggested, notions similar to that of the *patria* sharpened when provinces began to secede from the Mughal Empire as regional states.[32] He argued that the contours of communities, their identities and homelands (*waṭan*) were clarified and negotiated in localized regional contexts well before the East India Company began its enumerative projects that "fixed" the boundaries of social hierarchies. While it would be inaccurate to identify Bayly's conception of pre-modern nationalism exactly in Yatīmī's letters, it is clear that he developed an awareness of localized community hierarchies in Badāyūn and that he viewed the competition amongst these groups as a threat to stability in the region. In another letter, addressing one Asʿad Allah, he writes of the many features of the Afghāns, Kashmiris, Kambohs and Kāyasthas, ultimately urging the reader to maintain peaceful relations with all. The general thrust of the letter is that since he has had occasion to witness different types of people, he is in a position to advise Asʿad Allah to be aware of their "features [*ausāf*]" and to befriend all of them (*ba Afghān wa Kamboh wa Kashmiri dūstī begīrad*).

> To Asʿad Allah, about the characteristics of various communities…Oh the one with foresight who chooses wisdom! It is written such that one should befriend Afghāns, Kambohs and Kashmiris. Please accept what has been written with your entire heart and mind and be conscious of these descriptions, written ahead. There are Afghāns in the place where this lowly person [Yatīmī] lives. All three communities are present [nearby]. In all this time, since I have lived for sixty-one years, I have witnessed every conceivable thing on the stage of this world. I have endured the

32 See C. A. Bayly, "The Consolidation of Indian Patrias," in *The Origins of Nationality in South Asia*, (Oxford University Press, 1998).

> wounds and tasted the poison of this world (*rīsh o nīsh-i zamāna chashīda*)…[33]

Yatīmī couches comments about these communities in couplets that appear to have been light-hearted and humorous. He notes for instance that "even though the *qaum* of Sayyids are descendants of the Prophet," they are very affable and not as arrogant as one would expect. His thoughts about Afghāns are somewhat harsher: "Befriending an Afghān is courting war and pain!" In addition to the couplets he appends a *mukhammas* poem, as an aide memoire for the reader to be able to recall what to expect from each of these communities. One could expect a predisposition for battle from an Afghān, Kambohs were wont to volley insults, and Kashmiris were not kind, in his view. Ultimately though, he advocated befriending all of them.

In other letters, Yatīmī's remarks about Afghāns in Badayūn are somewhat less casual. He makes observations about their emergence in Badayūn as a group that threatened to overturn the peace. He occasionally refers to them as "oppressive [*zālimān*]" and holds them responsible for disturbances in neighboring towns. He writes a complaint to an unnamed acquaintance (a "protector of Sayyids") about the outrageous behavior of the police chief (*faujdār*) of Sahaswān, a man by the name of Kāle Khān Afghān.

> He is nothing but unjust and cruel (*bī-insāf wa zālim*) and will be the cause of complete and utter ruin in these lands. Upon hearing of this, my heart has fallen into a whirlpool of sorrow. The Afghāns follow the path of secret animosity (*khusūmat-i bātinī*); who knows what they will do next![34]

[33] *Hosh Afzā*, f 47(b)-48(a).

[34] *Hosh Afzā*, f 35(a).

Yatīmī concludes the letter by asking his interlocutor for advice about the matter, which he will pass on to an unnamed ally in Sahaswān. His deep distrust of Afghāns evident in this anecdote, is borne out in a number of other letters; he appears to have regularly doubted their intentions and suspects them of hatching secret subversive plans. He writes to ʿIttimād al-Daula in Delhi about the same matter, complaining about their violent behavior (*sar bashūrish wa fasad bar dāshte*).[35] Indeed, Badāyūn was first occupied by the Bangash Afghāns in 1713, and subsequently taken over by ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla's Afghān contingent in ca. 1740. Lest we hastily attribute his opposition to the Afghān occupation in Badāyūn to his unwavering loyalty to the Mughal Empire, it is worth noting that Yatīmī's opinions are not categorically in favor of the emperor or his courtiers in any narrow sense. For instance, he observes the actions of the Sayyid brothers of Bārha in a tone that we might read as both mocking and admiring, giving them the playful titles of Ḥusayn ʿAlī Khān "Himmat [Will]" and ʿAbd Allah Khān "Fiṭrat [Wisdom]." In a letter on the quick succession of emperors and the machinations of the Bārha Sayyids, he argues that Ḥusayn ʿAlī Khān's only failing was that he was unable see his will through to its conclusion. He adds that, ultimately, when the emperor Muḥammad Shāh came to power, he created a council of five ministers to ensure that his subjects (*raʿāyā*) were no longer exposed to any more political fluctuations. This, he writes, was the best possible outcome for all.[36] Thus, at the heart of most of his political critique—of the Afghān occupation or the Bārha Sayyids' coup in Delhi—was his advocacy of the replacement of the status quo with a more stable order.

Yatīmī observed politics in both his district and the Mughal capital with interest, and harbored complex opinions about the interactions between imperial subjects and the regional

[35] Idem., f 36(a).

[36] *Hosh Afzā*, f 44(a-b).

arms of administrative authority. Given that he shared his observations with a number of notables, friends, relatives, and state functionaries, it is possible that he had once occupied an important position in a provincial chancery or was apprenticed as a *munshī* to a local official in his district.[37] However, if this was the case, he failed to mention it in the introduction to his compilation of letters, which remained dedicated solely to his students and his son. If a *munshī* based in the Mughal capital could document and project his "self" in the seventeenth century as Kinra argues, by the mid-eighteenth century, he could do so in Sahaswān without a formal attachment to an office or a court. This trend would continue through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. After the Rohilla Afghāns assumed political and administrative control over Sahaswān and its neighboring towns and districts in the Middle Doab, the East India Company took over the same territory, prompting another mode of reflecting on political change in the recent past, as seen in the writings of Aḥmad ʿAlī.

III. The *Kawāʾif al-Sayr*: A *Munshī*'s Notes on the *Qaṣbāt* of Rohilkhand

3.1 The Rohilla War (1774) and the "Ecumene"

Under the leadership of Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān, the Rohilla state that had been founded by ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla in 1737 expanded to include more *qaṣbāt* and agricultural land, only to be annexed in 1774 by the neighboring Mughal successor state of Awadh with the help of the East India Company. What remained in the hands of one branch of the ruling Rohilla family was

[37] The study of Mughal provincial chanceries is a subject that has yet to garner sustained scholarly attention. In comparison, analyses of provincial officials and their collections of letters is more developed in Safavid studies. See for example, Colin P. Mitchell, "Provincial Chancelleries and Local Lines of Authority in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran," *Oriente Moderno* 88, no. 2 (2008): 483-507.

a shrunken 'native state' in Rampur. The East India Company gave Fayzullah Khān (d. 1793), one of ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla's sons, the title of Nawwāb of Rāmpur.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the Company's involvement in the conquest of the Rohilla Afghān territories under Governor-General Warren Hastings' direction became a major source of controversy. During the takeover, the Company's soldiers and officials engaged in widely discussed instances of loot and plunder, raising ethical questions posed by imperial conquest in distant lands.[38] Hastings was famously tried for corruption, and he became a polarizing figure in late-eighteenth century debates over despotism and popular sovereignty as they unfolded in England. So resonant was his case that statesmen continued to defend and critique his legacy as late as the 1890s.[39] And yet, theirs were not the only opinions that contributed to the discourse surrounding the case. At the time of the trial, *maḥżars* or written testimonies in support of Hastings's character were solicited from the "old clerical class" in Hindustan.[40] Bayly suggested that members of this clerical class participated in a set of conversations about the imperial revolutions that were underway in India that ran parallel to the debates in England. They were part of a pre-colonial north Indian "ecumene", defined as a transregional space of cultural and political debate that preceded the advent of print news and modern public associations. He further elaborated that this ecumenical space persisted alongside newer publics in the nineteenth century. It is precisely within these persistent forms of Bayly's "ecumene" in the late eighteenth

[38] See E. I. Brodkin, "British India and the Abuses of Power: Rohilkhand Under Early Company Rule," in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 10, 2 (1973): 129-156.

[39] See John Strachey, *Hastings and the Rohilla War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892).

[40] See Nandini Chatterjee, "*Mahzar-namas* in the Mughal and British empires: the uses of an Indo-Islamic legal form," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 58: 2 (2016): 379-406; and C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, pp. 81-83.

and early nineteenth centuries that we find a wider range of thought, curiosity and political enterprise than he himself accounted for.[41]

The figures whose writings he focused on were for the most part elite and cosmopolitan historians, scholars and poets, besides being administrators and officials of law. But the notion of the "ecumene," as Bayly defined it, does not fully encapsulate the nature of the clerical class and how it transformed during this period. For example, how might we account for secretaries and teachers like Yatīmī, who operated from regional centers even as they were part of wider information networks that spanned the major metropolitan cities of the Mughal Empire? The well-known multiple-portfolio-holding lineages of scholar elites that Bayly referred to, were not the only members of the Persographic discursive world of the eighteenth-century.[42] Even as voices from the "old clerical class" continued to be heard, the secretarial service cadres underwent noticeable changes in their locations of employment, social profile and observational style. From the late-seventeenth century, the figure of the Persographic *munshī* emerged as an increasingly perceptive writer whose opinions on worldly matters did not always correspond to the views of his patrons. In a range of essays on early modern *munshīyān*, Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam argue that by the middle of the eighteenth century, a diverse body of scribes had moved beyond the perimeter of courtly settings, and recorded observations that they

[41] C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p.182. See also, Kumkum Chatterjee, "History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century India," *Modern Asian Studies*, 32, no.4 (1998): 913-948.

[42] In recent years, scholars have advanced the notion that the late 17th and early 18th centuries in India marked a highpoint of literary and poetic sociability. Scholars have undertaken close readings of *taẕkiras* (biographical compendia), paying particular attention to references to Mughal salons. See, for example, Purnima Dhavan and Heidi Pauwels, "Controversies Surrounding the Reception of Valī "Dakhanī" (1665?–1707?) in Early Taẕkirahs of Urdu Poets," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25, no. 4 (2015): 625-646. The present chapter seeks to add to this literature by drawing attention to the non-poetic Persian writings of service figures, and their place in regional politics.

had made during travels outside and within the subcontinent. As these changes took place, members of the Hindu *khatrī* and *kāyastha* castes acquired a larger presence within the ranks of the scribal offices in the Mughal Empire and its successor states than ever before.[43] To these comments, one may add that the momentum of social mobility among younger lineages of *munshīyān* extended beyond the growing number of Hindu Persographic writers, to scribes of all manner of background, some with very little prior experience and training.[44] Taken together, these figures—the inter-imperial men of paper—brought their thoughts, anxieties and prescriptions to bear on their immediate surroundings. In doing so they continued to operate within a field of ideas and critique that had already been populated by writers of an earlier vintage, as well as more recently ascending *khatrī* and *kāyastha* scribal families.

We turn now to the writings of precisely one such *nouveau munshī*— Aḥmad ʿAlī Murādābādī—who made his way through the Rohilla territories between the months of February and May 1780 (that is, after the Rohilla War of 1774). Aḥmad ʿAlī wrote his diary as a newly literate scribe, who took a keen interest in documenting his travels through the largely abandoned Rohilla settlements, describing forts, mosques and temples with the sensibility and curiosity of an antiquarian. He recorded each artifact that he came across during his travels, large and small, dilating in particular on the visible relics of both the recent as well as a more distant past that had remained after the Rohilla state was dismantled. These aspects of his case make him particularly

[43] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam make this argument convincingly in a number of articles. See for example Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 61-72.

[44] Though Yatīmī's letters constitute a slightly more sophisticated body of work, Aḥmad ʿAlī could barely write a page without making a number of errors.

relevant to any quest to understand the new location, widened social profile and intellectual breadth of secretarial figures during this period.

3.2 The Circumstances of Aḥmad ʿAlī's Journey

Aḥmad ʿAlī's designated role was to accompany Major Charles Marsack of the East India Company on a journey from Lucknow to various *qaṣbāt* in Kaṭehr; from there to Delhi, and finally back to Lucknow.[45] In addition to the two of them, the traveling party included at least one other European gentleman "Kīṭ Sāhib," Marsack's wife "Begum Sāhiba," and a large entourage of armed campers: *tilangān*, *barkandāzān*, *khāssbardārān* and *turksawārān*. Upon his patron's request, Aḥmad ʿAlī wrote a diary of their travels called *Kawāʾif al-Sair* (The Conditions of Travel).

Aḥmad ʿAlī had been hired as a *kātib* (scribe) only a week before they departed from Lucknow, and it is unlikely that he had ever undertaken a task like this in the past. He was only able to secure the job through the mediation of one Munshī Hukūmat Rāi who had been Marsack's employee for over a decade.[46] The unique manuscript of the diary appears to be autograph, written as a day-by-day account of the traveling party's movements. It is organized in three parts, documenting Marsack and his entourage's travels through the *qaṣbāt* of Kaṭehr in the first part; a series of meetings between Marsack and the Deputy Nawwāb-Wazīr of Awadh and high commander of the Mughal army, Mīrzā Najaf Khān, in Delhi in the second part; and Marsack's return to Lucknow in the concluding portion of the work.

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[45] The journey was approximately forty days long, with overnight stops in Shāhjahānpūr, Barelī, Rāmpur and Murādābād.

[46] *Kawāʾif*, f 2(v). Munshī Hukūmat Rāi may have tutored Aḥmad ʿAlī, as the manuscript of the *Kawāʾif* contains glosses and corrections in a second hand that is neater than the orthography of the main body of text.

Shortly after writing the *Kawāʾif*, Aḥmad ʿAlī wrote a historical account of the Rohilla settlements titled *Nuzhat al-Żamāʾir* (The Delight of Minds), which was written as a chronicle, in a less personal register than his diary. The prefatory remarks in the *Nuzhat* submit that much of it was based on the notes he took while traveling with Marsack although it is missing several anecdotes, chronograms and detailed observations about inter-personal exchanges that are present in the *Kawāʾif*, such as the interactions between his patron and the remaining Rohilla Afghāns in Kaṭehr. Given that his notes on the Rohilla territories forms the most thorough and empirically rich portion of the work, it is likely that Aḥmad ʿAlī was familiar with or from Kaṭehr, though he does not explicitly state where he and his family were from. Judging from the numerous spelling errors across the manuscript and his penchant for using Hindustānī words wherever possible—he was not entirely comfortable writing in high-secretarial Persian.[47] His style is largely simple and prosaic, and there is no mention in his prefatory remarks about his own scholarly or literary pedigree.[48]

He elaborates the intended purposes of the journey, namely, *sayr o shikār* (wandering and hunting) in the preface. "*Sayr"*, Aḥmad ʿAlī notes, "is an opportunity to see the wonders and curiosities of God's world".[49] It has been suggested that in the year before he undertook this journey, Major Marsack was on the verge of retirement, having cited ill health in a letter to the

[47] He creates several compound Hindi-Persian verbs that are not found in any dictionary. For example, he creates the verb "nahān kardan", a synthesis of the Hindi *nahāna* (to bathe) and the Persian *kardan* (to do) on f 22(v).

[48] His narrative closely follows the journey from one Rohilla site to the next, often listing the names of various Rohilla leaders and their descendants, as well as the distances between their fortresses and settlements. He also offers notes on the *pīshkhīma*, i.e. the party in charge of setting up the tents and making arrangements ahead of the rest of the caravan, the elements of which included runners, soldiers, cooks, elephants and horses.

[49] *Kawāʾif,* f 2(r).

East India Company.[50] He had, with the Company's permission, loaned military contingents to the Nawwāb of Awadh Āsaf al-Daulah (d. 1797), and his deputy, Mīrzā Najaf Khān. Simon Digby, the previous owner of the only existing copy of the manuscript, believed that Marsack was on his way to Delhi to claim the debt that Najaf Khān owed him, before quitting the subcontinent for good. The extent to which Marsack was able to recover his various loan amounts cannot be determined from Aḥmad ʿAlī's account alone. In the second part of the diary, he writes of six frustrating meetings between Marsack and Najaf Khān, over the course of which repayments were promised but never actually made and in which Marsack was made a present of an unhealthy elephant which was of little use to him. Aḥmad ʿAlī seems to suggest that ultimately, the Nawwāb of Awadh gave Marsack a *jāgīr* (land assignment) in Farrukhābād to defray at least part of the principal. It is quite possible that the indebted Nawwāb may have even bankrolled Marsack's travels from Lucknow to Delhi via Rohilkhand.[51] Aḥmad ʿAlī describes the Nawwāb's efforts to personally greet Marsack when the traveling party was en-route to Bilgrām, thus suggesting that the Nawwāb treated him with respect, as one would a creditor. The reader also learns of the party's warm reception in Almāsganj, the headquarters of the Nawwāb's appointee Almās ʿAlī Khān, who was in charge of the administration of the former Rohilla territories that had been taken over by Awadh.[52] Marsack and his journey across Kaṭehr to reclaim his dues from the Nawwāb of Awadh via Najaf Khān in Delhi exemplify the elaborate web of debt-recovery mechanisms that ramified across Mughal India in the eighteenth century.

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[50] Rosie Llewellyn-Jones presented her findings at the Simon Digby Memorial Conference in 2013, and she kindly shared her unpublished paper with me. Her investigations into Major Marsack's life have helped me address some questions about the circumstances surrounding the writing of *Kawāʾif al-Sayr* that are not answered in the manuscript itself.

[51] Ibid.

[52] *Kawāʾif,* f 6(v).

As large-scale militarization and borrowing fed off each other in a cyclical pattern, military entrepreneurs like Marsack could hope to make a tidy profit from a land assignment in Farrukhābād and then return to Britain. Aḥmad ʿAlī was happy to be part of this sort of expedition, perhaps sensing a promising remuneration at the end of it and a future career as a successful secretary.

One might be tempted to view Aḥmad ʿAlī's journey with Marsack in 1780 as one would a native informant in the service of a Company official on a colonial reconnaissance mission in India. However, even as late as in the 1820s when the Company assumed near-sovereign powers in India, the figure of the mobile secretary was as much a client of the Company official as the latter was his, as secretaries were often linguistic mediators and diffusers of social tensions in unfamiliar terrain.[53] Furthermore, Aḥmad ʿAlī's position vis-à-vis Marsack did not fit the late-nineteenth century model of colonial foreign rule and native subjectivity. Although he was Marsack's servant and secretary, it would be inaccurate to describe Aḥmad ʿAlī as his "native informant." Quite unlike later surveying enterprises, Aḥmad ʿAlī's narrative, in as much as the traveling party indulges in *sayr o shikār*, bears more similarities to the Mughal litterateur Ānand Rām Mukhliṣ's (d. 1750) account of the Emperor Muḥammad Shāh's slow-moving and epicurean military campaign in the same region in 1746 than it does to later colonial surveys and diplomatic campaigns in British India and along its borders.[54] It could further be argued that in the absence of the yoke of a coherent ideological enterprise, a relatively unknown secretary like

[53] Simon Digby argues that in the context of William Moorcroft's forays into Central Asia, his *munshī* Najaf ʿAlī's diary reveals that Moorcroft often depended on ʿAlī's reputation and goodwill in crucial diplomatic dealings and negotiations. See Simon Digby, "Travels in Ladakh 1820–21: the account of Moorcroft's Persian Munshi, Hajji Sayyid 'Ali, of his travels," *Asian Affairs* 29, no. 3 (1998): 299-311.

[54] See Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. "Discovering the Familiar: Notes on the Travel-Account of Anand Ram Mukhlis, 1745," *South Asia Research* 16, no. 2 (1996): 131-154.

Aḥmad ʿAlī had the license to write and organize his diary with relative editorial autonomy; he was able to magnify certain aspects of the journey and minimize others; and was forgiven his faulty chronograms and many grammatical errors.

The moment in which he was writing could be accurately described as a meeting point of the historical paths of upwardly mobile secretarial service cadres, and military entrepreneurs (many of whom were Europeans who served regional powers and the East India Companies alike). During the second half of the eighteenth century across north India, figures like Antoine-Louis Henri de Polier (d. 1795)—and until the 1770s, several Jesuits—had forged careers for themselves as doctors, engineers and collectors. The services of mobile European military entrepreneurs were especially in demand in Awadh and in Maratha-occupied Bundelkhand.[55] Under these conditions, Marsack, like Polier, "went native:" having initially served the East India Company, he began charting an independent career for himself, navigating the political landscape of north India with relative ease.[56] This necessarily involved being immersed in the Perso-Islamic written world of the Mughals, Afghāns, Marathas, Jāts, Sikhs etc.—the "ecumene" of information reports, administrative orders and belles-lettres. There was therefore, a convergence between mobile military entrepreneurs and the Persographic secretaries who had been steadily growing in numbers, thus making it possible for an unprepossessing secretary like Aḥmad ʿAlī to record his impressions of recent historical events and their artefactual remains in the ruined landscape of the former Rohilla state. In his context, there certainly existed a politically charged network of information, but it did not necessarily prefigure an all-permeating dialogue between colonial ruler and subject. As we trace certain aspects of his account, it

[55] Sanjay Subrahmanyam "The career of colonel Polier and late eighteenth-century orientalism." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 10, no. 1 (2000): 43-60.

[56] Idem., p 50.

becomes apparent that the world he inhabited still clung to multiple bases of power and authority.

3.3 History, Antiquarianism and the Written Record

1. Map of Aḥmad ʿAlī's Journey through Rohilla Afghān Territories.
Source: Google Earth

As the reader makes their way through the *Kawāʾif al-Sair*, it becomes apparent that Aḥmad ʿAlī lacked the flair of a classically trained Persian litterateur. Nevertheless, it is also clear that he greatly admired the habit of taking notes and the practice of putting pen to paper. He was especially impressed by his new patron's tendency to "stay busy with his books and writing."[57] Aḥmad ʿAlī's interest in historiography as the formalized craft of Persianate *tārīkh-nigārī* is also borne out by his having subsequently written a chronicle of the Rohilla Afghāns in North India, the aforementioned work titled *Nuzhat al-Żamāʾir.* His diary, the *Kawāʾif*, contains

[57] It is likely that at least part of the 'books' in question were ledgers containing records of balances owed and recovered. *Kawāʾif*, f 3(v).

numerous vignettes that suggest just how keenly aware of the political value of historiography and the exchange of information in the eighteenth century he was. For instance, he recalls the traveling party's sojourn in the Afghān stronghold of Shāhjahānpūr, where they encountered Shāh Mīyān, son of an Afghān *zamīndār*, who had died in the war that was fought between the Rohillas and the joint forces of the Company and the Nawwāb of Awadh.[58] Aḥmad ʿAlī observes that the Afghān hosts in Shāhjahānpūr gifted Major Marsack a fine copy of the *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, the well-known chronicle of the Mughal Emperor Akbar's (d. 1605) reign, by ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāyūnī.[59] At this same occasion it was revealed that Shāh Mīyān's sister was married to the Rohilla *pater familias* Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān's son Maḥabbat Khān, and that she had sent a cache of secret letters to her "kinsmen in Shāhjahānpūr". The runners who were carrying these letters were murdered en-route, close to *qaṣba* Sāndī. It happened that Major Marsack's men chanced upon these apparently controversial epistles. Aḥmad ʿAlī does not offer more information about the subjects of the letters or why they were so contentious, other than the fact that "if they had slipped into the hands of anyone else in the East India Company, the land and power that had remained with the Rohilla Afghāns would be utterly destroyed."[60] It appears that Major Marsack's having found and read them did not worry his Afghān hosts. Based on this incident, it can be surmised that the relationship between Marsack, his secretary and his Afghān interlocutors was one of mutually reciprocated trust, rather than a set of hegemonic colonial relationships. Marsack's authority was vested in his role as a learned military entrepreneur and as

[58] The Afghān *zamīndār* in this instance was a certain ʿAbdullah Khān.

[59] The *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* is a chronicle of the high-classical Mughal period, which would be reason enough to offer it as a gift. However, the fact that it was a definitively Mughal work authored by a great scholar from Basawar who's *nisba* "Badāyūnī" connected him to later-day Rohilkhand, may have influenced this particular choice of gift.

[60] *Kawāʾif*, f 13(r).

a would-be retiree from Company service who was about to recover sums of money that he had loaned to other military entrepreneurs. Afghāns like Shāh Mīyān who met him felt assured that he would not share sensitive information with the Company or the Nawwāb, although they simultaneously recognized that he was socially positioned to do so.

It is possible to gauge from Aḥmad ʿAlī's curiosity about how written artifacts and information circulated like currency—as well as from his role as a recorder of the events of the journey—that the business of writing was particularly important to him. Apart from carefully observing the exchange of letters and gifts of *tawārīkh* (historical works)—both classic elements of the eighteenth-century "ecumene"—his notes also allude to an antiquarian interest in the buildings and remains of *qaṣbāt* in former Rohilla territory, many of which yet bore the marks of the recent takeover. In Shāhābād for instance, the party entered a *hawelī* (mansion) that had belonged to a Rohilla chief called Dalīl Khān Afghān. Major Marsack met with his descendants who showed him the *ḥammām* (bath-house) as well as a mosque that Dalīl Khān had commissioned. Aḥmad ʿAlī reproduces the chronogram on the façade of the mosque: a habit that he kept up throughout the journey from one *qaṣbāt* to the next. The chronograms in the diary are not limited to those found on Afghān-commissioned buildings; we find similar efforts extended towards Mughal mosques such as the *bādshāhī masjid* in Shāhjahānpūr or the *jāmaʿ masjid* in Barelī. He also took note of the occasional bridge or fortress that was built by a Kāyastha or a Rājpūt *zamīndār*.[61] Like the antiquarians described by Arnaldo Momigliano, Aḥmad ʿAlī pursues a "systematic description" of mosques, forts, mansions and bridges as he encountered them

[61] For instance, he takes note of two solid bridges had been built over a water channel near Bisaulī, by Rāja Kānmal, who was the personal *dīwān* of Nawwāb Dūnde Khān. See *Kawāʾif* f 15(v).

rather than tracing them in a chronological manner.[62] His focus however was on relics that were no older than a hundred years, preoccupied as he was with the recent rise and fall of Rohilla Afghān control in the region.

As he traces the structures that the party encountered along the route, he sharpens his focus on observable details pertaining to the history of Afghān migration and settlement in Kaṭehr, paying particular attention to how the names of places had changed under Rohilla rule, how the cities and *qaṣbāt* of the region had grown and developed under Mughal rule, and how the landscape and patterns of administration were shifting now that the Nawwāb of Awadh and his officers had taken charge. He writes, for example, about *qaṣbāt* like ʿUmarpūr, named after ʿUmar Khān whose son Mangal Khān was a *risāladār* (a commander of troops) in Hafiz Raḥmat Khān's army in 1774.

> After the death of 'Umar Khan his favourite son, who was called Mangal Khān, gathered recruits in the time of the Rohillas, and he rode an elephant, commanded a troop and lived well. He was brave, strong and generous. In his company, there were about five or six thousand horse and foot, of Afghān race and others… Mangal Khān left the service of Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Bahādur and came to the court of Shujāʾ al-Daula, where he was ennobled by service. The late Nawwāb [Shujāʾal-Daula] took note of the bravery and courage of Mangal Khān and made him his companion…[63]

Further on in his description of the father and son, he writes that Mangal Khān was so steadfast in his commitment to his new employer, Shujāʾ al-Daula, that it did not matter that Awadh's army had effectively disbanded and defeated the Rohilla Afghāns under Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān. He claims, in fact, that Mangal Khān lost his life running an errand for Shujāʾ al-Daula! Aḥmad

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[62] See Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 1950.

[63] *Kawāʾif*, f 16(r).

ʿAlī's description of a non-partisan Afghān soldier whose loyalty to his employer overrode his own putative ethnic allegiance is far removed from Yatīmī's caricatures of Afghān settlers in Badāyūn, written about fifty years prior. The difference of perspective can at least partially be accounted for in terms of their respective vantage points: Yatīmī wrote during the period of Afghān occupation, while Aḥmad ʿAlī wrote in the wake of Afghān defeat and characterized Afghān soldiers as victims of circumstances rather than destabilizers of empire. His admiration for the Afghāns of Kaṭehr is made even clearer in his record of those whom he viewed as economically productive agents, developers of commerce and agrarian productivity. For instance, following the party's stopover in ʿUmarpūr, they briefly visit a *kaṭra* (market), established by five generations of Afghāns. Aḥmad ʿAlī notes:

> This *kaṭra* (market) was settled by Muzaffar Khān Afghān and his grandson Kamālzaʾī Khān. Five generations of his family have resided here, and the settlement is approximately 100 years old... The revenue for the whole year of the *qaṣba* was settled at 22,000 rupees and 23 localities (*mauzaʿ*) were attached to it. Kamālzaʾī Khān and Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān were each other's allies and friends, as Z̲ū al-fiqār Khān, Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Bahādur's son, was married to the Kamālzaʾī Khān's daughter. Beyond this, a sense of fraternity between Kamālzaʾī Khān and Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Bahādur had developed.[64]

In similar vein, he supplies anecdotal information about the change in the *jamaʿ* (revenue assessment) and *ʿamal* (collected revenue) statistics since the Nawwāb of Awadh had taken charge of administration in the region, implicitly suggesting that the numbers had fallen since 1774. He notes:

> The *qaṣba* of Tilhar was settled by Tilok Chand, who was one of the *zamīndārān* (landowners) of that place. He was an official (*ahl-i khidmat*) there in the time of ʿĀlamgīr (Aurangzeb), a wealthy man

[64] Idem., f 17(v).

> among the (revenue) farmers of the neighbourhood. The settlement of the *qaṣba* took place a hundred years ago and there are three hundred and seventy localities (*mawzaʿ*) attached to it. Its total revenue assessment (*jamaʿ-bandī*) in the time of the Rohillas was one lakh and twenty thousand rupees. During the rule of Nawwāb Shujāʿ al-Daula up to the time of the administration of Khwāja ʿAyn aI-Dīn it yielded one lakh. This *qaṣba* is called Dehī Kamān.[65]

Adding to his original observations about the landscape, Aḥmad ʿAlī occasionally incorporates information that echoes well-known narratives that figure into standard accounts of Afghān settlement, such as the history of the foundation of Shāhjahānpūr. "The city of Shāhjahānpūr was populated by Afghāns during the Mughal Emperor Shāh Jahān's reign [(1628-1658)]", he writes, and proceeds to offer an account of the city's history which closely mirrors the Afghān Maḥabbat Khān's (d. ?) version in the *Akhbār-i Maḥabbat* (ca. 1772).[66] His diary thus appears to intermittently combine the interests of an antiquarian with those of the chronology-conscious historian, although more the former than the latter. It closely resembles a functional handbook for exploring the then living, inhabited and visible remains of the conquered state of the Rohilla Afghāns. In the 1780s, the sentiments about the injustices of the Rohilla War were resounding, and the young amanuensis appears to have echoed them by way of closely studying what was visibly left of its Afghān occupancy.

It is important to note that Aḥmad ʿAlī's interest in recording chronograms and offering historical anecdotes about structures has an older precedent. Historians have debated the existence of a mode of "indigenous" antiquarianism, prior to the emergence of different veins of European antiquarianism in India. Subrahmanyam cites several instances of pre-modern cultural

[65] Idem., f 16(r).

[66] The author of the *Akhbār-i Maḥabbat* lived in Shāhjahānpūr and is different from Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān's son, Nawwāb Maḥabbat Khān, author of a Pashto-Persian dictionary and a *dīwan* of poetry in Persian.

endeavors that can be understood as antiquarian.[67] For example, in the seventeenth century, several Hindu intellectuals and scribes who had joined the growing Mughal secretarial service cadres wrote about the pre-Islamic past in India as a way of valorizing "Hindustan" and distinguishing it from the rest of the Islamic world. These and other pre-modern acts of cultural objectification, interpretation and translation could approach a definition of antiquarianism, somewhat distinct from similar projects undertaken in the 1800s which were closely associated with European patrons and by extension, European antiquarianism of the nineteenth century. Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's account of the monuments of Delhi, *Āṯār al-Ṣanādīd* (1847) is for example one such enterprise, written by an Indian scholar in a colonial setting, and with an awareness of imminent colonial rule.[68]

3.4 On the Spectrum between the Mughal *safarnāma* and Colonial Gazetteer

For our purposes, we could set aside the slippery question of whether Aḥmad ʿAlī's antiquarianism was part of a European or an "indigenous" tradition, and view his diary as a hinge between an older pattern of comprehending peoples and their layered histories through the cultural artifacts that they left behind, and later colonial forms of enumerative and category-based information-gathering. Readers familiar with the colonial gazetteer will recognize the difference between Aḥmad ʿAlī's dense descriptions of each *qaṣba* and fortification in his path,

[67] Subrahmanyam presents an array of cultural projects to support his case. For instance, the early Mughal projects of having canonical Sanskrit works translated into Persian, involved both an act of cultural comprehension as well as an association of these works with physical sites. He makes similar cases for the Mughal-era *muraqqaʿ* i.e. the royal or aristocratic album of paintings, and comparable acts of collecting and preserving cultural artifacts. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Traces of the Ancients in India," in Alain Schnapp ed., *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2013).

[68] See C. M. Naim, "Syed Ahmad and his two books called 'Asar-al-Sanadid'," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 3 (2011): 669-708.

and the colonial tendency to treat ancient, medieval and modern histories as discrete periods in time.[69] Even though he magnifies the fortresses, mosques, bath-houses, mansions, fields and bridges that were constructed under Rohilla rule, his total endeavor is to incorporate as much of Kaṭehr's Mughal, pre-Mughal and Rohilla past, as well as its current patterns of life, within a single frame. As he threads through these layers, he often pauses to comment on the generations of different communities who were a part of the landscape. For instance, he writes the following about the establishment of Murādābād, its buildings, neighborhoods and inhabitants:

> This town has existed from ancient times. Its foundation is from the time of Rustam Khān Dakhnī, and who lived during Shāh Jahān's reign. He was a man of great enterprise. He built the fort and other places in that town, and he was the initiator of other very great works. The town is also a large one and it is the place of residence mostly of the high-born (*akthar shurafāyān*). Formerly the governorship [*sūbadārī*] of the place was bestowed by the (Mughal) emperor on Nawwāb ʿAẓmat Allah Khān, an inhabitant of Lucknow; and most of the men who chose to settle there were Shaykhzādas. Their neighbourhood (*muhalla*) in that town is well known. The suburbs are located at a distance …The graves of many holy men from old times are also located there, such as the *dargāh* of Sultan Pīr-i Ghayb, close to the inn (*sarāy*), and the Dargāh of Hazrat Shāh Bulāqī Sāhib, other tombs of holy men including the tomb of Nawwāb Asālat Khān (are also there). Additionally, there are a number of *maḥallas* which are well known, such as Nawwābpūr settled by ʿAẓmat Allah Khan, and the *muhalla* of the Kalāls (distillers) called Kasrol… where most of the Baksariyās (footsoldiers) live; and the *muhalla* of *ʿAtāʾiyān* (gift givers), where men live whose profession is mostly *bhagatbāzī*;[70] and the *maḥalla* of the *shīshagarān* (glassmakers). On Thursdays the entertainers (*arbāb-i nashāt*) from the groups of the *tawāʾif* (dancing girls) and

[69] See Blain Auer, "Early Modern Persian, Urdu, and English Historiography and the Imagination of Islamic India under British Rule," *Études de lettres* 2-3 (2014): 199-226.

[70] Aḥmad ʿAlī uses the same word i.e. *bhagatbāzī* to describe dancing in Shāhjahānpūr. In this context, he is likely referring to transgender prostitutes. *Kawāʾif* f 14(v).

> the *bhagatbāz* gather at the Dargāh of Sultānjīū Sāhib (Sultān Pīr-i Ghayb), where most of the men of the city also come.[71]

This sort of descriptive tendency survived in the writings of Company-appointed *munshīyān* on surveying missions in the nineteenth century, though it was eventually superseded by the idiom of the gazetteer, as mentioned above.[72] On the other hand, in portions of Aḥmad ʿAlī's writings the reader is struck by similarities in the observations and moods of Aḥmad ʿAlī and traveling secretaries and writers before him. For instance, he writes about visiting a mosque that was built during the first Mughal Emperor Babur's reign (1526 – 1530) in the *qaṣba* of Sambhal. The mosque was built on the site of a Hindu Shiva temple that went by the name Harmandal. Although it no longer existed, "Hindus continued to bathe in the adjacent sacred pond."[73] Ānand Rām Mukhliṣ—the Mughal noble to whose diary of a leisurely campaign across Rohilla territories we have already likened Aḥmad ʿAlī's account—also visited the site of the Harmandal temple in Sambhal, noting that an important mosque had been erected in its place even as it continued to attract Hindus priests and flower-sellers.[74] Both writers treat the replacement of the temple with a mosque as a source of potency, almost suggesting that it made the venue doubly special.

3.5 Aḥmad ʿAlī and ʿ*Ibrat* (Lesson) from the Past

[71] Idem., f 31(r).

[72] Chapter Two treats of traveling scribes and secretaries in the inter-imperial period.

[73] *Kawāʾif*, f 22(r).

[74] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Acculturation or Tolerance?: Inter-faith Relations in Mughal North India, c. 1750," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, No. 33, 2007, pp. 427-66.

Intermittently in his narrative, Aḥmad ʿAlī's observations give way to a sense of regret when Marsack and the traveling party regard with *chashmahā-yi ʿibrat-bīn* (eyes that behold a warning) the field where the Rohilla chief Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān was "martyred" in the war of 1774.[75] Similarly, writing about Marsack's visit to Āonla, at the site of ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla's tomb, Aḥmad ʿAlī notes:

> He looked at the fort and the buildings of the sardārs of Aonla. During the day he rode out and visited the tombs of ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān, Fath Khān the *khānsāmān* (chief steward), and Nawwāb Saʿd Allāh Khān; and also the masonry tank of the *khānsāmān* which was adjacent to the grave of ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān. He saw the spectacle with eyes that behold a warning.[76]

In this respect, his words echo the *ʿibrat* or warnings issued within a wider discursive sphere, well beyond Kaṭehr. As an example of the opinions that surfaced within the north Indian "ecumene", C. A. Bayly drew upon the writings of the Benares-based *munṣīf* (magistrate) and litterateur ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Khān, the aforementioned member of the "old clerical class" who supplied a *maḥżar* in support of Hastings during his trial. In a work titled *Tārīkh-i Maratha* or 'The History of the Marathas' (1786), ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Khān wrote with disdain about the resurgent campaigns of the expansionist Maratha polity from the Deccan plateau to Hindustan, and he decried what he saw as their audacious challenge to the reigning Mughal sovereign.[77] Bayly pointed out that as an extension of the old imperial order, ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Khān assumed that it was his role to write history in a manner that would instruct the East India Company in good

[75] *Kawāʾif*, f 16(v).

[76] *Kawāʾif*, f 23 (r-v).

[77] At that moment in time in ca. 1789, the East India Company's systematic political control was not a *fait accompli*, and Cornwallis had yet to embark on a program of judicial and administrative reforms that codified Indian penal law and introduced the "permanent settlement."

governance so that it might better serve the Mughal Empire. In fact, one of the titles of a manuscript copy of ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Khān's history of the Marathas is *ʿIbratnāma-yi ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Khān.* Although we need not make too much of a ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Khān's role in giving it this title—which was likely attributed by a reader and/or a scribe—the use of the word *ʿibrat* suggests that ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Khān's chronicle was indeed interpreted as a warning by those who drafted, circulated and read it. Recently, historians have drawn our attention to the use of the notion of *ʿibrat* in early eighteenth-century *tawārikh***,** mostly as lessons that were directed at Mughal emperors to whom ambitious groups like the Sayyids of Bārha, as well as backstabbing members of the royal family, posed a grave threat.[78] Similarly, through its recollection of the Marathas' foiled expansionist endeavor, the *ʿIbratnāma-yi ʿAlī Ibrāhīm* contains recommendations about how political aims might legitimately be realized under late Mughal conditions.[79] The term *ʿibrat* as it was used in eighteenth-century Mughal India thus had wide application, ranging from warnings issued in the context of the Bārha Sayyids, to the encroachments of an expansionist polity such as that of the Marathas. In the manner in which Aḥmad ʿAlī uses the word however, *ʿibrat* refers to the lessons to be learnt from the devastation of a short-lived state ruled by Afghān migrants who were "betrayed by their own kinsmen and cheated by the power-hungry."[80] The warnings issued by the "old clerical classes" and the new regional secretarial service cadres although similar in their moralism, can be distinguished by

[78] For a discussion on references to *ʿibrat* in late Mughal works, see A. Kaicker, *Unquiet City: Making and Unmaking Politics in Mughal Delhi, 1707-39* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014).

[79] One finds a similar use of *ʿibrat viz.* as a lesson to be learnt from the threats that had been posed to the Mughal Empire in Khayr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ilāhābādī's *ʿIbratnāma*, written in 1782. See C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p 83.

[80] *Kawāʾif,* f16(v).

scale: ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Khān dwells on the threats to Mughal sovereignty, while Aḥmad ʿAlī laments the regional politics that obstructed a Mughal successor state's path to prosperity. One usage should not be read as a pastiche of the other, but as sufficient evidence of a thematic continuum between perceptions of troubles at the imperial center and in the Mughal provinces that had become autonomous regional states. Aḥmad ʿAlī's diary demonstrates how the breakdown of a regional state struck a chord with a figure who closely observed politics as it appeared to him—emanating from the *qaṣbāt*—where he, and Yatīmī before him, were based.

IV. Conclusion

At a remove from Mughal and successor-state chronicles and the Company's archives, the present chapter has focused on a far less state-centered order of writing, one that reveals neither the redolent eloquence of the Mughal court and its litterateurs, nor the ostensibly colonized expression of the native informant of the nineteenth century. This has allowed us to move away from the burdens of an overly categorical view of the period, and to enter instead into the worlds of those who witnessed fragile polities rise and fall and used the opportunity to reflect on the interplay between regional and larger imperial political upheavals; state and subject; past and present.

The preceding pages have traced the writings of two *munshīyān*, the first of whom witnessed the rise and the second, the fall, of the Rohilla-Afghān-ruled region of Kaṭehr, a "successor state" to the Mughal Empire. Yatīmī, the author of the *Inshāʾ-yi Hosh Afzā'* was a scribe based in the district of Badāyūn during a period in which the Afghān occupation of the area generated ripples through the provincial administration. Yatīmī observed these changes and operated as a pedagogue, a moral anchor and a go-between to friends, students and allies who

were changing jobs or were involved in legal battles with local officials. His letters echo the reverberations of Mughal decentralization as it permeated the rhythm of life in his hometown and the wider ecosystem of the Kaṭehr region. The second set of observations were grounded in the same region, written by a mobile and a less-experienced scribe who brought an antiquarian's curiosity to bear on his study of the Rohilla landscape. Aḥmad ʿAlī's *Kawāʾif al-Sayr*, assumes analytical functions that are shared across multiple spectrums of Persianate writing in South Asia. It mirrors a regional tradition of retelling the past as well as a more global eighteenth-century tradition of writing about empire; an early-modern idiom of documenting travels or campaigns and the modern colonial gazetteer; an antiquarian form of note-taking as well as a historical chronicle.

Both *munshīyān* valued literary practices and were attuned to a militarized world in which to write and communicate was to wield a particular kind of power. Although Aḥmad ʿAlī does not appear to have had a legacy and continued readership as Yatīmī did (until his work was struck off reading lists in 1853), both figures reflect the forms of draftsmanship that were in demand at the regional level during the eighteenth century. Both figures also betray an affective relationship with the Kaṭehr region: Yatīmī advocated for the rights of the *atītān* of Bagdhar, while Aḥmad ʿAlī despaired at the disappearance of the Rohilla chiefs who had fought alongside Ḥafīẓ Raḥmat Khān and their short-lived control over the region that he argues had boosted agrarian productivity, facilitated the construction of mosques, forts and bridges, and created an equilibrium across the different communities which inhabited the neighborhoods within their purview.

To be sure, these modes of documentation changed within a few decades after the East India Company incorporated the Rohilla territories into the Ceded Provinces in 1802. As colonial

information-gathering projects were unveiled, a subtle negotiation took place between the older eighteenth-century forms of regional scribal cultures and the Company's ambitions to rationalize the administration of its newly acquired territories. In Kaṭehr, this can be seen in works such as Ghulām Yaḥya's *Yāzda Taswīr* (Eleven Illustrations) written in ca. 1820. Robert Glyn, a magistrate and judge in Barelī and Bulandshahr hired Yaḥya to prepare a price list of the goods that were traded in the *bāzār* of Barelī. Accordingly, Yahya appears to have gone the extra mile and produced an annotated list of the different occupational groups and rates at which their goods were sold in the form of an illustrated manuscript with paintings of merchants and their trades.[81] These mismatches between an instruction to harvest information for the purpose of governance and the perceived agenda of the information gatherer often occurred under early colonial rule during the first half of the nineteenth century. Yahya's illustration of a *kabāb*-maker in the manuscript, for example, was probably of no strategic importance to his patron, Robert Glyn's judgeship. These inconsistencies between the imperatives of early colonial rule and the written works that were produced under its tutelage notwithstanding, it is however a fact that by the 1820s, the East India Company began to rapidly absorb the services of *munshīyān* in recently ceded territories across the subcontinent. Scribal cultures began to factor in this change at the regional level, and, as the following chapters will suggest, diplomats, soldiers and dispossessed elites too were forced to respond to and contend with the piecemeal transition to colonial rule.

[81] See M.A. Farooqi, *Crafting Traditions: Documenting Trades and Crafts in Early 19th Century North India* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2005). On the theme of "local" Muslim identities and how they were formed in Rāmpur under indirect colonial rule, see Razak Khan, "Local Pasts: Space, Emotions and Identities in Vernacular Histories of Princely Rampur," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58, no. 5 (2015): 693-731.

Chapter 2

Looking West, Looking East:

Two Trajectories of Diplomacy in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries

I. Introduction:

From the mid to late-eighteenth century, as the Rohilla state rose and fell, two incipient empires presented distinct trajectories of diplomacy to the service figures of north India. To the west was the newly formed Afghān Empire (1747 – 1842) founded by Aḥmad Shāh "Durrānī", initially based in Qandahār, and subsequently in Kābul. To the east, in Bengal, the English East India Company, having secured the right to collect revenue in 1765, began competing with other contemporary regional powers, transforming itself from a trading company to an expansive state.

The first of these—the Durrānī empire in the west—held the promise of a possible Afghān-Mughal imperial alliance that might restore the authority of the Timūrid sovereign. Over the course of Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī's multiple military campaigns in north India (1748 – 1767), he had seized the opportunity to strike an alliance with the Rohilla Afghān chiefs in Kaṭehr, even placing one of them, Najīb al-Daula, as the Mughal emperor's *mīr bakhshī* (chief paymaster). In the process, the Rohilla territories became an outpost and a political satellite of the emerging Durrānī empire. [1] Following the rapid succession of kings in the Mughal capital of Shāhjahānābād in the 1750s, and the East India Company's takeover of the Rohilla territories in 1774, a set of disaffected Mughal princes, who had escaped the royal palace, were joined on a

[1] The Rohilla Afghāns were reluctant to recognize Durrānī imperial claims until the 1750s, by which time the Durrānī empire had several military successes to its credit. It was then that the notion of an Indo-Afghān connection appeared in public political discourse. See Jos Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire: C. 1710-1780* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) pp 60-61.

delegation to Kabūl by an Afghān courtier from Rāmpur, who served as the princes' agent (*wakīl*), The aim of the visit was to request the then Durrānī ruler, Timūr Shāh (d. 1793) to assist them in staging a coup in Delhi and instate one of the Mughal princes as emperor. Even though this west-facing diplomatic mission was cut short by 1800, it alerts us to a specific political imagination that was possible for a given window of time, one that sought to revive an older form of imperial rule under a Muslim dynast. This imagination is mirrored in the writings of the *wakīl* of the delegation, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān.

Simultaneously, a growing number of *munshīyān* in north India turned east and associated themselves with the East India Company which had virtually seized control of Bengal in 1765 and presented the possibility of a new form of empire in India. The Company emerged as a major political player in the array of regional states—such as the Rohilla territories—that had emerged in the eighteenth century. Under these conditions, Persographic service figures like secretaries and *wukalāʾ* (agents) were increasingly drawn to the Company as a source of stability and regular employment. Many of these men hailed from lineages of itinerant service at the Mughal court and its regional appendages, and they increasingly placed their faith in the notion that the Company would preserve the forms and ideals of Mughal sovereign authority. Figures like Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān Ṭabāṭabaʾī (d. 1806) and Khayr al-Dīn Muḥammad "Illāhābādī" (d. 1827) typify this trend: both were active as agents for the Company when it launched its attacks on Awadh, the Rohilla territories, and Benares over the course of the latter half of the eighteenth century. They each engaged in diplomacy on behalf of the Company and witnessed its transformation into a conquest state.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, the Durrānī-Mughal alliance and the imperial revival that it represented was no longer viable. The East India Company had won numerous

wars of conquest and had pacified most of its regional competitors. As it set about demilitarizing northern India, it created a class of purportedly self-governing landed gentry, and it absorbed the local functionaries who had been working for them into its new administrative apparatus. In addition to these men, the Company continued to recruit the kind of Persographic secretaries whom it had once deployed to communicate and exchange information with the other regional powers. It redirected them to fulfil its needs for a cadre of bureaucrats to conduct more regularized forms of administration. Its previous focus on diplomacy between "equivalent" powers was now replaced by its need to form an administration of its own. Company officials were careful however not to appear politically interventionist, engaged as they were in a cautious image-building exercise, while the Mughal Empire and the regional powers that had succeeded it, held onto varying but unmistakably reduced degrees of political authority. The Rāmpur-based scholar-turned-administrative officer, ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān worked for the East India Company in such a context. In his memoirs, he documented his experiences as a servant of the Company and as a scholar who was deeply connected with regional and urban lineages and networks of well-known masters and their disciples.

The present chapter explores this arc—running through the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century divide—through the above-mentioned service figures who were based in or had served the Rohilla territories. By analyzing the Persian memoirs of these figures, we will explore each of the two trajectories of diplomacy, the political conceptions that drove them and how they unfolded. Each of these examples will also demonstrate that the teachers, charismatic men and saintly figures i.e. the longstanding networks of scholarly sociability that sustained these Persographic servicemen in the eighteenth century, continued to do so when they began to cater to the bureaucratic interests and the administrative requirements of the early colonial state.

II. Looking West: Mediating an 'Encounter' between Mughal and Durrānī Royalty:

2.1 ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān's Context

By the late-eighteenth century, the Kaṭehr region had been subjected to a long sequence of changes in political authority, as alluded to in Chapter One. A stream of Afghāns from "Roh"—the mountainous region surrounding the Kābul river valley—had settled in Kaṭehr between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, claiming land assignments that had previously belonged to a class of Rājpūt *zamīndārs*, and formed a state in 1745 that intermittently asserted autonomy from the Mughal capital. Adjacent to the Rohilla territories was a settlement of a smaller group of Afghān migrants from the "Bangash" region north of the Sulaymān mountains, who served the Mughal Empire as military jobbers and formed their own state after securing land rights from the emperor Farrukhsīyar along the eastern edges of Kaṭehr in 1714. [2] By the close of the eighteenth century both regional states were demilitarized and pacified by the East India Company. The Nawwāb of Awadh seized control over revenue administration in the Rohilla territories in 1775, leaving only the tiny city of Rāmpur under the administrative control of a single branch of the family of Rohilla Afghān chiefs.

It was under such conditions that ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān (ca. 1757 - ?) grew up in a household of servicemen who over successive generations had been attached to the Rohilla Afghān chiefs.[3]

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[2] E. I. Brodkin, "British India and the Abuses of Power: Rohilkhand Under Early Company Rule." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 10, no. 2 (1973): 129-156. See pp.133-134 for a brief account of how the Rohilla Afghāns secured proprietary rights over Kaṭehr.

[3] ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān belonged to one of the secretarial service households from Rāmpur that appears in the *Waqāʾiʿ ʿAbd al-Qādir Khānī* as an entry under the heading "Afghān *ʿulamāʾ*." See *Waqāʾiʿ ʿAbd al-Qādir Khānī*, BL APAC IO Islamic 3049, f 20(v).

He spent most of his childhood in Rāmpur, and during his teenage years he forged common cause with a cast of disaffected elites: two princes of the Mughal royal family and a major political power broker, ʿImād al-Mulk (d.1800). He journeyed westwards with them to the Durrānī Afghān emperor's court in Kabūl to request his aid in staging a coup in the Mughal court. The entire mission to Kabūl was documented in his unpublished personal memoirs, titled *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī* ('Abbās's History). The original manuscript—if it still exists—does not feature in any manuscript catalog, but an undated later copy (ca. early twentieth century) is preserved at the Raza Library in Rāmpur. [4] How did an officer at the comparatively small and less powerful court of Rāmpur manage not only to meet the Durrānī ruler, Timūr Shāh (d. 1793), but also request his assistance in restoring Mughal imperium in north India? Given that his memoirs contain the only known first-hand account of this journey to Kabūl, we might begin to search for answers there.

His narrative opens by outlining the familial, intellectual and spiritual capital that prepared him for his journey as well as the circumstances that prompted him to write his story. By way of his personal background, he writes that he was the son of a Rānīzaʾī Afghān *ākhūnd* or preacher called Muḥammad Ziyārat Khān who went by the epithet "Mulla Faqīr" (d. 1775).[5] The Rānīzaʾī, were a subset of the Yūsufzaʾī tribe who settled in the Swāt valley in the sixteenth century, and frequented a trade and migration route between Swāt and North India as horse

[4]The twentieth-century copy of *Tārīkh-i-ʿAbbāsī* does not offer a chronogram or a date of authorship. There is a single comment on the fly-leaf that states that the manuscript was purchased from one Bashīr al-Dīn Khān and placed in the Raza Library's collection in 1916. See *Tarīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, Persian MS 4466, Riżā Library, Rāmpur.

[5] In the late 1800s the Rānīzaʾī were recorded as a sub-tribe of the Yūsufzāʾī, occupying land across the Totai Hills and the lower end of the Swat Valley. See William H. Paget, *A Record of the Expeditions Undertaken Against the North-West Frontier* (Calcutta: 1874).

traders and soldiers between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.[6] Various accounts describe Mulla Faqīr's close relationship with the Rohilla Afghān leader Hāfiz Raḥmat Khān (d.1774) and ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān states that his father actually accompanied him when he migrated from the Afghān *wilāyat* to Kaṭehr. His father was additionally famous for his otherworldly qualities; one account in particular suggests that he was buried by djinns in the *qaṣba* of Jasoli in Kaṭehr.[7] ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān writes that he himself was eighteen years old during the first Rohilla War (1774) in which his brother Irādat Khān fought alongside Hāfiz Raḥmat Khān and that the family's ties with the Rohilla chiefs outlasted the Rohilla War. He states that he maintained a close relationship with the Rāmpur court after the East India Company instated Fayzullah Khān as the first Nawwāb, though he does not offer details about the kind of service he undertook.[8]

ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān's ancestry is a prominent theme in his writing. He writes of the long-standing ties that his family had with both Swāt in the Kabūl river valley and Kaṭehr in north India, thereby presaging the rest of the narrative of the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsi*, which centers on his journey back to Swāt from Kaṭehr across the well-worn path that Afghān horse-traders and soldiers had been traveling along for centuries. He writes:

> This base slave… Muḥammad ʿAbbās may God forgive him, is an Afghān Surī Banī Rānarī Zaʾī, well known as "Swātī". Swāt is a *mulk* (country) in *wilāyat* (the Afghān homeland) … For a long time, this land produced the *sultānān-i jahāngīriyya* (world-conquering

[6] For a detailed analysis of the history of Afghān migrants in north India and their participation in the horse trade, see Gommans idem., chapter 3.

[7] *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, p.14. On the social organization of the Swat Pathans and the formation of descent groups among them see Fredrik Barth, *Political Leadership Among the Swat Pathans* (London: The Athlone Press, 1965), chapter 3 and 6. Barth argues that there were certain conditions in Swat, wherein a *mullah* (priest) could become a *faqīr* (saint).

[8] ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān writes of his father's relationship with Hāfiz Raḥmat Khān, "My father served him selflessly in every manner as a shepherd bringing water to the thirsty from his own reservoirs. After my father died, his grave continued to be a source of abundance just as he was when he was alive." *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, p.16.

> kings). In reality these sultans were Mughals: some describe them as Tājik while others describe them as Turk. For hundreds of years they ruled that *mulk* (country). It was thus that the great *malikān* (lords) like Malik Sultān Khān and Malik Sulaymān Khān and Malik Aḥmad Khān gave their sisters and daughters [in marriage] to the *sultānān-i jahāngīriyya*, and they used these relationships as a means to enter Swāt and settle there. With the passage of time as the sultanate became weak, the *malikān* were able to control Swāt. Nagardharam (Nangarhār), Toṛ and Pakhal are still under their control. My deceased father Muḥammad Zīyārat Khān, who swam deep in the ocean of truths, immersed himself in divine knowledge: a revealer of the wisdom of the world, both that which is seen and that which is hidden, stated for the sake of leaving a record behind for humankind that we are so and so, and have descended from Mughals and Afghāns.[9]

ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān thus identifies himself as a "Swātī" who had descended from the "*sultānān-i jahāngīriyya*" (world-conquering kings) whom he describes as essentially "Mughal" i.e. Mongol but were also described in written sources as "Tājiks" or "Turks." The term "*jahāngīriyya*," it should be noted, is not hyperbole; rather, it is an epithet for a specific set of rulers, the Tājik and Turk sultāns who purportedly ruled over the region north of the Kabūl river, between the Tagāb tributary and the Pīr Panjāl mountain range, as well as a small area south of the Kābul river during the period from ca. 1150 – 1500.[10] In Swāt, the last of these rulers was Sultān Uways, whom the Yūsufzaʾī Afghāns gradually displaced when they moved into the region in the sixteenth century. It appears that the "Maliks" whom ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān refers to—his own ancestors—were local Yūsufzaʾī headmen who married into the Tājik ruling family in Swāt, and thereby leveraged themselves to positions of authority in the region, particularly over

[9] *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, p.13-14.

[10] For a history of the Tājik sultāns of Swat, see H. G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan and Part of Baluchistan: Geographical, Ethnographical, and Historical* (London: Secretary of State for India in Council, 1888). pp 51-53.

"Nagardharam, Tor and Pakhal."[11] He states that they had maintained their control over the region well into the late eighteenth century, when he was writing the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*. Descendants of the Yūsufzaʾī "Māliks" such as his own family, continued to retain their influence in Swāt, and as he suggests, carried that influence with them when they migrated to North India.

This particular detail about ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān's heritage echoes the writings of Ākhūnd Darweza (d. 1638), who also traces his own descent from the *sultānān-i jahāngīriyya*, in particular, from one Sultān Bahrām.[12] Although ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān does not overtly express any affiliation with Ākhūnd Darweza or his writings in this account of his own heritage, the fact that both figures claim descent from the *sultānān-i jahāngīriyya* has wider historical ramifications. Ākhūnd Darweza was a steadfast opponent of the *Raushanīyya*, a late-16th century mystical gnostic movement which originated in the Tirah valley, just west of Swāt, and which posed a constant threat to Mughal authority in the north-west frontier of the empire.[13] Several Yūsufzaʾī Afghāns—possibly including descendants of the "Maliks" whom ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān refers to—were followers of Ākhūnd Darweza and were able to migrate to and settle in Mughal India as well as secure employment in its administration.[14] By claiming to have descended from Afghāns

[11] *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, p.15.

[12] See H.G. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan*, p. 51.

[13] For an analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of the Raushaniyya movement, see William Sherman, "Mountains and Messiahs: The Roshaniyya, Revelation, and Afghan Becoming" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2017).

[14] These Afghān migrants to north India preceded the wave of Yūsufzaʾī migrants (who came to be known as Rohilla Afghāns) by at least a hundred years. In fact, there was considerable tension between older and newer Afghān settlers in Awadh. See Iqbal Husain in Barnett, "Jagirdari in the Eighteenth Century: A Case Study of Two Afghan Families of Western Awadh," in *Rethinking Early Modern India*, ed., Richard Barnett (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2002), 119-129.

who had married into Tājik and Turkic ruling families and maintained positive relations with the Mughal Empire from the sixteenth – eighteenth centuries, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān implies that his own heritage was woven into the historical fabric of pre-modern empires. Give that chroniclers had long perpetuated the trope that Afghāns were rustic, pastoral figures whose forms of social organization were removed from urbane, cosmopolitan and courtly spaces, it was important for him to affirm that he differed from Afghāns who did not align themselves with the principles that undergirded imperial state formation.[15] He further claims that he received credible assurance from his father, that their own family had indeed descended from Mughals and Afghāns, although he unconvincingly feigns some embarrassment at this boast, adding that "it must be remembered that the secrets of one's heritage are not very important as we all come from nothing and return to naught." Such disclaimers notwithstanding, it is clear in subsequent pages that his connection to the *sultānān-i jahāngīriyya* is a crucial element in his memoirs which are largely centered on his claims to have been an imperial liaison between the Durrānī Empire, the Mughal Empire, and the state of Rāmpur.

But what prompted ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān to write a memoir about the delegation to Kabūl and his own role as a broker between empires? Unlike the *munshī* Aḥmad ʿAlī, from the previous chapter, or the newly minted colonial officer ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān - whose writings will be discussed in the second half of this chapter -ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān did not have a patron in the East India Company. His reasons for writing his memoirs stemmed from two stated concerns. First, he had a self-professed eagerness to let it be known that he once had a career as a bureaucrat between two major empires, although he fell on hard times in later years as he writes that his

[15] For a critical assessment of the historical biases against Afghāns in Mughal historiography i.e. the kind against which ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān might have wanted to defend himself, see Robert Nichols, "Reclaiming the Past" in *Afghan History Through Afghan Eyes*, ed. Nile Green (New York: OUP, 2015) pp 213-214.

"fortunes were drastically altered" when he sat down to write his story.[16] Writing this self-aggrandizing work was perhaps part of an effort to rehabilitate his image upon his return. His second stated concern was to write a narrative of political events that superseded the array of Rohilla histories that had been written by Rohilla Afghān chiefs or under courtly patronage. This is clear when he skims over the events of the first Rohilla War, informing the reader that they could look up the details of how Hāfiz Raḥmat Khān "was betrayed by his military leaders and close companions" in the battle against Shujāʾ al-Daula, in the widely accessible *Gulistān-i-Raḥmat* by Nawwāb Muḥammad Mustajāb Khān Bahādur."[17]

That ʿAbbās Khān had literary pretensions is evident in his claim to having studied metrics and his having had his verses edited and corrected by expert teachers twice in his lifetime. Both of these occasions feature prominently in his memoirs. The first was in Rāmpur, under the tutelage of one "ʿ*ārif* [enlightened] and peerless poet" Mīyān Muḥammad Qāyam Sāhab also known as Qāyam Chāndpūrī, an occasionally profane student of the Urdu satirist and poet Mirzā Rafīʿ al-Dīn Sauda (d. 1781), who was based in Lucknow at the time. ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān met his second literary tutor during his journey to visit the Durrānī ruler when he stopped in the town of Khayrpūr in Punjāb. It was there that he met a well-known member of the Chishtī Sūfī order, Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad, who was the *khalīfa* or successor to the Chishtī eighteenth-century Chishtī saint Maulāna Fakhr al-Dīn (b.1714/15). Apparently, Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad also offered to read ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān's verses. It is thus implied that the two-fold intentions of drafting the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī* were to make a name for the writer as a powerful political liaison between empires, and to leave a mark as a poet and writer of merit.

[16] *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, p. 15.

[17] Idem., p.16.

2.2 From Rāmpur to Kabūl with a Runaway Prince[18]

ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān's account of the delegation to Kabūl is a detailed narration of a seven-year-long journey across North India through Multan to Kabūl, which he spent accompanying a runaway Mughal prince called Mīrzā Aḥsan Bakht (d.?), and ʿImād al-Mulk (d. 1800), the grandson of the influential Mughal nobleman Niẓām al-Mulk Āsaf Jāh (d. 1748). His journey out of Rāmpur began when he chanced upon Shāh ʿĀlam II's son Mīrzā Jawān Bakht Jahāndār Shāh (d. 1788) who escaped the fort of Shāhjahānābād and traveled to Lucknow and from there to Rāmpur. At the time, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān was a sixteen-year-old who had recently had the good fortune of having Chāndpūrī edit his poetry and give him lessons in writing balanced (*mawzūn*) verse. Other than this, we know very little about precisely what ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān did in Rāmpur before he met Mirzā Jawān Bakht, who was impressed enough with him to employ him as his *bārbardār* (porter) on a journey to Benares and from there to Delhi. In Delhi, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān was ennobled and given the rank of 5000 *sawār* and 5000 *manṣab* as well as the lofty title Iqtidār al-Daula ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān Bahādur Samsām Jang.[19] He writes with a bit of self-awareness, "Although it seems like I am tooting my own horn and it is unbecoming to do so, I am now living in abject conditions and writing about my glory days allows me some respite."[20] The elevation of his status, from porter to commander of horses, helped him to get a foot in the door beyond politics in the *qaṣba* of Kaṭehr, so much so that when Mirzā Jawān Bakht died, the

[18] For one of the few references to this delegation see Birendra Varma, "Indian Solicitations for Afghan Military Intervention, 1793-1800," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 32 (1970): 38-43.

[19] *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, p.21.

[20] Idem., p.15.

governor of Akbarābād (Agra), Ismāʿil Beg Khān Ḥamadānī, too sought and enlisted his services. For a time, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān remained in Ḥamadānī's service in Akbarābād, but after an incident of unrest in Delhi where the Maratha leader Mahadjī Shinḍe (d. 1794) who was *wakīl-i muṭlaq* i.e. protector of the Mughal emperor, attacked Ḥamadānī. ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān and his patron escaped to Jaipur, the latter having found his reserves depleted.[21] At this point yet *another* Mughal prince, Mīrzā Aḥsan Bakht, who had escaped the royal fort in Delhi and had also fought alongside Hamdānī, took ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān under his wing. Mirzā Aḥsan Bakht planned to approach the Durrānī emperor, Timūr Shāh with a request to assist him in claiming the throne in Shāhjahānābād. It was also in this context that a polarizing figure in Delhi—the abovementioned ʿImād al-Mulk Āsaf Jāh (d. 1800)—joined the traveling party making its way to Kabūl.[22]

The figure of the runaway Mughal prince was certainly not unfamiliar in these years. Company officials wrote exaggeratedly of the unwholesome imprisonment of the extended royal family within Shāhjahānābād.[23] One of the better-known of these princes, Mīrzā ʿAlī Bakht ʿAzfarī', escaped the *qayd-i salāṭīnī* roughly around the same time as Mīrzā Aḥsan Bakht, whom he refers to in his memoirs as a rival. In the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī,* one catches a whiff of the events in Shāhjahānābād that seem to have been pushing these frustrated and anxious princes out of confinement. Mahājī Shinde's regency in Delhi, during which he wielded control over large parts

[21] Idem., p.17-18.

[22] There are some inconsistencies in the narrative with respect to precisely when ʿImād al-Mulk joined the party.

[23] See Alam and Subrahmanyam's study of the Mughal prince Mirzā ʿAlī Bakht's (1759-1818) memoirs, *Wāqiʿāt-i Azfarī*. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Political Thought of a Late-Eighteenth-Century Prince," in *Writing the Mughal World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 433.

of north India (*musallat-i tamāmī mulk az Ujjayn tā Dehlī*), appears to have been a particularly disruptive force in the Mughal capital.

As they made their way to Kabūl, the prince, our writer, and ʿImād al-Mulk paused in Khayrpūr, Punjab, to meet the *ʿārif-i kāmil* (wholly enlightened one)*"* Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad (d. 1805), *khalīfa* or successor, of the Chishtī saint Maulāna Fakhr al-Dīn (fl. ca. 1714 - 1780).[24] It is worth noting that ʿImād al-Mulk was a devoted admirer and disciple of Maulāna Fakhr al-Dīn, and he even wrote a *manqibāt* (encomium) in praise of him. It is quite likely that he had encountered his fellow disciple, Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad, before this particular meeting in Khayrpūr. ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān took to Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad, claiming that the affection was mutual and that the *khalīfa* treated him as he would his own son (*be khitāb-i buland pāye farzandī sharaf-i-ikhtisās bakhshīd*). He offers up a *ghazal* in praise of him, foregrounding in particular his wondrous poetic skills (*shāʿir-i akmal*). He further claims that upon meeting the *khalīfa* "the temperament of this lowly nobody [himself] was immediately directed towards Persian verse." As stated above, Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad was the second of his poetry teachers, but the one with whom he spent the most time. In fact, during the seven years that he traveled across Punjab, Sindh and Kabūl, he would return to Khayrpūr to have his poems in Persian and Hindi edited by Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad, producing in this time a complete *dīwān* of *qaṣāʾid* and *manāqib* in both languages.[25]

[24] ʿImād al-Mulk returned to Khayrpūr periodically in the latter half of his life, to spend his remaining years with Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad. See A.S. Bazmee Ansari, "ʿImād al-Mulk," P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* Consulted online on 11 August 2018 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3547>.

[25] *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, p.19.

Historians of early modern Islamic empires can attest that it was not unusual in the eighteenth-century for a party plotting a political coup to include a pilgrimage to the shrine of a Ṣūfī, a charismatic figure or a teacher in their itinerary. In South Asia alone, numerous imperial and regional polities from the Mughals to the Afghāns, Marathas and the Sikhs, initiated political campaigns with the blessings of charismatic figures, some of whom even accompanied military campaigns or initiated them.[26] In this sense, the journey to Kabūl via the Chishtī shrine at Khayrpūr was very much in the idiom of pre-modern imperial military action and diplomacy, an idiom which seeped into the East India Company's military organization but which it ultimately jettisoned after 1857. In a broader sense, the visit to Khayrpūr was part of a particular teleological sequence of events in ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān's narrative: as he made his way from one prince to another, one poet to the next, and to the Chishtī shrine, he built upon his inherited social capital by ennobling himself with the requisite graces and patronage for an audience with the Durrānī ruler, Timūr Shāh.

2.3 A Hindustani *Wakīl* at the Durrānī Court

One of Timūr Shāh's representatives and fellow tribesman, Muḥammad Muẓaffar Khān Sadozaʾī, greeted the long-traveled party in Multan. He welcomed them with rich gifts and escorted them through Ḍera Ismāʿil Khān, across the River Aṭak, and finally to Kabūl. ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān—in his capacity as the group's *wakīl* (representative)—was the first to be granted a meeting with the Durrānī ruler whom he presented with a petition from his benefactor, the

[26] For references to regional powers and their patronage of Ṣūfī saints and their shrines, see for example, Nile Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 61. In a separate work, Green writes. Idem., *Islam and the Army in Colonial India: Sepoy Religion and the Service of Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), chapter 2.

Mughal prince. These exchanges took place in Pushto, the "*zabān-i Afghānī*", which ʿAbbās claims to have known well (although he does not appear to have written poetry in Pushto). He presented Timūr Shāh with his fellow travelers' request for an audience, and said:

> This lowly servant recalls the kindness bestowed by Shāh Tahmāsb ʿAbbās of Iṣfahān upon the emperor Humayūn in his hour of need […] which nobody has ever been able to match again (*hīchkas irāde-yi īn maʿanī namūde*)… and it will be remembered for as long as the world will turn… it has remained proverbial (*żarb al-mas̲l*) in Hindustān to this day.[27]

With these words, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān claims to have reminded the Durrānī ruler of the time when Sher Shāh Sur conquered north India and the Mughal emperor Humāyūn (d.1556) sought refuge at the court of the Safavid ruler, Shāh Ṭahmāsb (d. 1576). We can gauge that he invoked this piece of history as an analogy for the importance of forging trans-imperial alliances, but also as evidence that there had been a precedent for such exchanges in the Mughal past that Timūr Shāh could follow by guaranteeing Mirzā Aḥsan Bakht and ʿImād al-Mulk refuge at his court.

Shortly after the meeting with Timūr Shāh, Mīrzā Aḥsan Bakht's son arrived and joined the gathering (presumably having escaped from Shāhjahānābād, like his father and princes before him). His reception at the royal court in Kabūl was enacted with the *rasm o āyīn-i Hindustānī* (the proper Hindustani manner and customs). After the courtly visitors were dismissed, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān was singled out and detained by Timūr Shāh so that he could be given exclusive charge of numerous gifts of camels, military equipment, jewels, robes of honor and much more for the Hindustānī guests. As if this were not enough, the Durrānī ruler even offered to dispatch his own son along with a formidable contingent (*chand daste-yi jarrār o*

[27] *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, pp. 27-28.

khūnkhwār) to accompany the visitors back to India.[28] ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān foregrounds all of Timūr Shāh's gestures to assist the Hindustānī delegates in their mission to overrun (*taskhīr*) North India and to confirm and endorse the validity of this particular cast of political claimants. Given that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, upstart military chiefs and charismatic leaders had crafted polities ranging from sultanates to semi-autonomous regional states in South Asia, it was important for ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān to distinguish the Mughal princes and their proposed campaign from the abounding ambitious parvenus of the period. In describing this sequence of verbal and customary exchanges that took place in the court, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān continuously alludes to the ways in which he alone was uniquely qualified to straddle multiple imperial environments. His own Mughal and Afghān heritage; his facility in Persian, Hindi and Pushto; and his loyal service to his princely employees, each factor into his role as a *wakīl* who was capable of bridging imperial boundaries—both literal and cultural—in order to forge a successful alliance which would be used to reclaim Mughal authority over Delhi.

Unfortunately, a number of events waylaid these plans: Mirzā Aḥsan Bakht for one experienced a crisis and appeared to have experienced a complete nervous breakdown (*az bargashtagī-yi bakht wa iqbāl-i shūrish, junūn-i kamāl tawaqquf o ahmāl-i mizāj-i shān numāyān shud*). What then would become of the plan to place him on the throne? This problem was compounded by the fact that Tīmūr Shāh—with whom the party had been in talks—died in 1793. The group of Hindustānīs was at Multan at this point and they decided to lend a hand to one of the Durrānī princes, Zamān Shāh (d. 1844), in the ensuing succession wars that unfolded. ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān claims to have been unwavering in his support of the new Durrānī ruler, and his actions were rewarded accordingly. Zamān Shāh agreed that it was expedient that they all

[28] Idem. p.28

resume the plan to go to Hindustān with a strong contingent, as his father had promised. This plan was agreeable to all except ʿImād al-Mulk, who had returned to the shrine of Maulāna Fakhr al-Dīn at Khayrpūr and would only join the party if a few conditions were met. He said,

> "These days I have busied myself in the remembrance of God and have abjured the temporal world. However, it is incumbent on every Muslim to observe the word of the Qurʾān: 'Obey God, obey the Prophet and obey the appointed ones among you.' In these times of *fasād* [sedition] when the winds of disbelief blow strong from all four directions, and a good king such as yourself stands up to face them, to shun your cause would be to cast myself into perdition."[29]

Among the conditions that he listed were his appointment to an important position upon the subjugation of Hindustān and the authority to leave such a position whenever he pleased. Although these conditions were apparently acceptable to Zamān Shāh, the plans to stage a military campaign and conquer Hindustān were repeatedly obstructed and were eventually shelved. Retrospectively, the idea of ʿImād al-Mulk holding a brief for Islamic imperium seems incongruous and perhaps absurd, given his career-long alliances with Maratha chiefs and the fact that he had murdered the Mughal Emperor ʿĀlamgīr II.[30] Through his voice however, it is the author ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān who channels his own position as the mediator of a Mughal-Afghān enterprise that might have saved Hindustān and the old order of imperial rule by Muslim sovereigns from *fasād*. Towards the end of the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, the entire plot appears to have unraveled: after Mirzā Aḥsan Bakht became terribly unwell, the Durrānī ruler died, and ʿImād al-Mulk decided to stay on in Khayrpūr at the shrine, and ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān too experienced a jolt of sorts. He writes of hearing news about the death of Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān in Rāmpur and the political unrest surrounding the question of who would succeed him. This disturbance in his

[29] *Tārīkh-i-ʿAbbāsī,* p.22

[30] Ansari, "ʿImād al-Mulk."

hometown caused him to gird his loins and make his way back to India to be with his "kinsmen", eventually giving up the prospect of the Durrānī-led conquest of India altogether and bringing the account to an abrupt conclusion.[31] By the end of the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī* it is abundantly clear that ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān is the hero of his own memoirs. The entire work centers on his ability to bridge two imperial cultures that were apparently similar on account of their distant past of Mughal-Afghān inter-marriages and a shared history of rule by Muslim sovereigns. It is important however that we recognize this as part of *his* discourse on the survival of Islamic imperium, rather than accepting that there was some kind of natural and uncontrived affinity between Muslim empires. The Durrānī and Mughal Empires had been firm political rivals as much as they had been allies, and their relationship was as tenuous and charged as any eighteenth-century coalition.[32]

For all his self-aggrandizement, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān does not clearly state what the larger outcomes of the failed alliance between the two empires were or what compelled him, as a minor poet and soldier from Rāmpur to participate in such a project as a *wakīl* and key facilitator. Nevertheless, the reader can infer that the exchange between the Durrānī ruler and the visitors from Hindustān is indicative of a reckoning that took place amongst a specific set of political actors. Each of these actors was the product of an older imperial bureaucracy which comprised successive generations of *khānezādehā*, or those who were born into service, at the elite,

[31] ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān indicates towards the end of the account that he had heard of the news of the Nawwāb's passing and would soon return to Rāmpur after his travels. Having fallen out of favor in Rāmpur following the death of Nawwāb, and being harassed by the court physician, ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān moved to Barelī where he thought it best to disentangle himself from courtly intrigues during the years after the Second Rohilla War (1793-94). See ʿAbd al-Qadir Khan, '*Ilm-o'Amal jild awwal*, ed., Muḥammad Ayub Qadri, trans., Maulwi Mu'in al-Din Afzalgarhi (Karachi: Educational Press Pakistan, 1960) pp. 73-74.

[32] Coalitions formed by both empires famously fought each other at the third battle of Panipat in 1761.

middling and lower levels of the Mughal administration. Historians have demonstrated that *khānezādehā* occupied positions in elite households as nobles such as ʿImād al-Mulk and as the middling and lower-level "technicians" of empire, as well as in the "clusters" of sub-imperial networks of patronage and loyalty that included *zamīndārs* and Mughal princes like Mirzā Aḥsan Bakht.[33] When the empire decentralized, and provinces seceded from the empire, these hereditary service cultures continued to replicate in regional successor states like Bengal, Hyderabad and the Rohilla state, typified by figures like ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān. Each of these three figures are representative of the older imperial bureaucracy; the execution and failure of their mission points to their attempts to regenerate political authority within this system and the realization that it was increasingly challenging to do so.

The memory of their efforts, as it is recorded in the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, marks a moment of reckoning with the end of a form of diplomacy that was characteristic of the eighteenth century Persianate world. "Courtly encounters" that entailed diplomacy and the exchange of gifts—like the Hindustani mission to Kabūl—have long divided historians of early modern empires. While some scholars have framed these encounters as a site of "cultural commensurability" others have dismissed these concerns by demonstrating that a range of connections across early modern regimes foreclosed the likelihood of stable, fixed and discrete political structures encountering one another.[34] Indeed, the fact that the Rohilla territories had served as a "satellite" to the

[33] On the concept of the service household and "khānazāde," see John F. Richards, "Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers" in Barbara D. Metcalf ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 255-289. See also, Kumkum Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal* (New Delhi: OUP, 2009): 157.

[34] See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

Durrānī Empire under Aḥmad Shāh Abdālī (d. 1772), and the entwined nature of Mughal and Afghān state formation, both precluded the possibility of an "encounter" between entirely unfamiliar entities. The princely delegation to Kabūl at the turn of the nineteenth century however, presented a somewhat different reality at the end of the age of empires: both parties were overwhelmed, the Durrānīs by the Sīkhs, the Mughals by the increasingly powerful Marathas and the interventions of the East India Company. Instead of the adjoined Mughal-Afghān legacy in Swāt with which ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān begins his narrative, the two empires now shared the pressures of political self-definition and reached out to one another in a period of imperial decentralization across much of the Persianate world. Despite the self-appointed delegation's laborious last-ditch effort, their diplomatic agenda was ultimately unsuccessful. The bizarre turns in the narrative notwithstanding, the story of the delegation reaffirms the fundamental parallels between the political upheavals in a sub-imperial state like Rāmpur, the Mughal imperial center in Shāhjahānābād and the Durrānī capital in Kabūl. All of the actors were products of simultaneous processes of political revolutions at regional and imperial courts, and their various roles in the delegation are indicative of the intersection of these processes. The *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī* is therefore a clear statement on the aspirations of a critical mass of service figures and lower-rung royals who moved seamlessly between region and empire at the dawn of the East India Company's ascent to power.

III. Looking East: Servicemen and the East India Company in the Rohilla Territories:

3.1 Inter-regional Diplomacy: Lineages of Service and Education

As the prospect of an alliance between the Durrānī and Mughal Empires prompted Rohilla *khānezādehā* like ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān, along with ʿImād al-Mulk and the Mughal princes to turn westwards, other servicemen who served the Rohilla territories looked east where the East India Company had found its initial foothold as a political entity in north India. After the Battle of Buxar (1764-65), the Company had acquired the right to collect taxes in the eastern provinces of the Mughal Empire. In the process, it defeated and imposed political restrictions via the Treaty of Allahabad (1765) on Shujāʾ al-Daula, the Nawwāb of Awadh, and on the Mughal emperor Shāh ʿAlām II (r. 1759 – 1806). From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, as the East India Company's political involvement spread up-country along the Ganges, it began its transformation from trading company into state through piecemeal demilitarization of its rivals, the collection of revenue and the monopolization of trade. It sustained this entire process through a policy of treaty-making, strategic alliances—and famously—by pitting one regional power against the other. [35]

The Company's officials—despite their internal differences—recognized that in order to execute these maneuvers, they would need to engage with their political interlocutors in Hindustan, and would have to draw on Mughal bureaucratic practices, modify them and develop their own idiom of diplomacy. The Company's "residency" system of appointing political agents or "residents" to different regional courts in India was born of this necessity.[36] The residency system followed an already existing pattern of bureaucratic appointments and diplomacy among

[35] For an account of the of array of regional powers with which the East India Company conducted diplomacy and signed treaties, see Robert Travers, "A British Empire by Treaty in Eighteenth-Century India," *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600-1900*, ed. Saliha Belmessous (New York: OUP, 2015), pp. 132-160.

[36] See Michael H. Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System (1764-1858)* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), pp. 43-69.

regional centers of power. For instance, as has been illustrated in the example of ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān, over generations throughout the eighteenth century, service figures clustered around regional households that acted as nodes in a constellation of disaggregated political power. Under conditions of imperial decentralization, these regional households had asserted *de facto* autonomy from Mughal rule and developed into courts, along the Mughal imperial model. And while figures like ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān and his allies sought to exit this arena of fragmented regional polities and—with the Durrānīs' assistance—revive an antecedent form of governance under the Mughals, the larger share of service figures at regional courts was comprised of those who were stationed by their employers in roles such as *wukalāʾ* (agents) and *akhbār nawīsān* (news-writers) at each other's courts. Such practices organically developed into an increasingly ramified network of inter-regional diplomacy. In the late eighteenth century, a host of regional potentates with stakes in north India like the Rohilla chiefs, the ruling elite of Awadh, the Jāts and the Marathas conducted their politics along these lines and could not help but directly engage in similar ways with the Company and its officials once they wrested the right to collect revenue in Bengal.

Historians have recognized that the Company began mirroring its political interlocutors by employing runners, reporters, *akhbār-nawīsān*, *munshīyān* and *kātibān* of their own as well as educators to train their growing ranks of officers to read and write Persian.[37] As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the social profile of Persianate writers had been widening since the seventeenth century, and provincial writers of *inshāʾ* were using their positions as draftsmen to document the impacts of major political shifts as regional centers of power came into relief. It was this

[37] For a summary of the changing role of the *akhbār nawīs* during the transition from Mughal to colonial rule, see Michael H. Fisher, "The Office of Akhbār Nawīs: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 45-82.

constituency of *munshīyān* that the Company would draw from to staff their emerging inter-regional diplomatic corps. They would come to rely on the skills of these men to become yet another regional power in India that could make treaties; give their allies, rivals and employees politically symbolic gifts and titles; and send or assure armed support in (the frequent) instances of warfare. Like the astutely observant and expressive secretarial *munshīyān* who drafted *inshāʾ* and maintained diaries whom we encountered in Chapter One, the context of regional state formation also engendered another new role for Persographic *munshīyān*, that of the lower-rung diplomat at regional courts and subsequently, in the East India Company. This process, already afoot before 1765, further propelled the transformation of middling and minor *munshīyān* into diplomatic aides and political associates in the new "households" of the Company's political residents in regions that fell under indirect rule.

This particular change in the role of the *munshī* has been the subject of studies that focus on how the Company quickly plucked them up and yoked them to its enterprise and the fact that many of them were trained at institutions—like Fort William College—in metropolitan centers. These figures, it is pointed out, were employed as assistants and translators who would accompany Company officials on colonial reconnaissance missions throughout the nineteenth century. [38] The remaining portion of this chapter will fill in some of the gaps in this perspective by pointing to ways in which the Company drew from reserves of servicemen who circulated between regional centers of power, had long genealogies of service, and who were often trained

[38] Chapter 1 of the present dissertation refers to the roles of *munshīyān* in the provinces who had observational styles and opinions that were autonomous from their sources of patronage. Similarly, in the late eighteenth century, *munshīyān* like Ṭabāṭabaʾī who worked for the Company continued to mediate and shape interactions between British officials and their interlocutors during the wars of conquest. For a similar line of reasoning with respect to native agency in the co-construction of scientific knowledge see Kapil Raj, "Colonial Encounters and the Forging of New Knowledge and National Identities: Great Britain and India, 1760-1850," *Osiris* 15 (2000): 119-34.

and educated in regional centers of learning. In short, we will ask, who were they before they were recruited to facilitate the Company's entry into the world of inter-regional diplomacy?[39]

Some of the first chronicles of the late Mughal period and the rise of the Company emerged out of this context of regional service and inter-regional diplomacy. Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān Ṭabāṭabaʾī (ca. 1727 – 1806), was a figure who exemplifies this trend. He was widely known in colonial India—and is still well-known among historians of early colonial history—as the author of the *Siyar al-Mutaʾakhirīn*, a multi-volume history of India from Aurangzeb's death in 1707 until 1781.[40] Ṭabāṭabaʾī's chronicle has been a subject of interest amongst historians. Scholars have argued that his work is a classic example of a Persian *tārīkh* that was written under the auspices of the Company and drafted for its benefit as a tool to help its officers learn about the land that they were administering. Arguments in this vein specify the tension between the imperative to "represent" oneself and one's history to a colonial audience, and the tendency of such works to develop a "political tradition," i.e. to critique the moral and practical failings of different contemporary political actors including the Company.[41]

Historians have also noted the role that Ghulām Ḥusayn played as the Company's agent in the negotiations that took place with the chief Hāfiz Raḥmat Khān prior to the Rohilla War (1774-75), remarking on the probability that Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān worked as a double-agent in the Anglo-Rohilla negotiations of 1766-71. For instance, the historian Iqbal Husain refers to the

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[40] The *Siyar* has enjoyed remarkable staying power over the years. The first English translation was by done by Ḥājjī Muṣṭafā in Calcutta 1789 (most of this edition was lost at sea). It was reprinted in Calcutta in 1902-3, and another reprint with index was also published in Calcutta in 1926.

[41] See for example, Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Early Persianate Modernity," *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*, ed., Sheldon Pollock (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 257-289.

period after the Battle of Buxar when Mīr Qāsim, the defeated Nawwāb of Bengal, sought shelter in the Rohilla territories. Based on letters exchanged between Hāfiz Raḥmat Khān, Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān and the representatives of the Company in Calcutta during this period, he argues that Ghulām Ḥusayn was hired by Hāfiz Raḥmat Khān to forward letters to Major-General Robert Clive in Calcutta, proposing an Anglo-Rohilla alliance and requesting a guarantee that the East India Company protect the Rohillas against Maratha incursions into their towns and *qaṣbāt*. On the other hand, Ghulām Ḥusayn had simultaneously been instructed by the East India Company to ensure that Mīr Qāsim (whose presence was a cause of concern to them) would be expelled from the Rohilla territories. Although none of these conditions were met, Ghulām Ḥusayn's particular position as a representative of both parties suggests first, that figures like him were crucial brokers of war and peace between regional centers of power, and second, that the political sympathies of *wukalāʾ* constantly shifted on a sliding scale of allegiances; in fact, it is probable that this was more commonly the case than not. But how did Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān emerge into this field of diplomacy? Where had he trained if at all to be a *wakīl* and with what kind of genealogy of service and intellectual training was he associated?

Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān was the son of Hidāyat ʿAlī Khān "Żamīr," who had served in Shāhjahānābād as *bakhshī* (paymaster) to the future emperor Shāh ʿAlām when he was a young prince.[42] When he was five years old, his family migrated to Murshīdābād where a relative of his mother was in the service of the Nāzim of Bengal, Sirāj al-Daula (d. 1757). Subsequently, the family relocated to Azīmābād (Patna), where his father, Hidāyat ʿAlī was able to rise through the

[42] See A.S. Bazmee Ansari, "Sayyid Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān Ṭabāṭabaʾi," in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Consulted online on 5 August 2018 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2512.

ranks, amass some land holdings (*jāgīrhā*) and become the deputy of Azīmābād. Ghulām Ḥusayn accompanied his father from Patna to Faizābād and Delhi in 1743; in the following year when his father Hidāyat ʿAlī's patron Ṣafdar Jang was appointed imperial *Mīr Ātish* (master of ordnance), both father and son advanced in their careers and they were both subsequently presented to the Emperor Muḥammad Shāh (d. 1748) from whom they each received the title of *Khān*. Shortly afterwards, Ghulām Ḥusayn met Mr. Amyatt, an officer with the Company, in Delhi and he returned to Azīmābād to his mother and the rest of his family while his father remained in Shāhjahānābād and remarried. It was at some point during this period in his life that he first took up service with the East India Company and relayed messages between the Company and Mīr Qāsim when he was the Nawwāb of Bengal (ca. 1760 – 1763). He continued to represent the Company as before in its communications with the Rohillas in 1766-71, as mentioned above.

Apparently, his mother and other family members in ʿAzīmābād faced a degree of financial hardship during these years as Hidāyat ʿAlī stopped sending money to them. This was compounded by an unfortunate incident in which he was betrayed by a friend. He describes it in a short and neglected autobiographical tract that was probably originally written in Persian, but published in English, and outlines how he came to rely on Colonel Goddard at this juncture in his career. He writes that in ca. 1774, he was tricked into standing guarantee for an acquaintance who was unable to pay back the full amount. As a consequence, Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān lost large sums of money and was called on by the East India Company to pay sixty thousand rupees. Goddard promised to help him; "Such a character is not often met with among the English in Hindustan," Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān writes of his friend. But Goddard himself was in straitened circumstances and was planning to quit the Company and offer his own services to the then Nawwāb of Awadh, ʿĀsaf al-Daula (d. 1797). He therefore promised to put his troubled friend in

touch with a helpful acquaintance in Lucknow. Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān describes his subsequent journey to Lucknow via Jaunpur:

> I left my family…and with a few attendants only, I set out for Feiz-abad [sic] and Lucknow. As Jaunpur was in the road, I stopped at that city for a few days, having understood that it had become the residence of the illustrious and venerable Seid-Mahmed-Askhesy [sic], of who I had heard so much… Being admitted to his presence, I spent upwards of two hours with him…To this day I remember his venerable aspect and enchanting conversation, and they have made such an impression on my mind, that I must suspend the narrative of my own actions to give the reader a glimpse of the talents and virtues which adorned that distinguished man. He was of a family of Seids, that ranked for many ages amongst the most respectable of that sect, in the city of Jaunpur. This Seid of virtuous disposition and fine genius wrote a book of poetical morality, all the rules of which he extracted from his own practice; so that this book was a commentary on his life. Very different this from the generality of moralists, whose principles and practices are completely at variance; who preach up the utility of moral conduct, yet lead a life of sin. His speech was such, that it seemed to flow from the fountain of wisdom; and his advices and counsels were so many remedies against sickness and sorrow of heart. He possesses a very extensive knowledge, graced with so much modesty, that he instructed all who conversed with him, without making them feel their own inferiority. He lived contented upon a small income, without a wish to increase it. It is true he was not regularly initiated in the sciences; but the richness of his mind, and the strength of his judgment, amply supplied that want. By the force of his own genius, he had become a repository of all the sciences, practical as well as abstract. No wonder then that his house was resorted to by all the learned person of that city and neighbourhoods, and by numbers who travelled thither from distant countries, being learned themselves, or possessing a love of knowledge.[43]

[43] "An account of Gholaum Hossein Khan, author of a very valuable and interesting work, entitled 'Seir Mutakharin, or a View of Modern Times;' translated from the Persic original; interspersed with Anecdotes of the late General Godard," *The Asiatic Annual Register, Or, A View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce and Literature of Asia, For the Year 1801,* Vol. 3 (London: J. Debrett, 1802), pp. 28-32.

Ghulām Ḥusayn thus devotes a considerable share of his autobiography to a charismatic figure from Jaunpur called Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAskarī. ʿAskarī purported Sayyid heritage was probably a significant factor in Ghulām Ḥusayn's assessment of his extraordinary qualities, especially considering that his own family hailed from a Sayyid lineage which he took pride in.[44] This affinity notwithstanding, it appears that Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān was not alone in admiring this figure. Other *wukalāʾ* in the service of the Company, and Company officials themselves were also attracted to him and visited him regularly. Like Ṭabāṭabaʾī, Khayr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ilāhabādī a confidential agent to James Browne and James Anderson—both British envoys to the court of Mahājī Shinde—was an ardent admirer of ʿAskarī. During and after his appointment with the East India Company, Khāyr al-Dīn, like Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān, wrote historical works. One of these works is a history of the learned men of Jaunpur. This particular account refers to ʿAskarī's intellectual proclivities as well as his popularity with Shujāʾ al-Daula and other Company servants. Khayr al-Dīn describes ʿAskarī in the following words:

> One of the prodigies of this age was Maulāna Muḥammad ʿAskarī with his remarkable personality (mercy of God be on him). He started his career with reading several books under Mīr Muḥammad Māliḥ. By chance one day the attentive look of his holiness Shāh Ishq Ḥusain, who was one of the saints of the time, fell on him. He said to him: "Why do you suffer the troubles of discipleship? Sit here and teach these pupils." In accordance with the orders of his holiness, he sat on the chair of teachership. He used to give lessons extempore to whoever came to him in every science and art, from Alif, Ba, up to al-Baizawī, whether the books on the subjects were written in Arabic, Persian or Hindi. He had an independent spirit and did not blindly follow worldly customs. Students used to accompany him when he went out for diversion and recreation. He stopped at whatever shop of the market he pleased and benefited the people by his wise exhortations. He did not distinguish between children, youths, and old men or between the rich and the poor. His dwelling was a rendezvous for the wealthy and a resort for the needy. All who passed by or through Jaunpur, both high and low, used to pay him respects. Englishmen who knew how to appreciate the worth of a person, came to see him and asked him about the difficulties in every kind

[44] Ansari, "Sayyid Ghulām."

> of science, and after having obtained satisfactory answers from him, they used to say (and it was their considered opinion) that such a person comprehending all perfections had been very seldom found on the surface of the earth. Nawwāb Shujāʾ al-Daula after much solicitation and importunity prevailed upon him to accept the trouble of coming to Faizābād. When his holiness…came to Faizābād, Nawwāb Shujāʾ al-Daula became extremely pleased to see him and gave him many presents. It is 26 years since he died. After his death Jaunpur lost all its glory. Mīr Ḥasan ʿAlī, his cousin (the son of his uncle) and disciple, occupied his place in teaching the students. Now languidness due to old age and extreme weakness have constrained him to give up the work of teaching.[45]

Khayr al-Dīn, Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān, Shujāʾ al-Daula and officials from the East India Company each appear to have visited ʿAskarī at Jaunpur in the latter half of the eighteenth century, suggesting that Charismatic scholars like ʿAskarī were an integral part of the world of Mughal decentralization and inter-regional diplomacy. Mīyān Nūr whom ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān and ʿImād al-Mulk visited on their way to Kabūl is also representative of this tendency. Even as new regional courts became crucial centers of patronage and employment for service figures in the eighteenth century, longstanding robust genealogies of service, learning and spiritual erudition were very much essential factors in determining where and how service figures and political actors converged, even in the late eighteenth century when it appeared that the East India Company had absorbed *munshī*-diplomats like Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān into its ranks and built its own institutions of Oriental education to train its servants. As one scholar observes, it was in the eighteenth century that *ustād-shāgird* relations became individualized through methods of "self-articulation" and developed along a Sūfistic *pīr-murīdī* pattern.[46] Khayr al-Dīn and Ghulam

[45] Khayr al-Din Ilahabadi, *Tazkirat al-ulama: A Memoir of the Learned Men of Jaunpur*, trans., Muḥammad Sanaullah (Calcutta: Abul Faiz, 1934), pp. 66-67.

[46] Jamal Malik, Muslim Culture and Reform in 18th Century South Asia," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Jul., 2003): 227-243. See also, C. M. Naim, "Poet-Audience Interaction at Urdu Musha'iras," in C. Shackle ed., *Urdu and Muslim South Asia: Studies in Honour of Ralph Russell* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991): 167-173.

Husayn Khān had been socialized within this mode of teacher-student relationships and they sustained that mode in conjunction with their roles as some-time agents of the East India Company. In fact, these deep lineages of erudition and hereditary service transcended the phase of early colonial conquests and persisted at the regional level in places like Rāmpur, the new capital of the shrunken Rohilla territories after the Rohilla War of 1774-75.

3.2 ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān: Muslim Scholars and the Company in the Nineteenth Century

In the early nineteenth century, the pattern of inter-regional diplomacy that had been sustained through the eighteenth century increasingly thinned out. The Marathas, Rohilla Afghāns, Sikhs and formerly autonomous provincial governorships like Bengal and Awadh were defeated or pacified within a system of politics that was increasingly determined by the actions of the East India Company. After these early colonial conquests, middling and high-ranking *wukalāʾ* who had circulated among the former regional centers of power and within scholarly networks were no longer as much in demand, as the purpose that they had served diminished. Even as the residency system in areas under "indirect rule" continued to evolve, the space for an older form of diplomacy palpably shrank and the service figures who had turned east were no longer serving as *wukalāʾ* who brokered war and peace between the Company and its major regional political competitors in the manner that Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān had done. Simultaneously, areas that came under "direct rule" expanded, and as a new colonial administrative state was born, a greater share of the next generation of Persographic service cadres were absorbed into its new administrative corps as *munshīyān*, *harkārahā*, *sarishtedāran*, *daroghahā*, and the corresponding demand for native literate administrative officers swelled proportionately. Significantly, teachers and the scholarly networks that had nurtured many of the *wukalāʾ* of the eighteenth century continued to train this generation of officers in the post-

conquest era. The arc of this entire process is clearly visible in the former Rohilla territories. The Nawwāb of Awadh's administration struggled to fully seize control of the Kaṭehr region, after having defeated the Rohilla Afghāns in 1775. The East India Company used this occasion to assume complete administrative authority over the former Rohilla territories excluding the single remaining Rohilla Afghān-ruled city of Rāmpur in 1802. The Kaṭehr landscape was therefore a constellation of *qaṣbāt* that were directly ruled by the Company; Rāmpur, held by the Nawwāb; and the indirectly ruled Nawwābate of Awadh.

The Company at the time was bound by its commitment to the "Cornwallis Code" (1793), which was notionally based upon the idea of non-interventionism. In theory, this noninterventionist policy would minimize the possibilities of Company officials at the district level participating in local affairs or using their influence for personal aggrandizement.[47] Historians have argued that in practice, matters were quite different. In the areas that it directly controlled, the Company left routine matters of administration to local small land-holders, their officers and functionaries in order to maintain the appearances of a hands-off administrative policy. However, through much trial and error over a period of three decades, the Company was unable to maintain a "sanitary distance" from the execution and maintenance of law and order in the region.[48] Just as it had previously integrated itself within the world of inter-regional diplomacy in the eighteenth century, it would develop a new political role with a highly bureaucratized administration which employed several Indian officers. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān—a scholar-bureaucrat who was raised in Rāmpur and who hailed from a family of servicemen — found employment with the Company in precisely this environment.

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[47] D. H. Kolff, *Grass in Their Mouths: The Upper Doab of India under the Company's Magna Charta, 1793-1830* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 1-19.

[48] Ibid.

The abovementioned structural administrative changes in his immediate setting constitute the backdrop of a personal memoir titled the *Waqāʾiʿ-yi ʿAbd al-Qādir Khānī* (Events as Told by ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān), which he wrote in Persian in c. 1831.[49] ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān grew up in proximity to the Nawwāb's court in Rāmpur, but subsequently lived and worked in the former Rohilla lands both before and after they were directly administered by the Company.[50] He associated himself with distinct Muslim intellectual genealogies, and many of the ʿulamāʾ of Rāmpur whom he lists in his work, were part of a growing trend amongst older scholarly networks to professionalize within the Company, which at the time was caught between internal critiques of its policies and the practical administrative reality of a massive agrarian law and order crisis in the Yamuna-Ganges plain. In the *Waqāʾiʿ*, ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān thus presents himself as a successful master of all trades, filling in gaps in the Company's administrative staff on an ad-hoc basis, while retaining an important connection with his regional scholarly circles across the *qaṣbāt* of Awadh and the former Rohilla territories.

Written in Persian, the *Waqāʾiʿ* escapes easy categorization as it liberally incorporates stylistic elements of the *taẕkira* (biographical compendium) and *tārīkh* (chronicle) forms of writing, although it is fundamentally an autobiography. The work is literally voluminous – spanning two large volumes in its Urdu print edition, spanning the story of the author's career and travels in Rāmpur, Calcutta, Delhi, Ajmer and Agra. The narrative, in the vein of pre-modern memoirs, is a touch self-congratulatory, leading us through ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's victory against numerous trials and challenges such as the loss of loved ones, depleted finances, occasional

[49] The manuscript was never published in Persian, although an Urdu translation was published under the title *'Ilm o 'Amal*, or Wisdom and Action. See ʿAbd al-Qadir Khan, idem., *'Ilm o 'Amal* (1960).

[50] Kolff, *Grass in Their Mouths*, pp. 36-44.

unemployment and his placement in locations which were troubled by crime and lawlessness. Through the varnish of his boasts the reader is able to gauge that in the early nineteenth century context of the former Rohilla territories, figures such as ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān were plugged into multi-generational nodes of scholarly learning, located at shrines, mosques, and seminaries. They moved between new jobs with the East India Company on the one hand and the older scholarly ties that qualified them for those very positions on the other, all the while making structural, perspectival and intellectual adjustments to their surroundings.

3.3 From Āzarbāijān to Rāmpur: Family, Teachers and Genealogies of Service

ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's family had close ties with the Nawwāb of Rāmpur's court and was associated with scholarly and spiritual lineages in Delhi, Rāmpur and further east in Dhaka. Over the course of the eighteenth century and with each passing generation, his family slowly transformed themselves by shedding their image as newly-arrived immigrants from Āzarbāijān and developing into a secretarial service family that settled in Delhi, Calcutta, Murādabād and finally, in Rāmpur. He describes this staggered migration in the preface to his work, explaining implicitly how he came to be a naturalized North Indian scholar.

2. A Map of the Journey undertaken by ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's Family from the South Caucasus to India, c.1730 - 1800. Source: Google Earth

Tracing his family's emigration from Āzarbāijān to Rāmpur, ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān outlines a journey that his great-grandfather a *Mīrzā* called Aḥmad, took towards the Indian subcontinent following the upheavals caused by Nādir Shāh in the 1730s.[51] Aḥmad rode a wave of migration of Central and West Asian military servicemen (including many Afghāns), writers and ideologues to India, accompanying, he claims, the Iranian poet Shaykh ʿAlī Hazīn Lāhijī (d.1766). They traveled from Isfahan to Delhi, arriving during the Emperor Muḥammad Shāh's rule (r. 1719-1748). While he was in Delhi, Aḥmad paid a visit to Ghāzī al-Dīn Khān's *madrasa*

[51] The term *Mīrzā* derives from the Persian term *Amīrzāda*, or "one who had descended from Amīr Timūr," although the actual use of the term extended beyond this literal definition.

to offer prayers, where he had a fortuitous encounter with the renowned ʿ*ālim* Naẓar Muḥammad, as well as Mīrzā Mażẖar Jān-i Jānān (d. 1781), a celebrated spiritual descendant of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's (d. 1624).[52] They treated Aḥmad with nothing short of brotherly affection. In this manner, the family developed a close association with some of the rising scholars and divines of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[53]

ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān then explains how the family came to settle in Murādabād. While Delhi was burdened by the attacks of the "*Irāniyān"* (Nādir Shāh and his accompanying troops) and the "*Kāfirān-i Dakhan"* (the Marathas), Bengal too was unsettled when Mīr Qāsim was overthrown in 1764-65. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's grandfather Muḥammad Aslam had been in Mīr Qāsim's service during this period. He wrote to his family that had been journeying towards him in Bengal to remain wherever they were for he would meet them at a location in the Gangetic plains. This meeting point would be the *qaṣba* of Murādabād. Although Muḥammad Aslam did not live very long, his young son Muḥammad Akram grew up in Murādabād under his mother's watchful care. It was at this juncture that the family struck roots in the *qaṣba*. Having felt the pressure of disturbances in the province of Bengal and the imperial capital of Shāhjahānābād, Murādabād was a relatively stable place for the family to settle down during the heyday of Rohilla power. With reference to this small-town context, Raisur Rahman has argued that the

[52] Ghāzī al-Dīn Khān was a noble during the reign of Aurangzeb (r.1658-1707) and his successor Shāh ʿĀlam (r.1707-12). Ghāzī al-Dīn's son was Niẓām al-Mulk, the founder of the Āsaf Jāhī dynasty at Hyderabad, and he was therefore, a great-grand-father to ʿImād al-Mulk, the abovementioned member of the Kabūl delegation. For a concise history of Ghāzī al-Dīn Khān's madrassa in Shāhjahānābād see Margrit Pernau, "Introduction" in *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, ed., idem., (New Delhi: OUP, 2006), pp. 1-34.

[53] For a theoretical discussion of political ideologues as "teachers" in the inter-imperial period, see Indrani Chatterjee, "Monastic Governmentality, Colonial Misogyny, and Postcolonial Amnesia in South Asia." *History of the Present* 3, no. 1 (2013): 57-98.

enduring localized structures that sustained life in north Indian *qaṣbāt* enabled them to remain connected with imperial political economies across the early modern and modern divide. The family and the *muhalla* or neighborhood, he argues, were crucial as mutually reinforcing vectors of prestige and *sharīf* (respectable) Muslim identity in *qaṣbāt*.[54] This appears to have been the case with ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's forbearers who turned to the *qaṣba* as a locus of stability. Muḥammad Akram was taught to read the Qurʾān by his mother and was also raised in part by his older sister, who was married to the then Nawwāb of Rāmpur Fayzullah Khān's son's tutor. Muḥammad Akram subsequently moved to Rāmpur, where his son—the author of the *Waqāʾiʿ*—ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān was born.

He mentions that as a child, he was placed in the care of one Ākhūnd Walīullāh at a *madrasa* where he was sheltered from the more damaging influences of children who idled away their time. At an early stage, all the well-regarded *ʿulamāʾ* of Rāmpur impressed upon his mother the need to ensure that the budding scholar enlist himself at the same school (*maktabkhāna*) as the Nawwāb's sons, where he could learn to read and write. Thus began ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's proximate relationship with the Nawwāb's family. He also claims that this enabled him to learn certain forms of distinction, like speaking in a genteel voice, and not stuffing his face when he ate. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān describes his early literary training as an experience that was encouraged in his home: his paternal grandmother spoke "Shāhjahānābādī Urdu" and taught both him and his mother to speak it.[55] His father would read portions of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAttār's mystical poem *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* (The Conference of the Birds), a staple of classical Persianate curricula. He

[54] See M. Rais ur Rahman, *Locale, Everyday Islam, and Modernity: Qasbah Towns and Muslim Life in Colonial India*, (Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 56.

[55] On the history of the use of Urdu in Shāhjahānābād during this period, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqui, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 109-129

would also discipline him when he did not learn the text by rote.[56] This narrative about the family moving into elite scholarly social circles, and the support and intellectual guidance given to the young scholar could be read as a self-legitimating strategy that would help ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān seem more employable in the eyes of the Company.

What is certainly apparent in his writing is the complementary relationship between the localized social and intellectual capital that nourished a person like him on the one hand, and the political impetus to move outside it on the other. We have seen that the ebb and flow of mobile service cadres between regional courts, the city and the *qaṣba* pre-date the arrival of Company politics by a significant margin, as is clear in the case of his Āzarbāijānī ancestors who, along with others, settled in small towns. With the Company's growing control in the former Rohilla territories however, the channels of professional mobility appear to have become increasingly determined by opportunities to work in the Company's legal-administrative offices, even as older patterns of scholarly sociability were reinforced.

3.4 The Scholars of Rāmpur in Times of *Khudsarī*

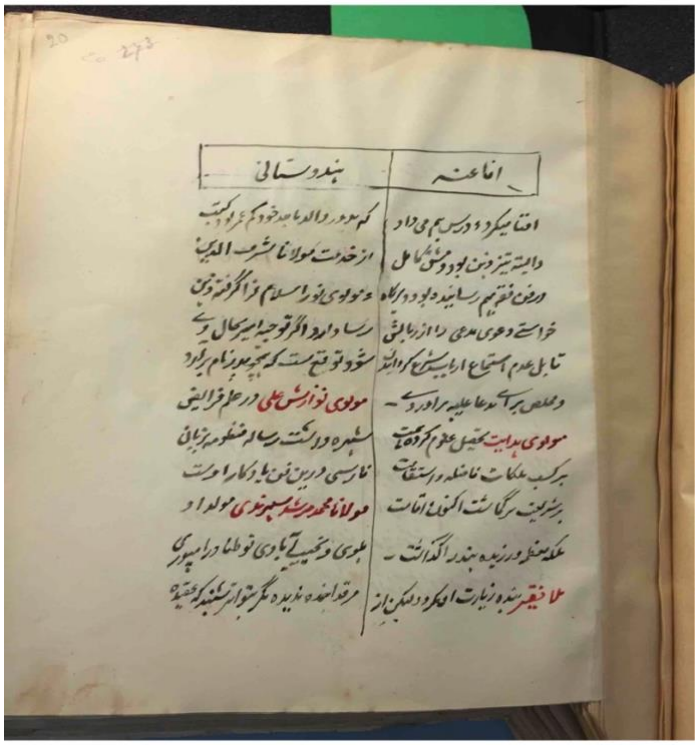
A close inspection of political affairs in Rāmpur offers some insight into the forces that drew deeply anchored *qaṣba* residents to remain integrated within older scholarly and familial matrices even while many of them were drawn to the East India Company's administrative service as a source of local stability. While Rāmpur did not fall within the realm of the Company's direct rule, a set of events unfolded at the court that pushed some scholars and their students to Lucknow, and to seek opportunities in the surrounding towns. As mentioned earlier with regards to the west-facing diplomat ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān's decision to return to Rāmpur,

[56] *Waqāʾiʿ*, f 23 (v).

following the death of the Nawwāb, Fayzullah Khān, a succession dispute broke out in 1793 between two of his sons and one of them was murdered. The Company and the Nawwāb of Awadh were quick to get involved and several Rohilla Afghāns from the family of the late Nawwāb, were caught in the fray and sent to Lucknow. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān remarks that in such times it was common for this sort of '*fasād'* or sedition to masquerade as '*jihād'* or one's moral struggle. This sardonic tone runs throughout the *Waqāʾiʿ*.

Khudsarī or selfish insolence, is also a term that one finds in the works of contemporary litterateurs. As is the case with the term *ʿibrat* or warning, *khudsarī* was used with a certain amount of flexibility, to describe a range of eighteenth-century conquest groups such as the Marathas, as well as more localized acts of rebellion, resistance and the disruption of order, as happened when Fayzullah Khān died. The sort of *khudsarī* that one witnessed in Rāmpur was not only exasperating to our author on account of the inconveniences of political rebellion; it was simply not a desirable quality in a person, whether they were in pursuit of scholarly erudition or if they held a position of authority that required them to maintain order. This unrest in the Nawwābī capital of Rāmpur exposed ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān to the fragility of the erstwhile safe haven, where he had grown up. It would shape the young scholar's future career, as he became increasingly drawn to positions in the police *thāna* as a *darogha* (manager of a police station), as an employee of the collector's assistant in Murādabād, and as someone whose opinion was occasionally solicited in an informal capacity in the adjudication of land tenure and ownership disputes. In short, ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān was drawn to positions that required him to assume moral authority in times of *khudsarī*. This comes through in his own writing when he describes his turn as a Company-appointed *darogha*.

ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān appears to have been conscious that he was part of a constituency of contemporary scholars in Rāmpur who leveraged their social standing by either taking up professional employment with the Company or by educating future generations of administrative officials. All of these figures retained their connections to older scholarly and spiritual lineages and schools and placed much value in long-standing intellectual genealogies. Like ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, their participation in the Company's administration was shaped by an awareness of the palpable disorder in Rāmpur and they held on to the promise of the restoration of a degree of order. The author's biographical notices of the "Afghān and Hindustānī *ʿulamāʾ* in Rāmpur" offer a glimpse at the lives of the Muslim scholars of Rāmpur, some of whom balanced their learned occupations with what we might describe today as their "nine-to-five" jobs with the Company. In the manuscript, one finds a tabular representation of the Afghāns on one side and the Hindustanis in the second column.



4. A Tabular Representation of the List of "Afghān" and "Hindustānī" Scholars.
Source: British Library (IO Islamic 4049)

Both of these groups, according to ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, were largely responsible for reviving the city of Rāmpur after it had been wrecked by Fayzullah Khān's fratricidal son, Ghulām Muḥammad Khan's *khudsarī* in 1794. Many of the *ʿulamāʾ* and *mashāyikh* in these lists were experts in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *ḥadith* (traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad) and occupied important positions in the Company's emerging legal-administrative regime, examined in detail in Chapter 4. Others excelled as small-scale *wukala'*, teachers, poets, chroniclers, clerks, soldiers and doctors. Among the Afghān *ʿulamāʾ*, he describes some of them in the following words:

> Maulwī Ghulām Jīlānī: A man of virtue, a gnostic [*ʿārif*] and a connoisseur of poetry and prose. He also wrote verse in Urdu and Persian. The *Janganāma-yi Afāghina wa Angrez* (Memoir of the Anglo-Afghān War), based on the battle between the English and the Rohillas is his most memorable work… His son-in-law, Maulwī Haydar ʿAlī is his successor, and is a master in the art of medicine.[57]
>
> Mullā Badr al-Dīn: An expert in *fiqh*... He excelled himself among the Afghāns as a public speaker. He used to keep the company of notables and would serve as their agent (*wakīl*). His son Anwar Khān acquired a name for himself in Lucknow during the days of Muʿtamad al-Daula.[58]

Similarly, among the Hindustānī *ʿulamāʾ* in Rāmpur, he sets great store by one Maulwī Ziyāʾ al-Nabī.

> Despite his involvement in the administration of the *riyāsat* (state of Rāmpur), and serving in the court of law and as paymaster in the British administration and the government of Lucknow (Awadh), he never failed to keep up with his intellectual commitments and duties. He introduced mathematics, the science of engineering… the astrolabe, the art of perspective and trigonometry to this city… His

[57] Idem., f 34 (r).

[58] Idem., f 34 (v).

> son Habīb al-Nabī—who was very young when my father was alive—studied with Maulāna Sharaf al-Dīn and Maulwī Nūr al-Islām.[59]

In similar vein, ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān speaks very highly of his own teacher and the generations of scholars that were taught by him. Maulāna Sharaf al-Dīn, he writes, had the kind of charisma that would leave no student untouched, even if they were taught only briefly. His students included a renowned doctor, a *qāżī* or jurist, and a lawyer at the Court of Appeals in Barelī (which was under direct colonial rule).[60]

Noticeably, these short biographies of the *ʿulamāʾ* of Rāmpur suggest that some scholars excelled in fields of Islamic arts and sciences like *ḥadith* and *fiqh* while also pursuing the rational sciences and arts, as evidenced by their knowledge of trigonometry and the astrolabe etc., thereby presaging later critiques of colonial representations of Muslim backwardness, in the writings of Muslim reformers like Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d.1898). All of these skills taken together, were part of the set of capabilities that the new administrative bureaucrats of the nineteenth century were required to possess in order to succeed at serving the Company or states like Rāmpur. Importantly, the vocational avenues that were available to such figures were not necessarily unilinear or permanent. The boundaries of service between directly ruled, indirectly ruled and autonomous landholdings (*zamīndārī*) were fairly porous as they had been during the era of inter-regional diplomacy, but the political stakes of such porosity were much lower. The focus in the early nineteenth century in both directly and indirectly administered regions was to sustain administrative structures that would stabilize and bolster the Company's claims to political authority in India, while simultaneously achieving complete demilitarization. This did

[59] Idem., f 36(r).

[60] Idem., f 36(v).

not mean that the new crop of lower-rung and middling Indian administrative officers were all on the same page. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān writes for example about a court stenographer who decided to quit his job and become an *ʿārif* (gnostic).[61] The creation of Company jobs did not necessarily imply that secretarial service cadres had embarked on a unilinear transition to colonial modernity.[62] We see this in other contexts during the same period. As Purnima Dhavan demonstrates with Persian-writing historians of the nineteenth-century Punjab states: chroniclers such as Bakht Mal and Ganga Ram quit Company service and moved on to greener pastures.[63] In ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's case, he explains the impetus to balance his life as a hard-working Company-appointed *dārugha* with his calling as a scholar of the religious and secular sciences. He claims to have learnt this lesson from his teacher, the abovementioned Maulāna Sharaf al-Dīn who upheld the statement "*dil be yār o dast be kār*" (Keep your heart with God and your hand at work!).[64] Working with the Company as it acquired a more noticeable presence in the Rohilla territories was thus well integrated with his scholarly training.

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[61] *Waqāʾiʿ*, f 13(r).

[62] Peter Hardy makes a different observation about this very context. He uses the Company's archive to arrive at broad generalizations about how different classes of Muslims fared unevenly under early colonial rule. Looking at the same context through ʿAbd al-Qādir's eyes reminds us that early colonial rule was not the only variable that conditioned these figures' lives and that the class of Persographic lower and middling bureaucrats chose to enter and exit early colonial service in remarkably differentiated ways. "Class" abstractly defined, therefore, is not necessarily the most accurate indicator of how Muslims fared under early colonial rule. See Peter Hardy, *Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 31-60.

[63] See Purnima Dhavan, "Redemptive Pasts and Imperiled Futures: The Writing of a Sikh History," *Sikh Formations* 3, no. 2 (2007): 111-124.

[64] *Waqāʾiʿ*, f 13(r). This statement suggests that Sharaf al-Dīn may have subscribed to Naqshbandī ideals. The axiom "*dil be yār o dast be kār*" is attributed to Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband, See Th. Zarcone, "Khwādjagān," in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Consulted online on 5 August 2018 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8766>
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The *Waqāʾiʿ* thus offers up a deeply textured description of a regional context that reveals the remarkable ways in which its chief service figures understood this moment of political restructuring as they moved between social spaces of intellectual exchange on the one hand, and the quotidian duties that they performed to prop up the Company's administration in the Gangetic plains.

IV. Conclusion

The preceding pages have examined the memoirs of Persographic service figures, all of whom were affiliated with the Rohilla territories in varying capacities over a period of time. In the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī*, a disenchanted courtier from Rāmpur described how he joined hands with a group of like-minded Mughal princes and statesmen who turned west to broker an alliance with the Durrānī Afghān ruler. The events that he outlines echo an older manner of imperial diplomacy, such as the Deccan journeys which the poet-laureate Fayzī conducted in pursuit of imperial reconnaissance and alliance-building in 1591-93.[65] As the *Tārīkh-i ʿAbbāsī* affirms, this idiom of imperial diplomacy no longer held traction in South Asia in the late-eighteenth century.

In the east—in contrast to the Kabūl campaign and the form of imperial diplomacy that it entailed—the East India Company recruited Persographic service figures to represent its interests in the intricate web of equivalent inter-regional powers that peaked by the mid-eighteenth century. These men often served as the emissaries and mediators of war and peace, who helped the Company maintain a regular channel of communication with its regional rivals, even as it increasingly assumed sovereign rights for itself. By the end of the era of early conquests, the

[65] See Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Deccan frontier and Mughal expansion, ca. 1600: Contemporary perspectives," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 3 (2004): 368-379.

Company no longer required agentive representation and channeled its Persographic service cadres towards its administrative offices. The writings of Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān Ṭabāṭabaʾī and ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān reflect this transformation in the role of Persographic servicemen under early colonial rule in the Rohilla territories.

A consistent observation running through this chapter is the fact that at the very core of all of these forms of service, and in all their iterations and realignments over the years, was a stratum of scholarly and pedagogical masters and their informal (and sometimes formal) schools. Many of these teachers wielded charismatic and other-worldly qualities, such as Mīyān Nūr Muḥammad in Khayrpūr, while others were famous for their intellectual capabilities, such as Ziyāʾ al-Nabī. In short, lineages of service families and chains of intellectual pedigree continued to underwrite the reproduction of service classes across the Mughal-colonial divide. Addressing the notion that "we know very little of the intellectual parameters of the later Mughal or the Nawwābi bureaucracy in South Asia," as one historian suggested, the endeavor here has been to point to the crisscrossing pathways of teachers and scholar-bureaucrats.[66]

Though historians have sought to explore how a growing class of service cadres weathered major political structural changes, they have seldom turned to the writings of these actors to determine the strategies, contexts and intellectual networks that they fell back on to sustain themselves. Though there has been a renewed interest in the literary cultures of late Mughal India, and its connections with the wider Persianate world, such scholarship has yet to engage with the perspectives of service figures as they engaged in a process of trial and error in their responses to the changes wrought by the ascent of the East India Company and the simultaneous fracture of the Mughal Empire and its successor states. In short, the memoirs

[66] Kumkum Chatterjee, "History as self-representation: the recasting of a political tradition in late eighteenth-century Eastern India," *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1998): 922.

discussed in this chapter have until now remained largely unexamined, relegated to a lower tier of writers in the eighteenth century's vast republic of letters. In this chapter, I have challenged such neglect, positioning ʿAbbās ʿAlī Khān and ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān as crucial mediators of diplomacy and governance at the end of the *ancien régime*.

Chapter 3

Soldierly Histories: The Written World of Military Service

I. Introduction

"As the Hindi saying goes, '*des chhoṛe, pardes bhāg*', that is to say, leave the country behind and be a mendicant in unconquered lands."[1] Such was the sage counsel that Qāsim ʿAlī Khān Āfrīdī, an Afghān soldier from Sahaswān, near Badāyūn, remembered having received in ca. 1799 from Nawwāb Amīr Khān (d. 1834), a more experienced Afghān soldier and military entrepreneur from Sambhal.[2] Although they were contemporaries, born into Afghān soldiering families and raised in the Rohilla territories—the late-Mughal Afghān strongholds of the northern Gangetic plains—their paths first crossed further south in Mālwa, in central India. They met there shortly after Āfrīdī had joined Amīr Khān's traveling army, which had pledged its services to Yashwantrāo Holkar (d. 1811), the head of one of the five major households within the disaggregated Maratha polity, and a claimant to territories around northern Mālwa.[3] Amīr Khān and Holkar constituted the leadership of an alliance of independent soldiers in the early

[1] Qāsim ʿAlī Khān Afrīdī, *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī,* MS 2245, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, f 33b. I translate the term *mamālik-i ghayr dakhlī* as "unconquered lands." I discuss the use of the term "dakhālat" in section III of the present chapter.

[2] Āfrīdī was from Sahaswān in Badāyūn, the same *qaṣba* that Yatīmī (Chapter One) was from. Although Amir Khan was born and raised in Sambhal, in the former Rohilla territories, he would later become known as the Nawwāb of Tonk, a title conferred to him by the Company after its forces defeated him in 1817 and confirmed his authority over the *jāgīrhā* in Rājpūtāna and Northern Mālwa that Yashwantrāo Holkar had gifted him.

[3] In the eighteenth century, the Maratha polity made inroads into northern, northwest and northeast India, fueled by a cyclical pattern of military arrears and the collection of taxes. Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); André Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarājya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

nineteenth century, populated by other Afghāns like Āfrīdī from the former Rohilla territories and the Maratha forces of the Holkar estate, in addition to a range of free-floating mercenary soldiers of varying backgrounds from north and central India. Theirs was the last major alliance to resist the Company's emerging sovereignty in South Asia during the nineteenth century. Āfrīdī's written account of this moment, and the political conditions in which it came to pass, points to a growing concern that occupied the imaginations of mobile soldiering figures such as himself, who were faced with the advent of the East India Company's administrative, legal and juridical reforms at the close of the eighteenth century: where were these soldiers to seek service and how were they to respond to the changes wrought by the Company's new avatar as a state?

Under Mughal rule, the military labor market—abundant in the supply of non-elite soldiers from agrarian or small-town backgrounds at the base of its martial hierarchy—had never been completely regulated.[4] During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, military brokers or *jamʿadārān* took over a large share of the recruiting process, which meant that the state's army was comprised of numerous mercenary forces led by military entrepreneurs. In fact, no single polity in early modern India had ever fully absorbed the services of such soldiers, whose fortunes were independent of direct state patronage.[5] In northern India during the eighteenth century, as Mughal political authority became attenuated and former Mughal provinces turned into regional successor states like Awadh and the Rohilla territories, an even wider range of employers than ever before hired these bands of mobile soldiers. Many of them would circulate between

[4] D. H. A Kolff uses the term "military labor market" in the context of Northern India to describe the intrinsic connection between the cyclical pattern of military service and agrarian and other forms of labor. See D. H. A Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[5] D. H. A Kolff, "Peasants Fighting for a Living in Early Modern North India," in Erik-Jan Zürcher ed., *Fighting for a Living: A Comparative History of Military Labour 1500-2000*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp. 243-265.

competing regional successor states, serving multiple employers throughout their careers. The close of the eighteenth century thus witnessed a swell in the number of independent soldiering figures and the mediators—i.e. the jobbers and paymasters—who facilitated their employment.

By the nineteenth century, however, the East India Company began actively pursuing a monopoly over militarization in Hindustān. Its professed intention to minimize its involvement in the administration of India, by creating a class of landowners and putting them in charge of a new legal and administrative apparatus, had not only failed, it had inspired armed opposition. As a result, the Company was frequently compelled to wage war in areas that it controlled directly, and it was faced with resistance to its consistent attempts to curb military forces in areas that it controlled indirectly.

Over the course of this period, a set of literate independent soldiers and military entrepreneurs—including Āfrīdī, Amīr Khān and Yashwantrāo Holkar—wrote memoirs and became the subjects of biographies that were based on their experiences under these conditions of early colonial rule.[6] Taken together, these figures formed part of a critical mass of mercenary litterateurs who emerged at the intersection of the widening constituency of Persographic writing, examined in Chapters One and Two, and the growing independence and authority of soldiering figures in the long trajectory of Mughal decentralization.

What conclusions can we draw from interpretations proposed by these authors at the end of the eighteenth century, when the Company began altering the otherwise long-standing circular system of military recruitment, taxation, state formation and alliance-building? The present

[6] A word on the use of the term "independent" is warranted here. I use the term to suggest that some soldiers who were attached to multiple successor state regimes were able to leverage a degree of control and authority over their terms and conditions of labor when these regimes were encumbered by consistent warfare. This is not to suggest that they were "free" from the straitened circumstances that most soldiers found themselves in during this period. They were however, able to loosen the ties of dependency within their professional relationships.

chapter addresses this question by drawing upon a Persian memoir, a volume of poetry in Urdu and two Persian biographies: *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī* (1823) and *Dīwān-i Āfrīdī* (?), *Amīrnāma* (ca. 1832), and *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar* (1808), corresponding to the soldiers and military entrepreneurs mentioned above, Qāsim ʿAlī Khān Āfrīdī, Nawwāb Amīr Khān and Yashwantrāo Holkar. Each of these actors figured into the others' lives and careers, and by extension, into their memoirs and the biographies that were written about them. Based on an analysis of this assortment of written works, the following pages demonstrate that independent soldiering communities and their biographers responded to demilitarization and early colonial rule in three ways. First, they elaborated a sense of community (*qaum*) amongst soldiers wherein a community's status and honor were not exclusively determined by its members' birth but could also be calibrated by how soldiering individuals behaved and enacted their respectability under straitened circumstances. Second, they abjured longstanding and familiar ethnic and spiritual genealogies that were enshrined in older chronicles in favor of more contemporary and personalized ones that they deployed to explain the opportunities that they received and the career choices that they made. Third, they advanced their own conceptions of a service (*naukarī*) ethic that reflected their experiences under conditions of Mughal decentralization and the development of the early colonial state.[7]

[7] Sunil Kumar's observations about the history of the use of the term *naukarī* are particularly insightful: "In its Persian usage the noun *naukar* carried some of the meanings present in its antecedent Mongol form, *nökör* (singular) / *nököd* (plural) – personal retainer, loyal friend, comrade in arms, bodyguard – and within the limited context of a dyadic relationship with a master, its meaning was very close to *banda-i khāṣṣ*. In its original Mongol sense, the *nököd* were free and honourable servants, who had voluntarily accepted service with a great lord." See Sunil Kumar, "*Bandagi* and *Naukari*: Studying Transition in Political Culture and Service under the Sultanates of North India, 13th–16th centuries," in Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh eds., *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-century North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 60-110.

Taken together, these works fundamentally upheld the integrity of independent soldiering in times of political upheavals. The views expressed in these memoirs, poetry and biographies were nevertheless not unanimous, and they did not propose a single consistent philosophy of military service. Rather, they were based on discrete appraisals of the circumstances under which successor state regimes had fallen apart and had in turn reordered their soldiering communities' possibilities for securing stable livelihoods. Unlike the previous chapters that unfold diachronically, the approach here considers all three contemporary actors in a single frame. It is therefore helpful to scan the contours of the works that correspond to these figures before analyzing them in tandem with one another.

II. Sources of Soldierly Histories

2.1 Āfrīdī's Collected Works:

Qāsim ʿAli Khān Āfrīdī (d. 1825) was an independent soldier who wrote an impressive range of prose and poetry in Persian, Pashto, Urdu, Kashmiri and English. "Āfridi" was the name of the tribe he belonged to, but it was also the *takhallus* or pen-name that he used in his poetry. Āfrīdī's writings survive in the form of a digest that he assembled himself called the *Kulliyāt* or collected works, of which three copies exist at different libraries in India and Pakistan. [8] This suggests that his writings circulated beyond his hometown of Sahaswān in the former Rohilla

[8] The manuscript of the *Risāla* is part of the *Kullīyāt*. Besides the *Dīwān-i Āfrīdi*, most of the contents of the *Kullīyāt* remain unpublished. The other works contained in the *Kullīyāt* include the *Shifʿāt-i-Āfrīdī*, a string of Persian poetry—mostly *qaṣidas* and *ghazals*—all in praise of the Prophet, the Imams and a few chosen Shaykhs. It also contains a *Dīwān-i Hindī* or a collection of his poetry in Urdu intermixed with a handful of Persian *ghazals*. Āfrīdī wrote poetry and prose in Pashto, comprising a divan and a *khwābnāma* or Book of Dreams, also present in the *Kullīyāt*. In all of his poetry, the author adopts two nom-de plumes: Qāsim ʿAlī and Āfrīdī. Lastly, the *Kullīyāt* contains a lexicon of Persian verbs translated by the author into Urdu, Pashto, Kashmiri and English. See *Kullīyāt-i Āfrīdi*, Khudabakhsh Oriental Public Library, manuscripts numbered 2245-2250.

territories. Though many of his works in the *Kulliyāt* are undated, we know that his memoir, the *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī*, was first completed in 1807, with additional material added in 1810 and 1823, which was just two years before his death. His repeated return to this work is suggestive not just of the value he attached to it, but also of the force of events—such as fresh encounters with other soldiering family members, and the Company's conquest of north India—that led him to keep providing this work with new endings. The title that he chose for his memoirs, "*Risāla-yi Āfrīdī*," literally translates into "Āfrīdī's Epistle" though a *risāla* was also a martial term for a body of horsemen, and it is possible therefore that he intended the title to be a play on words.

The *Risāla* in the broadest sense is a commemorative account of Āfrīdī's family and a chronicle of the major political events that shaped their lives and his own. From beginning to end, it spans a soldiering individual's reckoning with the world around him, taking in events both near and distant, and serving as a medium for his commentary on the tumultuous historical changes that he witnessed in his lifetime. Spanning twenty-three chapters, it offers an account of six generations of pastoralists and soldiers from the Āfrīdī tribe, who had migrated from the Swat valley to a small North Indian town at the turn of the eighteenth century. Āfrīdī writes that the intended audience for the *Risāla* was "the community (*qaum*) of Afghāns descended from a single patrilineal ancestor (*az yek jadd*) who had settled in Hindustān and were unfamiliar with their heritage and the experiences of their kinsmen."[9] The *Risāla* thus opens with a narration of the origins and history of the Āfrīdīs and an account of the author's great-grandfather and great-uncles who traveled across north and central India, charting careers as *naukars*, or servants, within the successor states to the Mughal Empire.

[9] *Risāla-i Āfrīdī*, f 1a.

Āfrīdī devoted the largest part of the *Risāla*, however, to documenting his own experiences and the challenges that he faced as he sought regular employment in a heavily militarized context. He recounts, for instance, his experience of joining a military contingent for the first time in India. His career first blossomed in Farrukhabad, in the Doab, after which he traveled to lands as distant as Surat, Indore, and Agra in search of employment over the span of two decades. Throughout his travels to these regions he undertook military service as a member of multiple wandering armed contingents. He mentions that when he arrived at the court of Yashwantrāo Holkar in Indore, he was greeted with a robe of investiture (*khilʿat*), which confirmed the recognition that he had long sought in his career.[10] It was there also that he met Amīr Khān, whose service he joined without a moment's hesitation, and whom he asked quite bluntly, "how did you manage to rise to such an exalted position from nothing?" The present chapter opened with Amīr Khān's response to this question, i.e. in order to reap success Āfrīdī would have to leave the *des* behind and head *pardes*, to the *mamālik-i ghayr dakhalī*. While Amīr Khān and Yashwantrāo Holkar, among other soldiering figures, are presented in such a manner as direct interlocutors in Āfrīdī's *Risāla*, their relationship could only have lasted until the East India Company defeated their collective forces in 1818, at the close of the Third Maratha War. Following an account of the war, the *Risāla* concludes abruptly with a description of the author's relatives who were alive while he was writing, and it is unclear if he then continued to work as a soldier.

[10] In the early modern gift economy, giving a *khilʿat* signified that the giver was an overlord whose gesture implied that the recipient was bound to him, through political allegiance, service, or friendship. By the eighteenth century, this had become a widespread ritual practice across several courts in India, and its meanings and particular significations held varying valences in different contexts. See Stewart Gordon ed., *Robes of Honour: Khilʿat in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

It merits mention that Persian commemorative works such as chronicles, memoirs, biographies and travelogues that were written in the pre-modern period elude genre-based categorization. A *tārīkh* could contain all the elements of a *safarnāma* and a memoir, such as Āfrīdī's, could contain both. What is unusual about the *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī* and warrants further analysis is the very fact that an independent soldier like Āfrīdī had written it.

How then might we situate the *Risāla* in the *longue durée* of Indo-Persian historiography? In South Asia, prior to the eighteenth century, Persian commemorative writing was primarily produced and consumed at sites of patronage and authority like imperial courts, provincial courts, the estates of elite notables, scholarly circles, and religious institutions. As a result, most of the Persian prose works that were written in this period were devoted to the self-representation of the elites and the sub-elite figures who occupied these spaces. From early on, this delimitation of the social remit of historical writing within the Persianate tradition was sometimes explicitly stated, as for instance in the words of the influential fourteenth century historian Ẓiyāʾ al-Dīn Baranī — the most well-known historian of pre-Mughal India:

> The discipline of history involves a knowledge of the accounts and records of the prophets, sultans, and dignitaries of religion and state...The low, mean, unworthy, base, vile, ignoble, and those of low origin have nothing to do with history and it can neither be their profession nor their area of expertise... The discipline of history and its knowledge is in fact harmful to the low-born and not valuable for them at all.[11]

[11] See Ẓiyāʾ al-Dīn Baranī, *Tārikh-i Firoz Shahi*, trans. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2015) pp. 6-9. See also Blain Auer, "Pre-modern intellectual debates on the knowledge of history and Ẓiyāʾ al-Dīn Baranī's Tārīkh-i Fīrūzshāhī," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 52, no. 2 (2015): 207-223.

Baranī, writing in the preface of his chronicle of Firūz Shāh Tughlaq (r. 1351-1388), then proceeds to illustrate the ways in which elite members of society should read history: as a body of ethical templates after which they could model their own actions—templates which were inappropriate and indeed dangerous and self-defeating for the low born. This passage reflects one of the central attitudes that shaped the way that courtly Persianate historians viewed their enterprise. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, when Persian was the main language of imperial administration and attained its highest literary prestige, most courtly historians would have agreed with Baranī's ideal. The very idea of a mercenary soldier as both the subject and author of a work of history would have been preposterous. And yet, by the early nineteenth century, in the wake of the Mughal Empire and some five centuries after Baranī's time, this phenomenon had started to root itself in the literary culture: historiography was no longer the preserve of a narrow elite.[12]

For a deeper sense of the development of this phenomenon, we might look beyond Āfrīdī's activities as a memoirist to his more strictly literary writing, for Āfrīdī also wrote poetry in Urdu, Persian and Pashto, often communicating aspects of his life as an independent soldier between empires in his verses. He does not mention a patron in his poetry, or in any of his works, which was in keeping with the pattern outlined in previous chapters of autonomous writing and observational styles in the late eighteenth century.[13] Writing about the eighteenth-century

[12] In keeping with this dissertation, this argument is based on Persographic figures who mostly wrote in Persian. There is a rich older tradition of vernacular commemorative writing. See for example, Allison Busch, "Portrait of a Raja in a Badshah's World: Amrit Rai's Biography of Man Singh (1585)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55, no. 2-3 (2012): 287-328.

[13] Chapter 1 of the present dissertation demonstrates through the example of the unpracticed and unpedigreed scribe, Aḥmad ʿAlī, who was writing a diary at the behest of his employer, that the social constituency of Persographic writers and had already expanded over the course of the eighteenth century.

Levant, Dana Sajdi uses the term "nouveau literacy" to describe socially mobile writers who had recently assumed the authority to write and to chronicle the world around them.[14] According to Sajdi, the Damascene barber, Ibn Budayr, was an "unusual author" in that he did not typify the social profile of a writer, and yet, his life and writings bore marks and clues of a new social reality in the Ottoman Levant. Āfrīdī's oeuvre is analogous to Ibn Budayr's in that he too was "unusual": his style, his perspectives and manner cannot be generalized alongside those of the majority of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers in South Asia. And yet, like Ibn Budayr, his writings point to a tangible shift in the social location of Persianate writing. He captures some of the force of writing in his Urdu verses about the value of the written word. In the *Dīwān-i Āfrīdī* he writes:

hai be shamshīr hasr-i mulk satānī toh kyā
jārī rahtā hai magar mulk mein kāghaz
hai kisī ke nahīn kuchh ʿahd-i zabānī par yaqīn
tā ke bāndhe nahīn mazbūt be paymān-i kāghaz[15]

So what if you conquer empires by the sword,
What remains and cannot be replaced is paper.
Nobody accepts a promise by word of mouth,
Until it can be backed by a guarantee in paper.

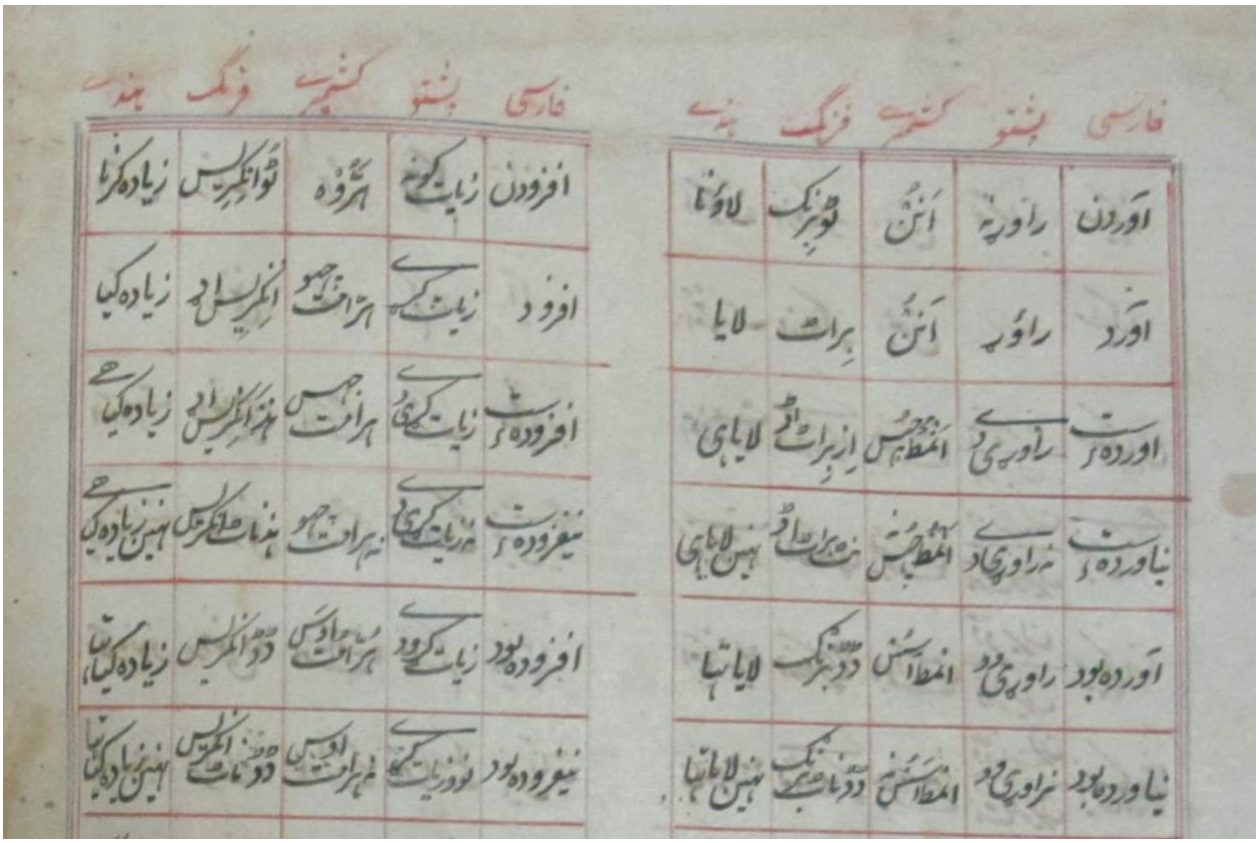
In this verse Āfrīdī records a sense of what writing could have meant to a soldiering figure who was not bound to a single patron, underscoring the symbolic security and transactional value of paper. Presciently, he indicates to his reader that he understands that in

[14] See Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[15] Qāsim ʿAlī Khān "Āfrīdī", *Dīwān-i Āfrīdī,* MS 2247, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, f 33b, Translations mine.

order to be successful and effective in the emerging political order, one had to be able to use paper.[16]

Āfrīdī also affords his readers a sense of his own relationship to language, literacy, and linguistic proficiency from the fact that he decided to write a glossary of conjugated verbs in Persian, Urdu, Pashto, Kashmiri and English (transcribed in *nastaʿlīq*).



4. A page from the glossary, *Āfrīdī Nāma*. Source: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library MS. 2248

As is demonstrated in this image, Persian is relativized: it is just one of five languages that would have been useful in the military labor market of the late-eighteenth century. And though Āfrīdī

[16] Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

makes no mention of his own educational background, he presumably picked up at least some of his linguistic skills—a smattering of English—through his service as a soldier.

Evidently, by the early nineteenth century, "unusual" an author though he was, it was possible for Āfrīdī to author his own *Kulliyāt*, a large collection of his life's works. The only other identified example in South Asia of an ordinary soldier who wrote Persian prose—that too, an Afghān soldier—is the very different example of Dattū Sarwānī, the sixteenth-century Afghān soldier from the Sarwānī tribe, who regularly had dreams and visions of his spiritual guide who he claimed would direct his future military endeavors in India.[17] It is rare, however, for the historian to come by the work of a Dattū Sarwānī from the early modern period, or even a voluminous work like the *Kulliyāt-i Āfrīdī* from a later one. The rarity of these materials is at least partially accounted for by the fact that non-elite writers of Persian were numerically fewer than their counterparts, but also by the fact that written artifacts such as the *Kulliyāt*, which were not closely attached to the survival and perpetuation of a major political entity, tended not to preserve very well. The conservation of writings such as those by soldiers, which usually did not possess significant literary distinction or informational value about previous Indian empires, was above all never a priority of the colonial state.[18] Nevertheless, when taken into consideration alongside works like the *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar* and the *Amīrnāma*, the *Kulliyāt-i Āfrīdī* suggests that a growing discourse was generated amongst independent military entrepreneurs, their scribes, attendants and soldiers, in the wake of early colonial rule.

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[17] See, Simon Digby, "Dreams and Reminiscences of Dattu Sarvani, a Sixteenth Century Indo-Afghān Soldier," in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 2, 1 (January 1965): 52-80.

[18] The Company's officials commissioned their own histories of eighteenth century chiefs and their lineages as discussed in most studies of "princely states." See for example, Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian princes and their states* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). pp. 88-90.

2.2 *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar* and the *Amīrnāma*:

Unlike the *Risāla* in *Āfrīdī*'s *Kulliyāt*, the other two commemorative works discussed in this chapter, the *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar* and *Amīrnāma*, are not autobiographical. The author of the *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar* or "The Holkar Affair" was a certain Mohan Singh, who wrote the original manuscript in 1808, "based on what he heard" from Yashwantrāo Holkar's *bakhshī* or paymaster, a figure named Bhawānī Shankar. The subject of the *Waqāʾiʿ* is ostensibly Yashwantrāo Holkar's life, which was deeply entwined with the political expansion of the Maratha *rājya*, a disaggregated polity based in the Deccan plateau consisting of a coalition of Marathi-speaking martial households bound together by their commitment to the orders of a Brahmin leader, the *peshwa*, and a Maratha ruler or *rājā*. The Holkars, who were based in Indore in central India, were just one of these martial households which had joined the Maratha coalition as it conducted raids and campaigns into the Mālwa plateau and the Gangetic plains. Like many *nawwābān* and *rājagān* in the inter-imperial period, the Holkar chiefs operated from a "court," maintained courtly rituals and practices, and consistently waged wars, staged campaigns and seized *chauth* (or a fourth of the revenue) in areas that they raided. The business of planned and strategized raiding was central to Maratha politics, and households like the Holkars formed around the abilities of their patriarchs to lead campaigns and raid successfully. Importantly, the Holkar household had only emerged as a part of the Maratha polity in 1721 and did not claim elite caste status like the *peshwa* and the *rājā*, and its members were famously remembered as *dhangar* or shepherds. They crystallized their position within the confederacy on the basis of their ability to further Maratha expansionist endeavors in north and central India. The Marathas' web of alliances was pulled apart in different directions by the end of the eighteenth

century as the *peshwa's* control over the households weakened. The East India Company finally defeated the remaining Marathas in the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-18). It is in this context, i.e. the Company's ascent, that the events of Yashwantrāo Holkar's life and his dealings with various martial interlocutors like Bhawānī Shankar, are given meaning in the *Waqā'i'*.[19]

The *Waqāʾiʿ* has been translated from Persian into Marathi and English, and its translated forms have especially drawn the attention of historians of the Marathas.[20] It is purportedly one of the few known contemporary narrative accounts that offers a glimpse into the internal workings of the Maratha confederacy during Yashwantrāo Holkar's chieftaincy (1799 – 1811) prior to its downfall. The other known biographical work pertaining to the Holkar household is the Marathi *Holkarānchī Kayfiat*, which was produced later in the late nineteenth century and has therefore not been perceived as useful to historians of the Marathas seeking to mine chronicles and commemorative narratives for verifiable "facts" relating to the decline of the Maratha regime. One would not be remiss however, in suggesting that the *Waqāʾiʿ* offers more than meets the positivist historian's eye, starting with the insights of the *bakhshī*, Bhawānī Shankar, the figure to whom Mohan Singh attributes all of the information in the *Waqā'i'*, and whose shadow looms over the narrative. Bhawānī Shankar—who was born into a household of jobbers and *bakhshiyān*—cut his teeth working for Holkar, but eventually defected to the Company after Lord Lake's capture of Delhi in 1803. He thus earned for himself the ignominious sobriquet *namak ḥarām,* or "one who is untrue to his salt," and his home, still standing in Shāhjahānābād,

[19] For a detailed review of the military rivalry between the Marathas and the East India Company, see R. G. S. Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India: The Struggle for Control of the South Asian Military Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[20] A redacted copy of the *Waqāʾiʿ* was translated into Marathi as *Bakhshi Bhawani Shankar Yanchi Rojnishi*. See Mohan Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, trans. Jadunath Sarkar, ed. Raghubir Sinh (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1998), pp. iv-v.

continues to be referred to as *namak ḥarām ki hawelī* or, "the traitor's mansion."[21] Given his defection to the Company, at junctures in the narrative the *Waqāʾiʿ* appears to be a thinly veiled defense of Bhawānī Shankar's upstanding character, portraying him as a victim of circumstance rather than a traitor. Therefore, departing from the hagiographical tendency that the reader of Persian chronicles frequently encounters, the *Waqāʾiʿ* betrays a discomfort with its subject, Holkar.

Although the *Waqāʾiʿ* opens with a fairly laudatory account of the Holkar family and their induction into the Maratha polity, it is Bhawānī Shankar who ultimately shines through the narrative. Throughout, his relationships with a wide array of soldiering figures who served Holkar are foregrounded, as is his role as the skillful mediator and efficient manager of troops comprising Afghān mercenaries like Āfrīdī and Amīr Khān among others. The reader is repeatedly reminded that he loyally served as *bakhshī* to his employer until the moment at which it was no longer tenable to do so, following the Company's takeover of North India after 1803, which effectively put an end to Holkar's claims there.

In similar vein, Amīr Khān's account, the *Amīrnāma*, like the *Waqāʾiʿ*, was written as a retrospective narration of the events that had immediately preceded the East India Company's "pacification" of northern India. Its author, Basāwan Lāl "Shādān" had served Amīr Khān as his *munshī* for about twelve years before he was commissioned by his employer to write an account of the latter's life.[22] Amīr Khān, who figures into most written sources as "Nawwāb Muḥammad

[21] Anonymous Author, "The Magazine," Calcutta National Library, Jadunath Sarkar Collection, JS no. 203. Jadunath Sarkar quotes an article about Bhawānī Shankar printed in a journal titled "The Magazine" published from Lahore in August 1921.

[22] *Munshīyān*, as examined in Chapter 1, were men of the pen. Following the gradual decline of the Mughal Empire, *munshīyān* in the eighteenth century developed an increasingly autonomous observational style. By the nineteenth century, alongside their gradual absorption into the East India Company's service, *munshīyān* like Shādān served individual patrons or households. On

Amīr Khān" of Tonk, was a Rohilla Afghān soldier whose grandfather, a Sālārzāʾī Afghān named Ṭāliʿ Khān, traveled from Swāt to Hindustān and settled in Sambhal in the Rohilla Afghān territories during the Mughal Emperor Muḥammad Shāh's reign (r. 1719 – 1748). In ca. 1781, at the tender age of twelve, the young Amīr Khān traveled away from his home and towards Gujarat and Mālwa where he sought to eke out a living as a full-time soldier, inspired, according to the *Amīrnāma*, by a sense of adventure. Initially, he tried to take up service with the Shinde Maratha household, based in Gwalior, but was rejected by Shinde's general, De Boigne for being too young and inexperienced. After some trial and error, he ingratiated himself to a fugitive Yashwantrāo Holkar who had escaped confinement in Nagpur. Within a few years, Yashwantrāo Holkar became his chief benefactor and gave him the title of Nawwāb. Holkar also conferred upon him administrative control over the small principalities of Tonk, Berasia and Rampura in southern Rājpūtāna which the Holkar household had previously seized. In this way, it was through Holkar's good offices that Amīr Khān made the transition from ordinary Afghān mercenary to neophyte prince.

Amīr Khān retained the title of Nawwāb even after the Company defeated him and his troops when he fought on behalf of the Marathas in the Third Anglo-Maratha War, thus morphing into a "native prince".[23] The *Amīrnāma* (Account of the Amīr) traces its namesake's

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the changing role of the *munshī* during imperial decentralization, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. "Witnesses and Agents of Empire: Eighteenth-Century Historiography and the World of the Mughal Munshī," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1-2 (2010): 1-2.

[23] Apart from a policy of direct annexation, the East India Company employed and developed a model of indirect rule from the mid-eighteenth century onwards whereby a single British Resident or Political Agent, controlled a regional state through 'advice' given to the local chief or holder of a patrimonial estate who they acknowledged as "native princes." This subsequently became a model for imperial administrators and politicians to extend the British Empire without bearing the costs of direct annexation. For a detailed study of the residency system see Michael

career as he completed this transformation from Afghān soldier to a major military entrepreneur who placed himself at the heart of Maratha internal rivalries. The *Amīrnāma* is the only major Persian work about a mercenary turned state-maker to have been translated into English, let alone Hindi,[24] and is available in countless manuscripts in libraries across South Asia and the UK.[25] Despite this profusion, suggesting unusually wide circulation, historians have largely ignored the *Amīrnāma,* much less engaged in an interpretative reading of its Persian text, perhaps deterred in part by the excessive verbosity of its prose, a quality often attributed to weak examples of a bygone Persian literary tradition, and one that was commented upon by its English translator, H. T. Prinsep.[26]

It is in fact true that taken together, the *Amīrnāma*, *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar* and *Risāla-i Āfrīdī* are not master works of the Persian literary tradition in India. They contain significant morphological and syntactical slips in language, as might be expected from the writings of a non-elite like Āfrīdī, or from the patronage of newly minted power brokers like Amīr Khān and

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H. Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System 1764-1857* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[24] See K. R. Qanungo, "Amir-Nama or Memoirs of Amir Khan Pindari by Basawan Lal," *Dacca University Studies* 3 (1938): 56.

[25] Amīr Khān's brother-in-law and fellow Rohilla Afghān Nawwāb Ghaffūr Khān of Jaora (d.1825)—who was also awarded administrative control over an agrarian township by Yashwantrāo Holkar—did not cultivate similar levels of celebrity during his own lifetime, though the Company instated him as the Nawwāb after 1818. The legacy of the Nawwāb of Jaora was later celebrated in brief and barely circulated histories of the princely state of Jaora. See *Tārīkh-i Rīyāsat-i Jaora*, (ca. 1950 publication data missing).

[26] H. T. Prinsep, the editor and translator of a copy of the *Amīrnāma* writes that he found the prose so unbearably verbose that he had to resort to considerable editorializing. See Busawun Lal, *Memoirs of the Puthan Soldier of Fortune: The Nuwab Ameer-ood-doulah Mohummud Ameer Khan*, trans. H. T. Prinsep (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1832). Unless specified otherwise, all of the citations from the *Amīrnāma* in the present chapter are from the Persian manuscript housed at the Salar Jung Museum and Library. See Basāwan Lāl Shādān, *Amīrnāma*, MS Ta. 34, Salar Jung Museum and Library, Hyderabad.

Yashwantrāo Holkar, all of which were at a distance from an imperial or elite social location typical of Persian chronicles in India. But it is precisely this quality that augurs wider historical analyses. Each of these works offers rare access into a realm of Persian prose that was grounded in the experiences of independent soldiers and military entrepreneurs who were being drawn into a political system increasingly dominated by the East India Company. More narrowly, they bring into relief the political, tactical and intellectual responses of Qāsim ʿAlī Khān Āfrīdī, Amīr Khān, Yashwantrāo Holkar, and the men in their service, to the altered system of politics that had become apparent in their lifetimes. The intersection of these figures at this particular historical juncture is representative of the slow dissolution of major regional power bases like the Rohilla Afghāns and the Maratha confederacy. As each of these successor state regimes was subsumed by the Company and its allies, independent soldiers, military entrepreneurs and chiefs splintered off and recombined to forge their own contractual relationships and allegiances. Through their lives, one is able to trace the sub-imperial system of political alliances which slowly broke apart, allowing a degree of social mobility, whereby independent soldiers could transform into neophyte military entrepreneurs, "nouveau-literate" poets and historians, and somewhat successful political opportunists (affectionately called freebooters by colonial officials).[27] As the two prominent sub-imperial political alliances of the eighteenth century broke apart—those of the Afghāns, stretching from Herat to the Gangetic plains, and the Marathas, spanning the Deccan plateau and parts of northern and central India—Āfrīdī, Amīr Khān and Holkar were required to, and were able to, steer their own courses. [28] It was thus that they wrote

[27] H. T. Prinsep, *Memoirs of the Puthan Soldier*, pp. iii – xiv.

[28] These two alliances competed with each other for political and economic control over Hindustān throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Colonial and nationalist histories would project this as a rivalry between two intrinsically opposed forces, one Hindu and the other Muslim. See G. S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*, 2nd. impression (Bombay: Phoenix

about and commissioned works that conveyed their sense of selfhood and service that was unattached to an imperial project. These conditions are inextricably braided into their descriptions of their lives, the choices that they made and their interpretation of historical events.

III. Community and Honor in the Military Labor Market

3.1. Piṇḍārīs and the East India Company

The East India Company was one of many competing military and revenue-seeking agents in South Asia when, in 1813, it formally separated its commercial and territorial accounts and took a significant step in its metamorphosis from company to state. As addressed in previous chapters, its transformation had been underway since the 1760s when it had begun to compete with Mughal successor states which had seceded from the empire by developing their own military-driven tax regimes. Statehood in the successor-state era manifested with variations but was always predicated on shifting coalitions between would-be sovereigns and holders of land grants, be they arrivistes or older politically connected lineages.[29] Many of the former—the arrivistes—rose through Mughal ranks as the Rohilla chiefs had in the early eighteenth century. In the absence of a clear imperial framework in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the arrivistes constituted an unpredictable and looming threat to the East India Company, whereas the task of vassalizing the older political lineages was comparatively a more straightforward project. The Company's officials found it increasingly difficult to distinguish between military chiefs, mercenaries, robbers, and highwaymen, all of whom appeared to them

Publications, 1957). Tending to their own communitarian biases, they neglected to consider the ways in which these alliances broke apart. As argued in this chapter, soldiering neo-literates pressed older identity markers into the service of an overarching ethics of soldiering.

[29] See D. H. A. Kolff, *Grass in Their Mouths: The Upper Doab of India Under the Company's Magna Charta, 1793-1830* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

vaguely similar. They therefore developed their own conceptual lexicon to take stock of the breadth of the military labor market that they were faced with in northern and central India in order to successfully subdue and criminalize or recruit its soldiers.

A prominent example of the latter process stems from the career of William Sleeman, who served the Company in multiple capacities during the early nineteenth century, famously heading the "Thuggee and Dacoity" Department, who was lauded by his peers for abolishing "Thuggee," between 1835-39.[30] Sleeman believed that the "Thugs" were essentially a widespread organized group of highway robbers and murderers who spoke a specific language called "Ramasaeena," adopted an identical modus operandi, worshipped a specific deity, and were answerable to a single leader. Even though he distinguished between the Thugs and a similar-seeming group of armed bands called "Piṇḍārīs," he and several of his contemporaries used analogous modes of analysis to describe the latter.[31] They conceived of the Piṇḍārīs as an organized network of thieving and scavenging militias who habitually followed Maratha campaigns in the Deccan plateau and in central India. Like the Thugs, the Piṇḍārīs represented a threat to the administrative order that the Company was attempting to establish at the time. In the eighteen-aughts, Company officials regularly corresponded with each other about how best to suppress men like Ẓālim Singh and Chittū Khān, identified as Piṇḍārī leaders. However, the one

[30] See William Sleeman, *Report on the Depredations Committed by the Thug Gangs of Upper and Central India: From the Cold Season of 1836-37, Down to Their Gradual Suppression, Under the Operation of the Measures Adopted Against Them by the Supreme Government, in the Year 1839* (Calcutta: GH Huttmann, 1840).

[31] William Sleeman, *Rambles and recollections of an Indian official* (Reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1915) pp. 292-299. Kim A. Wagner ed., *Stranglers and Bandits: A Historical Anthology of Thuggee* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Piṇḍārī whom they perceived as most threatening was none other than the Rohilla Afghān, Amīr Khān, who they eventually defeated and instated as a Nawwāb.[32]

It should be noted that the term "Piṇḍārī" has a hazy etymology. While its use in the nineteenth century is certainly attached to the elaboration of the early colonial construct outlined above, historians remain divided over how the word was used in the pre-colonial period and what it might have signified.[33] Some point out that the word Piṇḍārī appears in Persian chronicles as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, referring to the auxiliary armies that were following the Marathas and ravaging the Mughal territories south of the Narmada. Others suggest that it appears to be a corruption of the word "Bidarī" that was used to refer to auxiliary soldiers in the Mughal army's train. It is unclear, however, if "Piṇḍārī" was ever an autonym that was used by soldiers to describe themselves. In the late nineteenth century, after the term was used frequently by Company officials, Maratha political discourse also made use of it to refer to the *Shindeshāhī* Piṇḍārīs and the *Holkarshāhī* Piṇḍārīs, i.e. the camps of the two rival Maratha households in central India.[34] Amīr Khān was a partisan of the Holkar household, and therefore features in Maratha sources in Persian and Marathi from the nineteenth century as a *Holkarshāhī* Piṇḍārī. However, he is never referred to as such in the work that he himself commissioned, the *Amīrnāma,* where he is only ever called Nawwāb Amīr Khān. Evidently, the history and range of the use of "Piṇḍārī" make it difficult to extricate any original or foundational sense of the term

[32] I have deliberately avoided terms like "Thugs" and "Piṇḍārīs" in my analysis unless it is to quote or describe categories put forward by colonial officials, for they do nothing to explain the political and ethical reflections of the set of actors discussed in this chapter. As stated in the introduction, I use the term "independent soldier" to fully capture the condition of serving an army in the absence of strong state structures.

[33] B. N. Ghosh, *British Policy Towards the Pathans and the Pindaris in Central India, 1805-1818* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966) pp. 1-8.

[34] Idem., p.7.

beyond its extensive use in the Company archive. In practice, it appears that those who were identified in Company correspondence as Piṇḍārīs were not associated with a single exclusive soldiering identity such as "Afghān", "Rājpūt" or "Jāt." Nor were Piṇḍārīs limited to any technical martial category (although most of them appear to have been extremely mobile and likely rode on horse-back). The only consensus in the use of the word is in its modern form, to refer to bands of independent soldiers whom the East India Company was determined to either criminalize or absorb into its own ranks, and who were spearheaded by the Rohilla Afghān, Amīr Khān.

Historians are sensitive to the Company's criminalization of arriviste social climbers like Amīr Khān and the legions of independent soldiers who followed them during this period. However, studies of the military labor market in early colonial India have yet to fully appreciate how soldiering communities responded to the Company's lexicon and if indeed they generated their own concepts to consider their own condition. [35] As the regulations that the Company introduced in the first half of the nineteenth century threatened to progressively discipline and order a labor market that had produced thousands of unmoored soldiers and military chiefs like Āfrīdī, Amīr Khān and Yashwantrāo Holkar, their actions did not go unnoticed. What were the distinct ways in which they reacted to the Company's administrative measures?

3.2. Honor and Community in the *Risāla, Amīrnāma* and *Waqāʾiʿyi Holkar*

Qāsim ʿAlī Khān Āfrīdī responded to the Company's criminal courts in particular with suspicion, joined to a sense of anxiety about what the emerging new order might bode for his

[35] Kolff poses this question but does not suggest what kinds of materials could be studied to address it. See D. H. Kolff, "The End of an Ancien Régime: Colonial War in India 1798 – 1818," in *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 22-49.

source of livelihood and his opportunities for *naukarī*, or service. In fact, he inherited some of this suspicion from his father, Burhān Khān, a soldiering Afghān who had served in the Nawwāb of Farrukhabad's army for some time. Āfrīdī writes of an instance in which officers of the East India Company wrongfully arrested another Afghān man in front of his father:

> In these times, the British (*farang*) army has made victorious inroads, hemmed in solely by the other lands (*mamālik*) that remain in Hindustān. If it were not for them [the *mamālik*], they [the *farang*] would have collected taxes from all of Hindustān, and would have fulfilled their desire to conquer the seven climes. To the ordinary subjects (*raʿāyā*), this is fine, but the fortunes of the nobles (*shurafāʾ*) have been obstructed, and the station and ranking they had held has come to mean nothing. There is no justice for them in the criminal court (*faujdārīʿadālat*)… In the year 1187 AH [1773/4 CE], Burhān Khān, my father, was sitting at a men's gathering close to Lāl Sarāi; the party was getting started as usual and the dancers were performing. Some thieves arrived at the door, taking note of the gathering. Suddenly the servants of the troops of the English platoon (*mulāzimān-i firqa baṭālan angrez bahādur*) arrived in a carriage and picked up one Afghān of the Khaṭak tribe from the gathering, arrested him and took him to their camp… At that moment my father decided to leave his residence in the city of Farrukhabad. He said, "It is unfortunate that the Afghān community (*qaum*) is no longer treated as it ought… The officers of the British army have unjustly arrested this Afghān. Staying on in such a city is unwise."[36]

Āfrīdī thus describes the sense of injustice and confusion that his father (Burhān Khān) voiced at what he believed was the unwarranted arrest of an Afghān bystander. As Burhān Khān saw it, the officials' conduct was evidence of the Company's disregard for the Afghān *qaum* and it was reasonable for him to decide to reside elsewhere. Burhān Khān's statement closely resembles the advice that Āfrīdī received from Amīr Khān i.e. to leave the *mamālik-i dakhlī* and

[36] *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī*, f 10a

to make a living in unconquered lands.[37] The suggestion inherent in Āfrīdī's narration of the events surrounding his father's decision to leave Farrukhābād is that independent and mobile soldiers were better off seeking service in realms that had not experienced *dakhālat* or interference. Soldiers who moved between successor states were clearly aware that by the early nineteenth century the Company's politics amounted to something different: interference.

Āfrīdī's suspicion of the Company, its criminal courts and its inability to honor *sharīf* people are also revealing because they are attached to his father's declaration of pride in his own Afghān identity, broadly implied as a geographical provenance or a language that he shared with the unfairly apprehended Khaṭak man. The notion that some urban Indian elites mourned the loss of their *sharīf* status is familiar to historians of early Company rule or successor state regimes.[38] However, these were primarily nobles who claimed to have inherited the Mughal mantle through decades of service to the empire, through the embodiment of cultivated manners performed in courts or urban intellectual centers, or through kinship with *amīrzādagān* (Mughal elites). In contrast to the urban *shurafā'*, Āfrīdī articulates a more rustic image of his antecedents. For instance, he does not shy away from describing his family's humble origins in the pastoral lands of a place called "Sanḍā Basta" named after the Indian seed bull (*sānḍ*), located near Peshawar.[39] His ancestors were the victims of rivalry between two clans and were forced to leave their homeland and travel to the North Indian plains where they settled down in Sahaswan, a *qaṣba* where members of different Afghān tribes had been trickling in and striking roots. They then

[37] Idem., f 33b.

[38] See Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[39] *Risāla-yi Āfrīdi*, f 3b-4a.

served in the armies of the Bangash Nawwāb of Farrukhabad.[40] This account suggests that Āfrīdī's father was not an *amīrzāda*, nor was he servant of the Mughal Empire, and he appears not to have been a member of a major contemporary intellectual circle (*halqa*) for his son would surely have mentioned it. And yet, he lamented a loss of entitlement, a perceived lack of respect for the Afghān *qaum* and the *shurafāʾ* that had led to the summary arrest of an Afghān man in Farrukhabad. He drew the conclusion that as an Afghān *sharīf* himself, he no longer felt safe living in the same city.

In addition to this story, Āfrīdī also offers a short description of his father's appearance and skills: he was "a man of wheatish (*gandumī*) complexion with a handsome face and unparalleled intelligence. He was like Bīrbal (*Bīrbar*) or any other noble (*amīr*) from Hindustān. He knew many languages besides the Afghān language Pashto, including the Persian of Isfahan, Turkish, and Urdu of the court of Shāhjahānābād." In these statements Āfrīdī calibrates his father's *sharāfat*, or nobility, according to his aptitude for embodying the affective qualities of Mughal nobility, a skill he acquired somewhere between the *qaṣba* of Sahaswān and the Nawwāb of Farrukhabad's army.[41] Furthermore, in this description, Afghān identity—which had once been associated with insurgence and rebellion against the Mughal Empire—signifies honor and *sharīf* status. In the inter-imperial years, it was possible to articulate this type of self-identification of one's *qaum* as respectable and deserving of fair criminal trials rather than

[40] Ibid.

[41] Burhān Khān's construal of *sharāfat* is different from the historian Margrit Pernau's use of the term to indicate nobility based on the embodiment of qualities derived from connections to largely urban institutions in the early nineteenth century. Pernau does however make clear the possibilities of becoming *sharīf* through cultivated manners rather than from birth in the pre-1857 era, which is an argument that evidence from *qasbāt* like Sahaswān appears to corroborate. See Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes.*

summary arrests, but it would be drowned out in subsequent years when the Company would superimpose its own vision of "martial races" in the late nineteenth century.[42]

In similar vein Shādān, the author of the *Amīrnāma* describes Amīr Khān's grandfather Ṭāliʿ Khān Sālārzāi as a man who was so committed to his own Afghān "honor" that he refused to accept an offer to take up Mughal imperial service when the emperor Muḥammad Shāh—who was impressed with his brave resistance to the imperial army during its campaign in Bangarh—asked him to defect. Shādān writes, "That man of boundless courage (*ʿalā himmat*) refused. Shortly after that he sacrificed his life fighting alongside Ḥāfiz Raḥmat Khān [the Rohilla Afghān chief]."[43] Ṭāliʿ Khān's honorable reputation would precede him in later years. The Rohilla leader Dūnde Khān thanked Ṭāliʿ Khān's son, Muḥammad Ḥayāt Khān (Amīr Khān's father), for his family's service during the Rohilla War and allowed him to live on rent in the *jāgīrhā* of a few "prominent men" in Sambhal. It was there that Muḥammad Ḥayāt Khān interacted with a certain Shaykh Yaḥya and other men of learning, and became proficient in arithmetic, algebra, astrology, and the Hindu scriptures.[44]

Shādān's presentation of Amīr Khān's father as a partisan of the Rohilla Afghān chiefs who was also familiar with Hindu mythology and astrological sciences is a detail that was added with a particular aim in mind: to present Amīr Khān's subsequent affability with powerful Hindu chiefs like the Marathas as an organic quality that he had inherited from his learned and

[42] In the years following the mutiny of 1857, the Company would cultivate and encourage certain "martial races," and develop its own hierarchies, as well as reward and punish behavior within its regiments entirely along the lines of its own regulations. See Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

[43] *Amīrnāma*, MS Ta. 34, Salar Jung Museum Library, f 14.

[44] Idem., f 11a.

honorable father. By the 1820s, when Amīr Khān was narrating the events of his life to his biographer, Shādān, he bore the appellation of the Nawwāb of Tonk, a tiny *jāgīr* in Rajasthan, which was surrounded on all sides by Rājpūt chiefs. He had come to acquire this *jāgīr* from his chief benefactor, Yashwantrāo Holkar. In effect, Amīr Khān—the descendent of a Rohilla Afghān soldier who had fought against the Mughal army—began his career by deciding to leave the former Rohilla domains in his youth and ended it with the acquisition of valuable alliances with Hindu chiefs, both Maratha and Rājpūt. After he was defeated by the British in 1818, Amīr Khān and his family tried to draw from both his Afghān heritage and his Maratha connections, although to no avail. He sought, for instance, to revive an Afghān coalition of resistance in the former Rohilla territories, and later, his sons tried to secure land assignments within the Holkar household's territories. Though these attempts never reached fruition, they suggest that Amīr Khān drew from multiple social resources to which he had access in order to craft an unbounded and expansive social identity and sense of community.

Taken together, these descriptions of Āfrīdī and Amīr Khān's fathers and grandfathers have implications for the ways in which historians comprehend the inter-imperial world. Their respective autobiography and biography suggest that in the absence of empire, mobile soldiers exercised greater creative license in establishing their own criteria in interpreting notions of community and *sharīf* identity. In their circumstances, the requisite qualifications for entry into social categories were flexible, and soldiering figures like Āfrīdī and Amīr Khān stretched these possibilities to the fullest. These conditions would change shortly after when the Company successfully monopolized the military labor market, as Āfrīdī noted. Suffice it to say that in colonial India there would be no publicly known Afghān soldiers who were both *sharīf* and

capable of using their knowledge of Hindu scriptures as a tactical political virtue, as Amīr Khān's father had done.

5. A painting depicting Amīr Khān at the far right corner as Yashwantrāo Holkar's servant. The scene portrays the events of a meeting in 1805, when Yashwantrāo Holkar, defeated at the battles of Fatehgarh and Dig by the Generals Lake and Frasier, sought refuge from the East India Company in Punjab. Source: British Museum. BM 1936, 0411, 0.1 "Ranjīt Singh, Jaswant Rāo Holkar and Mīr Khān"

In stark contrast to the *Risāla* and the *Amīrnāma*, the *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar*, offers a different view of mobile soldiering identities. Mohan Singh writes of an incident in which soldiers approached Yashwantrāo Holkar for their pay, which had been in arrears for approximately six months. "Since soldiers as a clan (*firqa*) are prone to ignorance (*jahālat*), they would not heed his words and were determined to create a ruckus (*hangāma ārāy*)," he wrote of the event.[45] How do we account for the disparaging tone that Mohan Singh took in his description of Holkar's soldiers? As mentioned earlier, although the *Waqāʾiʿ* is ostensibly a biography of Yashwantrāo

[45] *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar*, IO Islamic 3930, British Library, f 35 a.

Holkar's life and career, it is clearly framed as an apology for Mohan Singh's patron and the source of all his information, Bakhshi Bhawānī Shankar, who had defected to the East India Company in 1805. To be sure, decisions to join the Company's service after the conquest of Delhi were more the norm than not. However, Bhawānī Shankar essentially abandoned the last political hope—cobbled together by an Afghān (Amīr Khān) and a Maratha (Yashwantrāo Holkar)—that posed a significant threat to the Company's conquest of Hindustān. It was this glaring fact that had earned him a reputation for capriciousness and disloyalty. The *Waqā'iʿ* was thus a vehicle for him to explain the events that led up to his choice to serve the Company. In this manner, in another section of the *Waqā'iʿ*, misguiding officials are held responsible for the rift in the professional friendship between Bhawānī Shankar and Yashwantrāo Holkar. "Because of Shyāmrāo Mahādik's misrepresentations, Jaswantrāo [sic] Holkar began to make changes, and he appointed Kallū Rām and Chhoṭe Rām Kāyastha as his paymasters (*bakhshīs*)."[46] Mohan Singh reserves praise on the other hand for soldiers who were able to arrive at the same realization that Bhawānī Shankar did, that it would be more tolerable to join the Company's service than to continue laboring with a seemingly never-ending cycle of arrears. Mohan Singh writes:

> After the loss at Dīg, Jaswantrāo [sic] Holkar marched towards Kumbher where Ashraf Khān, Muḥammad Khān Āfrīdī and Bahādur Khān pleaded for their pay… Jaswantrāo Holkar reproached them and refused, to which Muḥammad Khān Āfrīdī said, 'Our loyalty to your salt is what stops us from leaving, otherwise we would not have tolerated such dishonor.' Eventually they joined the English camp, where they were shown favors and kindnesses.[47]

[46] Idem., f 79b.

[47] Idem., f 159a.

Though they each offered distinct responses to the prospect of the Company's growing power, the *Risāla*, *Amīrnāma* and the *Waqāʾiʿ* demonstrate that mobile independent soldiers were able to generate a wide range of possible ways to identify themselves and each other based on their own definitions of community (*qaum*) and nobility (*sharāfat*). The authors of these works and the historical actors they describe had a distinct awareness of the Company and its presence in their lives. They understood that a new and fast-growing political competitor was threatening to disrupt the resourceful ways in which they were attempting to augment their own social capital in a perennially militarized world. Pride in a sense of community and respectability as articulated by Āfrīdī's father certainly echoed collective regional identities that were nurtured in successor states. However, above all, the expression of collective life in these writings—whether in Burhān Khān's fear of the summary arrests of all Afghāns, or Bhawānī Shankar's criticism of unpaid soldiers—was fundamentally ordered by a sense of moral rectitude in the face of the injustices and uncertainties of military service in the inter-imperial period. In the following section, we will see that they construed ethnic and religious hierarchies in similar ways.

IV. Genealogy, Ethnicity and Independent Soldiering

D. H.A. Kolff argues in his classic monograph on the social history of pre-modern soldiering that under Mughal rule a loosely defined Rājpūt identity, shared by mobile soldiering groups in the Gangetic plains, was transformed into a neatly demarcated and considerably more exclusive Rājpūt identity. Put simply, Kolff's argument rests on the theory that competition for candidacy to Mughal imperial service led to the crystallization of caste-like soldiering Rājpūt groups, which excluded those that had otherwise been part of a fluidly conceived Rājpūt identity.

In his analysis, this form of "genealogical orthodoxy" was directly related to imperial service.[48] Historians researching other soldiering identities in the Mughal period have largely concurred with Kolff's formulation. Nile Green demonstrates that it was only under Mughal rule that an association between Afghān identity and tribal forms of social organization were first articulated.[49] Prior to the expression of a definitive Pashtun Afghān identity based on the ethnogenesis of tribes, Pashtuns were one among several ethnic groups that had shared fluid identities in central Asia.[50] The *locus classicus* of this development is the *Tārīkh-i Khān-i Jahānī* (1612/13) written under the patronage of Khān-i Jahān Lodī, an Afghān noble in the emperor Jahāngīr's court. The notion that under Mughal rule, certain discourses hardened social boundaries, excluded some groups from service, and designated yet others as martial castes and ethnicity-based service groups, has much merit. However, we have yet to fully understand the processes through which the "genealogical orthodoxy" of the early modern period was transformed when soldiering communities began competing with each other in the military labor market in the absence of a vital imperial center. William Pinch's research on the history of "armed ascetics" (*gosāʾiṅ*s) from the Mughal to the colonial era, offers instructive ways of analyzing the careers of other contemporary soldiering communities. Alluding to the career of Anupgīrī *Gosāʾiṅ*—a soldier whose life he has studied in depth—Pinch writes that the context of the military labor market in the eighteenth century was such that it permitted a certain "elasticity

[48] D. H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, p. 73.

[49] See Nile Green, "Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History," in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 1 (2008): 171-211.

[50] Ibid.

of identity"[51] Indeed, as we have seen, independent soldiering figures were able to extricate themselves from rigid social categorization in order to generate an expansive social identity and a sense of community. They were able to forge strategic connections, draw from multiple resources of authority, and escape blame when the need arose. We find parallels to this degree of fluidity in discourses concerning the ethnicity and ideological affiliations of the inter-imperial soldiers discussed in the present chapter.

In the *Risāla,* Qāsim ʿAlī Khān Āfrīdī offers a detailed history of his *khayl* or clan—the Sulṭān *khayl*—as it originated in Peshawar and struck roots in North India. Āfrīdī's efforts were directed at accounting for "all the members of the Sulṭān *khayl,* who over the years had scattered across the realms of their dominion (*wilāyat*) and Hindustān. Many of them are unaware of their heritage and are bereft of any knowledge of the Pashto language."[52] Bearing this in mind, he was writing for their benefit, in "*fārsī-yi salīs,*" or simple Persian, beginning with a genealogical account of their *khayl* from its purported origins. Āfrīdī uses the term *khayl* and simultaneously defines it as "those who have descended through a single patrilineal line," as opposed to those descended from a "false ancestor [*jadd-i fāsid*]." Āfrīdī's patrilineal logic appears fundamentally inconsistent when he explains that the progenitor of his *khayl* was a woman called Sulṭānī who was "greater than all the men in *wilāyat.*" Her "masculine strength" and prowess were so celebrated that her descendants refused to be remembered by her husband; they would only agree to be identified as members of the Sulṭānī *khayl*. Sulṭānī—who Āfrīdī alleges was a consummate superwoman—was at the apex of his otherwise patrilineal family tree. Besides Sulṭānī, however, he had no recollection of the names of any of the women in his clan. He was aware of the names

[51] William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 146.

[52] *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī*, f 1a – 1b.

of the men though, and offers short biographies of the male members of the *khayl*—his great-grandfather and his brothers, their sons, grandsons etc., tracing their travels from their dominion in Peshawar to the plains of Hindustān. What we become aware of through his account of the men of his family is the deep importance that he reserves for the notion of fraternity and a sense of brotherliness within the *khayl*. He wistfully recalled the "five inseparable brothers" of his grandfather's generation and writes, "The brothers were sons of the same father and were employed as *naukars* within the Nawwāb of Awadh Saʿādat Alī Khān's administration. When one brother died, Mīyān Khān Afrīdī, their kinsman from the same *khayl*, replaced him." After a few sentences he mournfully observed that, "a commitment to one's own is not to be found in some members of the 'new' generation." He had been disappointed in particular by two members of his *khayl*: Mīr Khān and Akbar Khān, a pair of brothers based in Bahraich. "They do not have the courtesy to answer letters, the paper is too expensive for them!" he complains sarcastically. Evidently, he had been methodical in soliciting information about the dispersed Āfrīdīs to include in the *Risāla* and had written to every conceivable relative. "The only plausible explanation for their behavior is '*nā-insānīyat*' [lack of humanity]," he wrote.[53]

Where do we locate Āfrīdī's "genealogy" within the scheme of Afghān historiography? We can identify two broad trends in Indo-Afghān historiography within the Persian *tārīkh* tradition. These trends are not mutually exclusive; rather, they represent two large motifs that appear prominently in Indo-Afghān histories. The first is the abovementioned *Tārīkh-i Khān-i Jahānī*, which overlays a Pashtun tribal social organization onto the Ṣūfī order (*ṭāʾifa*) based social organization that had historically included members from multiple ethnic backgrounds. The *Tārīkh-i Khān-i Jahānī* emphasizes the relationship between early Islam and Afghān

[53] Idem., f 6a.

ethnogenesis. The narrative hinges on Qays ʿAbd al-Rashid Pashtūn's conversion to Islam, following which his descendants ramified into *ṭawāʾif* that were purportedly headed by different saints, whose descendants in turn constituted the Afghān people.[54] The *Tārīkh-i Khān-i Jahānī* thus draws from an early Islamic past to establish an equivalence between Afghān identity and an array of Pashtun tribes. Various chronicles from the Mughal and early colonial period (including the *Amīrnāma*) echo this account of Afghān ethnogenesis. The other major motif of Afghān historiography is the narrative of Afghān settlement or state formation in Hindustān. These narratives emerged during and immediately after Rohilla Afghān rule and professed to educate Afghāns in Hindustān about their ethnic identity and the history of their migration and settlement. Some of these accounts focus on the messianic *Raushanīyya*, many of whom settled in Farrukhabad; others describe the foundation of Afghān settlements in the Mughal era, such as the *Akhbār-i Maḥabbat* which recounts the establishment of the city of Shāhjahānpūr.

As we may surmise from the *Risāla*, Āfrīdī's account of his clan—the story of Sulṭānī, and his deep investment in fraternal relationships—reflects both of these stock features of Indo-Afghān historiography but does not entirely match up to either. It makes no mention of Qays ʿAbd-al Rashīd, nor does it illustrate the history of Afghān state formation. To the extent that he looks to the past, Āfrīdī's focus is squarely on dispersed members of his own clan (*khayl*) with the express intention of forging fraternal connections with them, rather than narrating the history of Afghān ethnogenesis, or Afghān migration and settlement.

Evidently, Āfrīdī was no state-maker; he was not interested in ingratiating himself to an overarching political dispensation by narrating a lengthy genealogy, nor did he overtly gesture to his clansmen to join him in rallying around a single political or religiously motivated cause.

[54] Green, "Tribe, Sainthood and Diaspora," p. 184.

Rather, it appears that he was anxious to solidify a sense of brotherhood with his clansmen as part of a wider strategy of securing protection from the gritty, physically harsh "circumstances of misfortune" (*gardish-i falak nāhanjār*) that attended migration and naturalization in India, in the shadow of a disintegrating empire. For instance, he was careful to document every conceivable medical condition that every member of his clan had suffered, from cholera and other water-borne diseases, to infectious boils, venereal diseases and death by injury in warfare; the reader of the *Risāla* is thus treated to a whole gamut of the ways in which one could die as an independent soldier in northern and central India. His grandfather's brother's children in particular suffered greatly in the *qaṣba* of Firūzābād. One died of a "disease of the pulse" (*nabż*), another went blind in his right eye (*az yek chashm bejānib-i dast-i rāst kūr*) and another died of an opium addiction (*qarfī-yi afīyūn*).[55] Also braided into these reflections on the health and vitality of his clansmen are signs that Āfrīdī embraced the cultural markers of naturalization in Indian society, the physically exacting (and sometimes fatal) experiences of soldiering in India notwithstanding. He notes for instance that when his father died, he observed the "Hindustāni custom of mourning on the third day" (*siwwum*) and that his father's corpse was shrouded in a Chanderī cloth, a textile particular to the region of Chanderī in Mālwa.[56] Comfortable though he was with these "Hindustāni" rituals, in the closing passages to the *Risāla* Āfrīdī expresses his desire to return to his homeland (*wilāyat*) in Peshawar. There is no written evidence that he ever undertook the journey. Conceivably, like many soldiering Afghān migrants to Hindustān in this period, his life was characterized by a tension between enduring the physical hardship of unceasing military activity, and organically adopting Hindustāni habits and customs. Unlike earlier Afghān migrants

[55] *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī*, f 5a – 5b.

[56] Idem., f 10b.

who recorded their own histories, Āfrīdī was not committed to defining Afghān identity as something that existed separately from the experiences of being in Hindustān. His endeavors in the opening chapter of the *Risāla* are simply concentrated on recording genealogy through the recent experiences of his clan in inter-imperial India.

With respect to genealogies and social categorization, the *Amīrnāma* is similar to the *Risāla* in so far as it is also an account of a soldiering Afghān that was not exclusively styled along the lines of either of the two major trends in Indo-Afghān historiography. Even though it opens with a summary of the account of Qays ʿAbd al-Rashid, Shādān writes, "God only knows if the stories are true!" The conception of ethnic, social and religious categories in the *Amīrnāma* is also akin to the *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar* for the rather simple reason that both works are biographies of aspiring soldiering military entrepreneurs. They present their main protagonists—Amīr Khān and Yashwantrāo Holkar—as self-made military chiefs and descendants of soldiers who were employed in Mughal successor states and ultimately tried to create their own, despite not having inherited the helm of state-making traditions from their families. Much like the *gosāʾiṅs* in William Pinch's analyses, Amīr Khān and Yashwantrāo Holkar profited from fluid identities and are portrayed in these works as both *naukarān* and employers who retained wide appeal across the military labor market. To the extent that we may read their biographies as political gestures that deliberately cast them in a positive light, it was necessary for them to appear agreeable to potential recruits to their troops across regional, ethnic and sectarian boundaries. We therefore find that their respective lineages as an Afghān and a *dhangar* are facts that are incidental to their identities as recruiters and *naukar*.

For instance, both works deliberately feature numerous encounters with a variety of blessed men only some of whose pietistic and specific religious affiliations are made known. In

the *Amīrnāma*, Amīr Khān has three separate encounters with such charismatic figures of no known intellectual or religious pedigree, and each of these encounters concludes with a mixed omen suggesting that Amīr Khān was headed towards luminous soldiering successes only to be tripped up by a hurdle towards the end of his career. For instance, the reader is informed that when Amīr Khān was an adolescent, he met with Mīyān Pākbāz Shāh, a man who "directed all his thoughts and energies solely towards a contemplation of God."[57] The wise man offered the young boy a sip from the "cup of God's grace." Amīr Khān mistook the wine in the cup for milk, drank from it, and then realizing that it was not in fact milk, tossed the cup. Mīyān Pākbāz Shāh scolded him, saying that he had been blessed with a "cup full of wishes," but by throwing the cup he had forsaken abundances that had been in reach.[58] Amīr Khān's biography in many ways is a long retrospective explication of Pākbāz Shāh's premonition. As it turned out he was an extremely successful military entrepreneur, but his eventual capitulation to the East India Company cut his career short. Similarly, in Surat, at a time when he was unemployed, he encountered a learned Muslim man, a certain unnamed *maulwī*, who offered him a seat at his table. Amīr Khān refused and explained, "Never let it be said that while my two hundred followers, who depend on me to find their subsistence are starving, I should sit down to enjoy a full meal." That very day the English turned a Maratha Brahmin out of Surat when he sought to collect a fourth of the yield as *chauth*. He then wrote to Amīr Khān and solicited his services to help collect the *chauth*.[59] In much the same way as his ethnic heritage and the identities of pietistic blessed men are blurred or obscured in the *Amīrnāma*, the *Waqāʾiʿ-yi Holkar* treats of

[57] *Amīrnāma*, f 24a.

[58] Idem., f 31a.

[59] Ibid.

Yashwantrāo Holkar's descent from a lineage of Maratha shepherds (*dhangar*) as a fact rather than an explanation for his later military entrepreneurship. In this account, Yashwantrāo Holkar's grandfather, Malhārrāo Holkar is described as having been busy herding his goats in residence in Masāwalī, Mālwa, when he was approached by a "*darwesh*" who asked for a cup of water. Malhārrāo purportedly gave the *darwesh* a cup of goat's milk. The *darwesh* showered him with blessings and predicted that he would prosper and acquire great acclaim in the near future.

The manner in which Holkar and Amīr Khān's ancestral backgrounds are described are, therefore, not closely attached to a notion of caste-based or tribal pride. These narratives harbor no aspirations to the "genealogical orthodoxy" that Kolff astutely identifies in the Mughal era. This is not to suggest that the *Risāla, Waqāʾiʿ* and *Amīrnāma* are bereft of (frequently obsequious) praise or claims to authority that are often directed at the subjects of biographical or autobiographical accounts. Praise and admiration in these accounts are attributed according to different criteria. The difference in these narratives of the inter-imperial period was in the articulation of a social framework for assessing and classifying the members of a soldiering society. In this typology, power and authority were derived from the performance of one's duties as a brother, a benevolent employer or a virtuous soldier, rather than one's position as an Afghān from a particular *khayl* or a specific Ṣūfī order. Clans, castes and Ṣūfī orders are secondary to a deeper vein running through these works. As explored in the following and final section of this chapter, for some of these figures, it was the use of an ethical discourse that transformed the world of continuous warfare, chieftaincy and military entrepreneurship into meaningful experiences.

V. A Soldierly Service Ethic in the Military Labor Market

As Kolff suggests, from the sixteenth century onwards, caste-like groups became increasingly associated with certain types of military capabilities.[60] The list of terms used to describe soldiering identities ranged from ethno-technical names like *tilang* (foot soldier) to purely technical appellations like *golandāz* (gunner) and ethno-regional terms like *pūrabīya* and *baksariya*. By the early nineteenth century, in addition to these numerous soldiering identities, the service regimes of the successor states often produced an osmotic blending between administrative, military, courtly and legal service. For instance, in the *Risāla*, *Amīrnāma* and the *Waqāʾiʿ*, references to *chelas*—disciples who were bound to a master or an overlord—appear frequently as figures who performed a range of services including armed service.[61] In these works *chelas* are described as having been present at the court of the Nawwāb of Farrukhābād, on battlefields in north and central India, as well as in the administrative offices of the central Indian Afghān state of Bhopal (where Amīr Khān, Āfrīdī and Yashwantrāo Holkar each spent parts of their respective careers). The *chela*'s multiple service identities in these contexts are very much in keeping with Pinch's notion that *gosāʾīn*s like Anūpgīrī—whose social organization was based on *gurū-chela* relationships—had the ability to insinuate themselves into political diplomacy and warfare during the early nineteenth century.[62]

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[60] Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy.*

[61] William Pinch observes that while skilled *chelas* were likened to sons in this period, under Mughal rule, the term *chela* was closer in meaning to and more pejorative than *banda* or "trusted slave." See William R. Pinch, "The slave guru: masters, commanders, and disciples in early modern South Asia," in *The Guru in South Asia,* eds. Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikigame (Routledge: New York, 2012), pp. 66 – 79.

[62] Regarding the history of the *chela* system at the Bangash court in Farrukhabad see J. L. Gommans, "Slavery and Naukari among the Bangash Nawwabs of Farrukhabad," in idem ed., *The Indian Frontier: Horse and Warband in the Making of Empires*, reprint (Leiden: Routledge, 2017), pp. 209-248. Also, drawing on the memoirs of a freed slave and service figure called Ṭahmāsb Qulī Khān who served in neighboring Awadh and in Lahore, Indrani Chatterjee argues for the emergence of "slave consciousness" and the "autobiographical self" in the eighteenth

Thus, in these works from the inter-imperial period, although older ethno-technical soldiering categories did not disappear, they continued to be used alongside newer, more fluid service-based identities, thereby expanding the glossary of soldiering appellations. Much of the analysis in the forgoing pages, of Āfrīdī, Amīr Khān's biographer Shādān, and Holkar's biographer Bhawānī Shankar, demonstrates that independent soldiers drew from this expanded glossary of soldiering terms, but that they attributed different valences to them. Terms like nobility (*shurafā'*), community (*qaum*), and clan (*khayl*) that were traditionally used as identity markers in political contests, were now used instrumentally to illustrate the ethical ideals and shortcomings of individuals and collectives in the military labor market. On what basis then did they marshal these ethically charged valences? What were the deeper schematizations that undergirded their ways of seeing and writing about their worlds? One need only turn to Āfrīdī's poetry to grasp the ethics of soldiering under inter-imperial conditions:

> *Na har amīr dilābanda parwarī jāne*
> Not every master knows how to nurture a servant,
>
> *Na har mulāzim ādāb-i chākarī jāne*
> Not every servant knows the etiquette of service.
>
> *Agar be khāna khāwe to kyā sipah-i sālār*
> If the commander dines at home, in what sense is he a commander of men!
>
> *Na jo ke khāna nashīn kiya ho dilāwarī jāne*

century. Although Ṭahmāsb Qulī Khān was not a *chela* per se, he was very much part of a generation of upwardly mobile Persographic service figures who circulated between regional power bases as discussed in the present chapter. See Indrani Chatterjee, "A slave's quest for selfhood in eighteenth-century Hindustan," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 37, no. 1 (2000): 53-86.

One who is housebound will never know valor.

Jo apne rāz ko afshān kare har ek se
He who reveals his secrets to all and sundry,

Hay uskī lāf-i hunar kya hunarwarī jāne
Has no talent, save the talent to boast.

Ke intizām mamālik ka hay bahot mushkil
For administering the lands is not an easy task,

Na har koī ravish-i nasaq-i sarwarī jāne
Not everyone has the ability to rule and command authority.

Muqābla na tamām ʿumr mein kīya jisne
How will he who has not confronted anything all his life

Woh kis ṭaraḥ se kamīn gāh safdarī jāne
Know what it takes to rout an ambush

Jagah jagah par agarche khalq farāham ho
He may obtain the company of people hither and thither,

Rasā maʿāmla ḥālāt-i lashkarī jāne
But only the capable know what it takes to be a soldier.

Agar che ṭabl-o-ʿalam nauʿ ko sawāre koī
One may know how to beat the drums and raise the standard,

Na jo ke mulk ko lūṭe sikandarī jāne
But mere loot and plunder does not make one Alexander.

Na ho muruwat jisko alyaq-i ʿadālat ka
He who is not attuned to justice cannot be called brave,

Aur ʿām khalq na ke ʿadl gustarī jāne
And a common person does not know how to dispense justice.

Muḥīṭ-i baḥr mein mushkil shanāwarī karna
It is difficult to swim when surrounded by a massive ocean,

Na jo ke jāwe be darīya shanāwarī jāne
Not everyone who can paddle in a river is a real swimmer.[63]

[63] *Dīwān-i Āfrīdī*, MS 2247, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, f 56b. Translations mine.

In these lines from a poem in his Urdu *dīwan*, Āfrīdī contends very clearly that there is a division of labor in a martial society, that every person can distinguish themselves in their own field of work, and that these roles and the tasks and responsibilities that come with them are not for just anyone to assume. In other words, Āfrīdī articulates a service ethic. In the *Risāla*, the clearest conception of the ethical prism through which he comprehends service relationships, is his apparent appreciation of "*sakhāwat*" or munificence. For instance, upon the Nawwāb Ahmad Khān Bangash's ascent to power in Farrukhabad, Afrīdī writes with admiration about the Nawwāb's unparalleled generosity. He was especially fastidious about paying his *naukar*s their monthly wages and had empathy for those who had faced a "reversal of fortune," regardless of whether they were high ranking or unremarkable people. Whoever they were, the Nawwāb would "grant them *jāgīrhā* or land assignments, money and gold without them having to request or demand it."[64]

Notwithstanding Āfrīdī's unverifiable claims about the Bangash Nawwāb's *sakhāwat*, what is worth noting is that relationships of service and employment were, in his scheme of things, excellent indices of human refinement. Were they good *naukars* or fair employers? How did they—as *naukars* or generous Nawwābs—respond in times of political uncertainty? There were also those whom Afrīdī found lacking in this regard, such as Zābita Khān, the Rohilla Afghān chief whose son Ghulām Qādir Khān famously blinded the Emperor Shāh ʿĀlam II.[65] Āfrīdī's father served Zābita Khan for a brief period as a desperate measure "in order to meet his monthly expenditure," but he decided to excuse himself from this position shortly thereafter. In a similar vein, Qāsim ʿAlī Khān was careful to steer clear of the company of *rahzan*s, or highway

[64] *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī*, f 8b.

[65] Idem., f 10a-10b.

robbers and casual pillagers, who tried to join his ranks or forge alliances with him. To him, the business of military service was regulated by certain ethical pre-requisites, contrary to how British colonial officials would later portray it in the late-nineteenth century. In an encyclopedic ethnography called *The Races of Afghanistan* published in 1880, Henry Bellew, a medical officer, wrote of the Āfrīdīs, "The Āfrīdī of today… is to a great extent ignorant of the tenets and doctrines of the religion he professes… he has [now] sunk to the lowest grade of civilization, and borders upon the savage. Entirely illiterate, under no acknowledged control, each man has his own king, the nation has dwindled down to a small community of less than three thousand souls, mostly robbers and cut-throats, without principles of conduct of any kind."[66] Bellew's perception of the habits and characteristics of Āfrīdī Afghāns is an example of a well-known practice of colonial ethnography. But how did the Āfrīdī Afghān s locate their place in the world before Company officials like Bellew described them as illiterate and unethical vagrants? Āfrīdī's poetry and prose suggest that in the inter-imperial period, such lesser-deemed people had a say in how they were represented and had vivid and clear thoughts about what constituted principled behavior in the military labor market.

Even though, of all the three works, Āfrīdī's *Risāla* contains the clearest elaboration of a service ethic, it is certainly implied in the two biographies as well. Bakhshī Bhawāni Shankar's entire defense against allegations of *namak harāmī* is articulated as a claim to *namak halālī* or service in good faith. His writing is also peppered with sarcastic quips about the undeserving amongst Holkar's servants, which suggests that he classified people according to certain limits of probity. He writes with contempt, for instance, about one Harnath Singh Chela, "the head of the

[66] Henry W. Bellew, *The Races of Afghanistan: Being a Brief Account of the Principal Nations Inhabiting that Country* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, and Co., 1880), p. 82.

pā'igāh cavalry who was an expert in oppressing people and slaying the poor."[67] In the *Amīrnāma*, Amīr Khān is admired for his ability to represent himself and his soldiers during lean phases when they were unemployed. In one such example, Amīr Khan traveled from Bhopal to Sironj, where he joined a Maratha soldier—Lakhwā Dādā's—service. Shortly after, Lakhwā Dādā refused Amir Khān's terms of service. Amīr Khān then approached a former colleague called Bālā Rāo Inglia, who also complained that Amīr Khān's services were too expensive. When Amīr Khān was repeatedly denied even the basic fees (*umīdwārī haqq*) for having traveled a great distance to meet Bālā Rāo Inglia in the hope of securing a job, he went up to him in the court in full view, drew his dagger and insisted on getting his and his men's pay.[68] When there were no reliable arbiters of justice, the only way to ensure that one received their dues was to insist on it at any cost.

VI. Conclusion

The foregoing pages have advanced three arguments about the written world of military service. First, it is suggested here that independent soldiers and military entrepreneurs elaborated a sense of community (*qaum*) amongst soldiers wherein a community's status and honor were not exclusively determined by its members' birth but also by how soldiering individuals conducted themselves in honorable ways. Second, many of these figures either completely eschewed or only tangentially referred to familiar ethnic and spiritual genealogies that were found in older chronicles. Instead, they focused on more contemporary and personalized histories that accounted for their kin, which they deployed to explain the opportunities that they received

[67] *Waqā'i'*, f 113a.

[68] *Amīrnāma*, f22b

and the career choices that they made. Third, they developed and wrote about the importance of a service (*naukarī*) ethic for both recruiters and soldiers alike. This notion of a service ethic mirrored their experiences under the challenging conditions of the inter-imperial years.

In sum, it has been the purpose of this chapter to argue that independent soldiering figures and military entrepreneurs of the early nineteenth century elaborated multiple normative templates for social hierarchies and relationships of service. In doing so they also reveal key differences of perception amongst themselves. Their works, and the works written about them in their own time, consistently grapple with the difficult question of how best to serve as *naukarān* in the absence of an imperial dispensation or a stable state structure. They observed the Company's political expansion with suspicion, admiration, resignation, and resistance, and they conveyed their thoughts within a Persianate tradition of commemorative writing that had historically excluded them.

It is important, in coming to terms with these developments, that the inter-imperial period be understood as the historical conjuncture in which they unfolded. The historian would be remiss in identifying these soldiering figures' resistance to early Company rule as proto-nationalism, or in suggesting that they were united in an anti-imperial or anti-colonial movement. Their legacies were never drawn upon in future articulations of nationalist resistance to colonial rule. Rather, their newly conceived social classifications and soldierly service ethic formed lenses through which they viewed collective life. In doing so, they loosened and unfixed the identity markers of community and ethnicity that they had inherited from the early modern period. However, by the mid-1820s, any loosened ties of social hierarchies would be subject to colonial re-evaluations. Social and military historians have recently made concerted and productive efforts to connect patterns of anti-Company resistance in the years leading up to the

mutiny of 1857 and trace them back to an older pattern of armed resistance by agrarian and pastoral communities against the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century.[69] The findings presented in this chapter affirm the analytical value of such efforts. The interpretations of the Company's political ascent—as articulated by some of the independent soldiers who emerged out of successor states like the Rohilla territories and the Maratha confederacy in the inter-imperial years—continued to reverberate through the military labor market, and informed the growing agitation surrounding colonial administrative reforms.

[69] See Crispin Bates, ed., *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857: Volume I Anticipations and Experiences in the Locality* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2013).

Chapter Four

Writing Custom and Mediating Law under the Company *Sarkār*

I. Introduction

> In the *Ashbāh wa'l-Naẓāʾir* it is written that "*al maʿrūf ʿurfan,* or that which is well-known as *ʿurf* [custom], is equivalent to that which is in keeping with the *sharīʿa*"… it is unacceptable for a king to appoint a judge who is unaware of the people's customs.[1]

A Rohilla Afghān by the name of ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān made these assertions around 1850 in a work entitled *Qānūn-i Khāndān-i Rohillahā* or, "A Canon for the Rohilla Household." He cited two major compilations of jurisprudence as sources for the *Qānūn*: the *Ashbāh wa'l-Naẓāʾir* mentioned above, a sixteenth-century work that was part of the Ottoman imperial tradition of legal thought, and the *Fatāwaʾ-yi ʿĀlamgīrī*, a compendium of Ḥanafī law which was commissioned by the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, and which circulated widely within and beyond the Mughal Empire.[2] ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān drew upon axiomatic legal opinions from both of these works to elaborate and affirm the legality of the customary practices of his own family of Rohilla Afghān chiefs who had exercised *de facto* rule over the territories of Kaṭehr, which their ancestor, ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla (d. 1748), had acquired as a royal gift (*ʿaṭāʾ-yi sulṭānī*) from the Mughal emperor in 1739. The question that troubled ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān and animated his writings in the *Qānūn* concerned the customary practices that the Rohilla family had followed in

[1] ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān, *Qānūn-i Khāndān-i Rohillahā*, Persian MS 1808, Rāmpur Raza Library, Rāmpur, p.17.

[2] For a description of the *Fatāwaʾ* as the most comprehensive Mughal compilation of Ḥanafī *fiqh* see Alan M. Guenther, "Hanafi Fiqh in Mughal India: the *Fatāwaʾ-yi ʿĀlamgīrī*," in Richard M. Eaton ed., *India's Islamic Traditions: 711 – 1750* (New Delhi: OUP, 2003), pp. 209-233.

the preservation and distribution of this gift — namely, were such practices compliant with the *sharīʿa*? The implicit subtext of this question was that there was a dissonance between the period in which the royal gift had been made and the conditions of early colonial rule under which the author lived.

The days of Rohilla Afghān rule—during which ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān's ancestors had leveraged the royal gift into a short-lived but virtually autonomous patrimonial state within the empire—ended in 1774-75, when their territories were overrun by the state of Awadh with the assistance of the East India Company.[3] When the Nawwāb of Awadh failed to adequately govern the conquered territories, they were left for the Company to administer, save the "princely state" of Rāmpur which remained under the control of one branch of the extended family of Rohilla Afghān chiefs. The East India Company, which had exercised a long-standing form of "indirect rule" in Awadh, soon began to extend its political influence over Rāmpur as well.[4] Following the death in 1794 of the popular first Nawwāb of Rāmpur, Fayzullah Khān, the city fell under a spell of violence, leading to the assassination of the late Nawwāb's heir and a younger son's usurpation of authority.[5] It was at this point that the Company initiated its interventions in Rāmpur's political affairs, supporting one candidate to the throne against others, in a pattern that

[3] Regarding the contested notion of the patrimonial state in South Asia, see Stephen P. Blake, "The Patrimonial-bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 1 (1979): 77-94. For an early critique of the structural focus of Blake's "patrimonial bureaucratic state" model see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Mughal state—Structure or process? Reflections on Recent Western Historiography," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 29, no. 3 (1992): 291-321.

[4] For a detailed description of the evolving arc of the system of "indirect rule" in Awadh see Michael H. Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System 1764-1857* (New Delhi: OUP, 1991).

[5] For an account of the dispute that followed Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān's death, see Najmul Ghani Khān, *Akhbār al-Sanādīd: Vol. 1* (Rāmpur: Raza Library, 1997), pp. 666-677.

was replicated in regional states across the subcontinent. Thus, by 1850, when ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān wrote the *Qānūn*, members of the extended family of the ruling Rohilla chiefs had begun to appeal to the Company for assistance in decisions about the patrimony of Rāmpur and how they might receive a share in it.[6] The Company had, by this time, already established a law and order apparatus of courts, police and bureaucratic control in the former Rohilla territories which surrounded Rāmpur, known as the "Ceded Territories".[7] Now, as it began to exercise its influence over matters of succession in Rāmpur, the Company also extended indirect jurisdictional authority within the princely state.

The forgoing chapters have analyzed the works of the service figures and regional functionaries who observed the political transformations of the inter-imperial period (ca. 1774-1857) in Rāmpur and the Ceded Territories. Through their writings, they expanded and transformed the Persianate tradition by using it as a vehicle for expressing how larger tectonic shifts in power were repositioning their lives at a regional level, at a distance from the urban theaters of high politics. The present and final chapter extends this analysis to the written works of those who mediated the curtailment of power structures, by either participating or rejecting the newly formed early colonial legal-administrative establishment, i.e. the legal regime in the

[6] Regarding the subject of regional aristocracies and nobles appealing to the British Raj to settle their internal disputes, see Barbara D. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 112-114.

[7] On the formation of the princely state of Rāmpur and the Company's efforts to administer the Ceded Territories, see E. I. Brodkin, "British India and the Abuses of Power: Rohilkhand Under Early Company Rule," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 10, no. 2 (1973): 129-156. Brodkin points out that the Rohilla elite had effectively obliterated the older class of proprietary lease-holders and replaced them with their own appointees. The Company therefore struggled to identify a class of original proprietors to enforce a revenue settlement and eventually declared Rohilla-appointed village headmen proprietors. This entire class was however, ruined by overassessment, leading to the enrichment of money-lenders and widespread violence.

former Rohilla territories. Each of the works considered in this chapter illustrates how jurisdiction and civil jurisprudence were negotiated by former elites and service figures.[8]

The first part of the chapter will contextualize the legal regime in the directly administered Rohilla territories by drawing on the writings of the ʿAbd-al Qādir Khān, whose role as a scholar-bureaucrat was introduced in Chapter Two. The aim is to illustrate how early colonial jurisdiction expanded by incorporating local service figures like him into the legal apparatus in territories that it directly and indirectly administered. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's reportage delineates his own role as an upholder of law and order, as well as his place within a wide community of regional officers who were crucial enablers of colonial jurisdictional expansion.

The second part of the chapter will analyze the writings of ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān—the author of the *Qānūn*, quoted at the outset—who affirmed the customary practices of his family against Company-sanctioned interventions in the distribution of inherited wealth. The goal of such an analysis is to consider how the jurisdictional expansion of the colonial state into areas of indirect control like Rāmpur was met in writing with jurisprudential assertions by disinherited figures like ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān. While responding to and acknowledging the growing salience of the East India Company, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān made a bid for the preservation of his family's Afghān customs in the adjudication of matters pertaining to their traditions, marriages, and political and legal rights. In doing so, he advanced his own conceptions of normative customary practices that he and other disenfranchised elites like him aspired to enforce. Such efforts point to a hitherto

[8] For a comparative perspective on jurisdictional boundaries in the Hyderabad state during the colonial period, see Eric L. Beverley, *Hyderabad, British India, and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 148-149. Beverley argues that the Hyderabad state was able to exercise what he describes as "Moglai" sovereignty and resist the British Raj's jurisdictional encroachments.

unexamined challenge to the Company's increasingly narrow interpretation of its subjects' customs and practices.[9]

II. Colonial Conquest and Regional Legal Regimes

2.1 Anglo-Muhammadan Law and Afghān Custom

In a series of interventions over the last three decades of the eighteenth century, the British Parliament gradually assumed control over the East India Company, effectively altering its status from a mercantile company to an instrument of the British government.[10] Provoking this transition was the Company's own conversion into a governing body following its acquisition of *Dīwānī* rights in 1765, which enabled it to collect revenue and administer civil courts in the Bengal province.[11] Prior to the acquisition of these rights, the Company had favored the adoption of local practices of arbitration within its early settlements. For example, before it was entrusted with the civil administration of Bengal, the Company had established *panchayats* or village councils, whose members exercised judicial powers to decide cases in Bombay.[12] By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the Company increasingly favored the idea of appealing to the religious practices of Indians as the basis for legal judgments. In order to do so,

[9] On the importance of considering multiple "normatives" among Muslim communities see, Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 453-457.

[10] See Scott A. Kugle, "Framed, Blamed and Renamed: The Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2001): 257-313.

[11] For a detailed account of the transition from Robert Clive's system of Dual Government wherein the Company collected revenue while the Niẓām retained political authority in Bengal, see Abdul Majed Khan, *The Transition in Bengal, 1756-75: A Study of Saiyid Muhammad Reza Khan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[12] Kugle, ibidem., p. 260.

it was pressed to identify standardized "Hindu" and "Muhammadan" laws. Company officials were slow to realize that standardized codes of religious law—and in particular, the notion of a uniformly applicable Mughal Islamic code of law—did not exist. Unlike the Ottoman Empire, which had deliberately cultivated an official *madhhab* or legal school through the patronage of a learned hierarchy and the regulation of the hermeneutic principles of interpreting Ḥanafī *fiqh*, the Mughal Empire had not developed a centralized, imperial legal structure.[13] Aurangzeb had commissioned and overseen the compilation of a massive compendium of *fiqh*, the aforementioned *Fatāwaʾ-yi ʿĀlamgīrī*, which was based on extracts from authoritative works of the Ḥanafī school of jurisprudence, but the Mughal state itself did not adopt an official school of law, nor did it directly regulate the interpretation of law.[14] In the absence of a single official code of Islamic law, the Company was therefore hard pressed to accurately identify one. Some of the earliest Orientalist translation projects undertaken in India were in fact attempts to fill this perceived gap. In this search for an Islamic code of law, British officials identified a handful of authoritative works, but focused in particular on the twelfth-century work of Ḥanafī jurisprudence, *al-Hidāya* by al-Marghinānī (d. 1197), as the primary reference point.[15]

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[13] Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 8-11.

[14] The *Fatāwaʾ-yi ʿĀlamgīrī* stipulates the qualifications of a *qāżī* and includes a compilation of rulings based on Ḥanafī *fiqh*, but it does not declare it incumbent on a *qāżī* to implement distinctly Mughal "dynastic" law, nor does it outline such a *qānūn*. The *qānūn-i ʿurf* in *Żawābit-i ʿĀlamgīrī* i.e. Aurangzeb's decrees, pertains to secular law. See Alan M. Guenther, idem.; Manohar Lal Bhatia, *Administrative History of Medieval India: A Study of Muslim Jurisprudence Under Aurangzeb* (Delhi: Radha Publications, 1992) p. vii.

[15] For a summary history of Anglo-Muhammadan Law and its reliance on *al-Hidāya*, see Syed Adnan Hussain, "Anglo-Muhammadan Law," in Rumee Ahmed and M. A. Eamon eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199679010.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199679010.

The Company then took a step further in their quest to administer Islamic law by beginning to interpret it. In doing so, they generated a particular form of "Anglo-Muhammadan law" which, as the historian Scott Kugle points out, was neither convincingly "Anglo" nor "Muhammadan."[16] This curious hybrid was born of the Company's intention to administer Islamic law more justly and efficiently than the Muslim sovereign from whom they had seized political authority. The search for a uniform code of law was coupled with the aim of standardizing its practice. Company officials conveyed the impression that the administration of justice in the Mughal Empire had been arbitrary, particularly because of a perceived lack of centralization and an overlap of offices and responsibilities.[17] As it began to fix and formalize bureaucracies within the legal-administrative system, the East India Company generated an artificial separation between procedural law i.e. the formal pathways of legal recourse, and substantive law - i.e. the laws that govern the particular issues that are subject to judgment. They justified such reforms within the rubric of "Anglo-Muhammadan Law" in the name of *siyāsa*, or pragmatism, and argued that they were continuing the Mughal use of *siyāsa* as a measure of political expediency.[18]

In the spirit of *siyāsa*, theorists of Anglo-Muhammadan law legitimised the Muslim sovereign's admittance of *ʿurf*, or custom, in certain circumstances.[19] They stated that according

[16] Kugle, idem., pp. 259-266.

[17] Under Mughal rule for example, the functions of the office of the *qāżī*, or the judge, were occasionally performed by the *ṣadr*, who oversaw religious affairs. See R. M Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal Period, 1556-1707* (Aligarh: Munshiram Manoharlal for Centre of Advanced Study, Dept. of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 1984) p. 118.

[18] Kugle, idem., p. 264.

[19] Roland K. Wilson, *A Digest of Anglo-Muhammadan Law* (London: W. Thacker & Co., 1895), p. 70.

to Islamic law, a sovereign could advocate for the use of *ʿurf*, defined as "unwritten law," but that in the event of a conflict between *ʿurf* and *sharīʿa*, the latter would prevail. They thus distinguished between custom and *sharīʿa*, glossing over the long and conjoined history of both concepts within the Islamic legal tradition.[20] In practice, within the Mughal Empire, customary methods of arbitration and settlement are widely attested in the adjudication of disputes between Muslims across the provinces.[21] The evidence suggests that Mughal subjects brought cases before both local non-state actors and courts of law, without necessarily subverting or challenging the goal of following the *sharīʿa*. This was especially the case in the Afghān-dominated frontier provinces of the Mughal Empire. For example, drawing on the experiences of the Khaṭak Afghāns of Sarāʾī Akhūr in the Peshawar Valley, the philologist Mikhail Pelevin has illustrated how tribal disputes were addressed through a number of official and para-official methods. Pelevin cites the *Tārīkh-i Muraṣṣaʿ*, a work begun by Khushhāl Khān Khaṭak, the seventeenth-century tribal leader and soldier-poet.[22] The *Tārīkh-i Muraṣṣaʿ* was completed by Khushhāl Khān's grandson Afżal Khān, who was involved in a long and litigious dispute in the early eighteenth century with the *shaykhs*, or religious elders of his community. The *Tārīkh-i Muraṣṣaʿ* contains several letters written by Afżal Khan to various religious authorities within Peshawar, appealing to their sense of moral duty, and seeking arbitration in order to avoid presenting the case to the Mughal authorities in the local *sharīʿa* court.

[20] For a comprehensive study of the history of *ʿurf* in Islamic legal thought, see Ayman Shabana, *Custom in Islamic Law and Legal Theory: The Development of the Concepts of ʿUrf and ʿĀdat in the Islamic Legal Tradition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[21] B. P. Saxena ed., *Calendar of Oriental Records:* Allahabad UP Archives, Vol. 1 (Allahabad: Government Central Record Office, 1959).

[22] See Mikhail Pelevin, "Persian Letters of a Pashtun Tribal Ruler on Judicial Settlement of a Political Conflict (1724)," *Iranian Studies* 50, no. 4 (2017): 495-510.

Pelevin argues that at the heart of the dispute was Afżal Khān's disapproval of the *shayūkh*'s assumption of political authority within the tribe, authority which he believed was his own to claim. Afżal Khān wanted the case to be settled by Muslim religious authorities along the lines of a Pashtun code of honor, Pelevin argues, rather than seeking the involvement of the Mughal courts of law. What was at stake for him was his pride, and the embarrassment of airing an intra-tribal dispute before the public court.[23] This particular example gives the lie to the East India Company's presentation of a binary between custom and *sharīʿa* in pre-colonial India. It is clear that both parties were presented with a choice between a customary settlement mediated by religious authorities within the Khaṭak tribe, on the one hand, or a more shame-inducing trial before Mughal *qużżāt*, on the other.[24] They categorically preferred to prevent the case going to trial in the first place. The circumstances of the case also suggest that, in the Peshawar Valley, a parallel hierarchy of Islamic authority was particularly robust, which Pelevin refers to as a "typical Afghān" locus of arbitration.

Pelevin's case study raises the question of how legal disputes were adjudicated within Afghān communities outside the Peshawar Valley. What might we observe if we shift our focus from Peshawar to the Afghān-occupied Rohilla territories of north India in Kaṭehr during the inter-imperial period? As the independent Rohilla soldier Qāsim ʿAlī Khān Āfrīdī's *Risāla*—examined in the previous chapter—suggests, Afghān settlers transported and invoked tribal customs in Hindustan, but they also adopted newly learnt habits and practices through service in

[23] For a discussion of contemporary modes of arbitration and settlement among Afghān communities in the borderlands of Pakistan, see Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: A History of Religious Mobilisation in the Pakistan Tribal Areas c. 1890-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 63-88.

[24] Although the system of courts in Mughal provinces was such that cases could be referred to the center in the case of appeals, this was not the norm, and the prospect of airing one's rivalries in the place of one's residence appears to have been particularly shame-inducing in this instance.

the military labor market. Thus, when the Company conquered the Rohilla territories and began to ponder the fate of the disenfranchised Rohilla elite, it was faced with the Rohilla household's system of *sharīʿa*-based adjudication which was formed by the historical sediment of multiple customary traditions. The Company sought to overlay these adjudicatory practices with its own legal regime. In the development of the colonial state by the mid-nineteenth century, debates surrounding these customs drew attention and became a matter of public interest. In order to understand how and why this happened - i.e. why proponents of *ʿurf* pushed back against the Company's legal regime - it would be instructive to examine how the Company's attempts to standardize and rationalize law unfolded in the former Rohilla territories and in the semi-autonomous state of Rāmpur.[25] Drawing from the writings of the scholar-bureaucrat ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, the following section will illustrate how the Company's vision for instating a legal regime was interpreted, realized and challenged at the regional level by officers like him, figurative cogs in its new machinery.

2.2 Regional Functionaries: Interpreting Law in the Ceded Territories

In the former Rohilla territories, though the East India Company's legal regime drew on practices that had developed under Mughal rule, it marked significant departures. The twin goals of the Company were the collection of revenue through new administrative settlements and the delimitation of the martial capacities of rebellious landowners and regional potentates. The reforms included the establishment of a system of courts and the formalization of duties and

[25] So that the reader may view these processes in Rāmpur not as a single localized challenge to the colonial regime, but as an example of the prevalence of challenges and pushbacks within plural and multi-centric legal regimes in colonial contexts in South Asia, Africa and South America, see Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

responsibilities carried out by police and officials of the courts of law. Each of the districts in the "Ceded Territories" (such as Badayūn, Murādābād and Pīlībhīt) had their own judge-magistrates who were assisted and advised by a regional staff of officers, comprising *ṣadr amīnāns, amīnāns* and *munṣifāns*. Appeals against the orders of the district courts could be heard at the appeals and circuit court in Bareīli, which was established by the Company in 1803. The appeals and circuit court in turn was under the jurisdiction of the highest civil and criminal courts at Fort William in Calcutta. In the district of Murādābād, by 1827, minor regional judicial officers—many of whom were "native" employees—were permitted to try cases concerning petty amounts of money.[26] Although they did not adjudicate major cases, several such figures were in practice tasked with interpreting, realizing and occasionally challenging the Company's goals in consequential ways, their apparently lower-order rankings notwithstanding. Such figures served as the conduits through which the early colonial legal regime was formed at the regional level.[27]

It was under these circumstances and through such channels that the savant ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān found his footing as a bureaucrat who was drawn to the East India Company's service. While we have considered the ways in which he exemplified a type of regional *qaṣbātī* scholar-bureaucrat, the focus here is on his position as a mediator of the Company's legal regime and his narrative of the same. Having been disappointed by the factious rivalries that plagued the court at Rāmpur after Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān died in 1794, ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān felt warmly towards the order, leadership and rationalizing mandate of the East India Company. In the *Waqāʾiʿ-yi ʿAbd al-Qādir Khānī*, he documents his relationship with various officers of the Company with a

[26] E.B. Joshi, *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteers: Moradabad* (Lucknow: Department of District Gazetteers, U.P., 1968) p. 228.

[27] By way of an analogous example, see Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Raman describes the force of local and bottom-up processes in shaping the colonial administrative offices in Madras.

sense of nostalgia, ease, and friendship. He also illustrates the manner in which he fell in with contemporary lawyers, representatives, scribes and officials. These relationships paved the way for his subsequent career as an officer of the law. He describes these associations as akin to informal apprenticeships, wherein he learnt his trade from, and molded himself after, successful regional officers. He writes:

> Upon reaching Murādābād, I found that it was impossible to have access to Listar Sāhab, the judge, Līrd Sāhab, the collector, and Cārtan Sāhab, the registrar, without the good offices of Tāl Sāhab. And soliciting an actual job was another matter altogether. Being loyal to anybody besides one's own boss was beyond the realm of imagination for someone such as myself. I spent a few days at the *shāhī masjid* [Murādābād] because all sorts of people would turn up over there. When people would bring books to me, I would read with them. Sometimes I would frequent the home of Maulwī Munīr ʿAlī whom I had known for many years and I would also go to the *qāżī* of the city (Muḥammad Bakhsh) to whom I am also related. The Maulwī Sahab, whom I mentioned, was a *wakīl* for the *sarkār*, and the *qāżī* Sahab served as a commissioner. Through my interactions with both of them, I managed to meet a whole host of influential people; I would also meet with Maulwī Muḥibb Allah, who was my *makhdūmzāda* and who also introduced me to people. Lāla Mansarām, who is the *wakīl* of the clerk in ʿAzīmābād (in Badāyūn), and who is close to Maharāja Shitāb Rāʾi, rented a place to stay for me right next to his own home…[28] I observed Maulwī Munīr Sahab's manner of formulating and drafting demands, which the *ashāb-i muʿāmala* (official people) appreciate, and which indeed is of a very high quality. I started copying his style, and many people began to request me to draft petitions and defendants' responses. In fact, even lawyers began appreciating my draughtsmanship…[29]

[28] Shitāb Rāʾi served as the governor of Bihar during some of the years of Clive's system of dual governance (1765-1772). He attempted to regulate the East India Company's trading activities and political authority but with little to no success. See Kumkum Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society in Early Modern India: Bihar, 1733-1820* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 49-51.

[29] *Waqāʾiʿ-yi ʿAbd al-Qādir Khānī*, BL APAC IO Islamic 3049, f 21(v).

ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān thus elaborates the nature of his engagement with Company officials (like Leicester and Laird) who were stationed in Murādābād, as well as his social and intellectual connections to a *maulwī,* a *wakīl* and a *qāżī*, who were employed in the Company's service. These were figures whom he admired and regarded with respect, though to be sure, there were others who did not meet his expectations. The sentiment that undergirds ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's subsequent commentary on the community of regional officers to which he belonged is that each of them occupied a certain role, and when even one of them failed, or was lazy or negligent in their work, the entire enterprise suffered. In fact, there were occasions upon which he believed that he had a better work ethic and a clearer understanding of the "Company *sarkār*'s law" than some of its senior British officers.

He offers an account of an incident that illustrates his commitment to the new legal regime: early in his career he was employed as a *wakīl* by ʿInāyatullah Khān, a prince from Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān's family. His duty was to seek information (*guft o shanīd*) from the British collector about an order to confiscate lands that very closely neighbored ʿInāyatullah Khān's properties. He had to verify if ʿInāyatullah Khān's lands would be subject to legal proceedings. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān was entrusted with a letter from his employer regarding such matters as well as the responsibility to receive an order regarding the same from the collector. He first showed ʿInāyatullah Khān's letter to a British officer, one "Baṛay Sāhab", or "Senior Gentleman." He writes,

> Baṛay Sāhab did not ask anyone who would meet him to sit down or get up and leave. His manner was such that he would entertain requests in writing as well as verbal statements. His response was always the same, "have patience, you will receive an order at the appropriate time."[30]

[30] *Waqāʾiʿ*, f 23(r).

He was clearly irritated at what he saw as Baṛay Sāhab's blasé attitude. Similarly, in connection with the same case, he was compelled to interact with a British commissioner at Fatehgarh in order to reach the collector. The commissioner stalled and kept putting the matter off, even planning to send a very persistent ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān back home. We are led to understand that he stood his ground and insisted that the commissioner follow appropriate administrative procedures and provide him with a written response from the collector addressed to ʿInāyatullah Khān. Contrary to the more familiar image of the British Company official disciplining and educating his native underling, we find ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān assuming a sense of authority and an unmatched understanding of legal and administrative procedure, even better than some of his British superiors.[31]

ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān professed to have set great store by the Company's goals of maintaining law and order in the region in a way that implied that his commitments were not so much to a particular political dispensation or government, but rather to the orderliness and peace, the values that the Company purported to stand for at the time. Like many others, he claimed to have been frustrated by the ebbs and flows of the military labor market and the constant pilfering of agricultural produce, the loot and plunder, and the disturbances in the *zamīndārī* land holdings surrounding the *qaṣba* of Murādābād, where he grew up.[32] In 1805, when Yashwantrāo Holkar and his soldiers launched a campaign in Farrukhābād, several Company officials, including some from Murādābād, were dispatched to quell the attack. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān was stationed at the criminal court—the district *Niẓāmat ʿAdālat*—in Murādābād at the time, apprenticed to one

[31] Ibid., f 3(v).

[32] See Brodkin, ibidem. Brodkin's account of the Company's overassessment and the subsequent reactions of distress, sheds light on the frequency with which violent disturbances took place in the former Rohilla territories.

Welder Sāhab to whom he taught Urdu. As Holkar's attacks were underway in neighboring Farrukhābād, Amīr Khān, possibly by design, simultaneously launched an attack of his own in Murādābād. ʿAbd al-Qādir writes of this event, reporting that Welder Sāhab and Leicester Sāhab refused to believe the *harkāra* who announced the oncoming ambush. "Indians often mistake trees for soldiers," they said mockingly. But Amīr Khān's soldiers, who had successfully camouflaged themselves against the trees on the banks of the river Gāngan that ran through Murādābād, surprised the entire group of Company administrators at the court, British and Indian alike.[33]

While everybody hid for dear life within the *ʿadālat* where they were trapped, only one officer seemed to brave Amīr Khān's soldiers. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān writes admiringly of this man, "Ajantan [sic; Edgington?] Sāhab." In the absence of any arms or gunpowder besides a defunct canon, Ajantan summoned up the two *kampaniyān* (squads) that were stationed at the court to help him face Amīr Khān's attacks. He eventually used them to escort all of the officers who were trapped inside the court, including ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, to Leicester's home where they remained in hiding for three days. Throughout this entire ordeal, Ajantan strived to keep up everybody's spirits. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān thought it important to document this entire event, stating that despite his valiant and sincere efforts on this occasion, Ajantan had languished in the same official position for several years without promotion. "The Supreme Council in Calcutta—the highest executive authority in India from 1774 to 1833—had probably never even received a detailed account of his services to the Company!" he writes. The narrative of the attacks by Amīr Khān and Holkar, and the brave defense put up by an administrator at the court in Murādābād, suggests that much like the independent soldiering communities that launched attacks on the

[33] *Waqā'i'*, f 26(r).

Company's administrative offices, lower-level regional officers like ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, who mediated the Company's administration, posited a service ethic of their own. He firmly believed in Ajantan's right to be considered by the Council in Calcutta and was deeply aware of a system of rewards and promotions that enabled the expansion of the colonial legal regime.

ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's initial experiences with officers at the *ʿadālat* enriched his portfolio, eventually leading to a number of other career opportunities for him as a legal-administrative officer. His first such appointment was as a *darogha*, or manager, of a *thānā*, or police station, in Thākurdwāra, Murādābād. He writes that he was appreciated for his efficiency and his ability to weed out insubordinate or corrupt officers. For instance, upon being asked by the *jamʿadār* for money to purchase hay for the horses at the station he replied that his job was to prevent criminal activities, not to purloin resources himself! Through a range of similar such appointments ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān eventually made his way to a position where he was placed to administer justice himself. He describes his appointment as a *sarishtadār* (clerk) of a minor court in the following words:

> When we reached Rohtak, a letter arrived from Mitkāf [Metcalfe] Sāhab stating that he was joining the army of the Governor General, Māʿira [Lord Moira, The Marquess of Hastings], and that I should go to him before he left. … When I arrived, he said, "I will be joining the Governor General's army, and I will no longer have the time to keep track of the state of the *thānas*. … It will be best if you read the *kayfiyāt* (report) carefully, consider it judiciously and on a separate piece of paper, write out an order (*ḥukm*) that you feel is appropriate and send it to me, and if it is necessary, send a *parwāna* as well. It will be studied, signed and sent to the *thāna*. Signed records of all the reports will be sent to you… Regard the crime carefully and award a commensurate punishment to the accused; chain their feet (*pā be zanjīr*); you can beat them on the feet (*pā chūb*) or accept bail money…[34]

[34] Ibid., f 31(r).

With this we see that ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān prided himself in his secular credentials: being judicious, trustworthy and loyal. These were qualities that earned him the responsibility of assessing petty crimes and awarding commensurate corporal punishment. Although he does not describe himself as an expert of Islamic law i.e. a judge (*qāżī*) or a legal specialist (*muftī*), there is evidence that he reserved a special admiration for such figures. In his characterization of some of the "Afghāni and Hindustani *ʿulamāʾ* of Rāmpur" ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān writes admiringly of their abilities as interpreters of the *sharīʿa* who could pass judgment on a range of subjects, as well as their positions as officers within the East India Company's legal regime. He describes some of the Afghān *ʿulamāʾ* of Rāmpur in such words:

> Mullā Mughal Muḥaddis: I have never seen this great man in person. At present his grandson Muḥammad Saʿīd, who is a *ḥāfiz* and is conversant in all the intellectual arts, is based in Fatehpūr at the chief judge's office (*ṣadr amīn*). He has a balanced disposition and is also a capable writer of prose…
>
> Mullā ʿAbd al-Raḥmān: He would get involved in a debate at every gathering of people. He would frequently illustrate his point post facto, after the event itself. He also served as a *muftī* in Madras.
> Mullah Ghufrān: He was a *faqīh*, an argumentative sort. He was very well-versed in *riwāyāt* or traditions that challenged the Ḥanafī *madhab*.
>
> Mullā Laṭīf: An expert in the books of *fiqh* who has documented what he learnt from his teachers in the margins of his books.
>
> Mullā Aslam: He had an extraordinary command over *fiqh*, and mostly kept the company of wealthy men.
>
> Mullā Nek Muḥammad: Was well-known for his knowledge of *ʿilm-i farāʾiẓ*. Hindustānīs mistook him for an Afghān, and Afghāns mistook him for a Hindustānī. In truth, he was an important figure amongst Afghān learned men.[35]

[35] Ibid., f 20(v).

The Afghān *ʿulamāʾ* who feature in his list were exemplary for their erudition in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and their expertise in matters of inheritance (*ʿilm-i farāʾiẓ*). As ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān suggests, many of them had skills that proved useful when they were employed by the Company as custodians of the *sharīʿa.* He offers a similar commentary on the Hindustānī *ʿulamāʾ* of Rāmpur, dilating in particular on the skills and services of two prominent figures, Maulwī Żīyāʾ al-Nabī and his own tutor, Maulāna Sharaf al-Dīn. He writes:

> Maulwī Żīyāʾ al-Nabī: Despite being very busy in his various roles in the affairs of the state, the court of law, working as a secretary (*bakhshīgirī*) and as a representative (*wakālat*) in the important affairs of the government of Lucknow and the British, he never compromised on his commitment to intellectual pursuits…
>
> Maulānā Sharaf al-Dīn: Whatever I have studied, I have learnt from him … In issuing orders (*ifta'*) he is reminiscent of Qāżī al-quzzat Abū Yūsuf.[36] At present, in this city, only he has an answer for every question, and can teach every conceivable work concerning every conceivable art… Any student who has spent even a few days with him and tasted the sweetness of the fruit of knowledge, will never find themselves helpless in the face of a calamity! They can never surrender what they have learnt! For example, Maulvī ʿAbd Allah who served as a *wakīl* at the Appeals Court in Barelī continued to keep up with his studies (*kutb bīnī*) despite being very busy. His younger brother, Nūr Allah is the same age as me, and was preoccupied with his job in the courts of law and was counted among the best of the *munshīs* who specialized in shorthand. However, now he has joined Maulwī ʿAbd al-Rahman ʿĀrif and is on the path of *haqq gūī*.[37]

These biographical sketches of the *ʿulamāʾ* of Rāmpur are layered with admiration for their pious occupations and their commitment to intellectual pursuits, which in turn qualified

[36] This is most likely a reference to ʿAbu Yūsuf (d. 798), the chief jurist in Harun al-Rashid's caliphate who is credited with being the first to articulate Ḥanafī law as the law of a state.

[37] ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān, *Waqā'i ʿAbd al-Qādir Khānī* in BL APAC IO Islamic 4049, *Kalīmāt al-Shuʿarāʾ*, IO Islamic 4049, India Office Collections, The British Library, London.

them for their careers in the Company's legal regime. ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's survey of a range of *qużżāt* and *muftīyān* from Rāmpur is particularly noteworthy given that the princely state of Rāmpur was in theory outside the Company's jurisdiction. It might therefore be deduced that many of the figures who staffed the offices of the district courts that had been established by the East India Company criss-crossed the directly administered and indirectly administered regions of British India. For example, ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's tutor, Maulāna Sharaf al-Dīn, offered legal opinions that challenged the Company's orders in support of the claims of members of the Bangash Afghān household of Farrukhābād, while many of his students—as illustrated in the passage above—were stationed at the Company's courts.

It is quite likely that by the time ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān completed writing the *Waqāʾiʿ* in c.1831, *muftīyān* in particular had come to assume a more complex social standing than they had in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the East India Company had regularly solicited their services. In an article on the history of the role of the *muftī*, Khalid Masud suggests that after Anglo-Muhammadan law was formalized, and the Company's vision of codified Islamic law thus realized, the figure of the *muftī* became increasingly dispensable to the colonial legal regime.[38] Over the course of the nineteenth century, in cases involving Muslim subjects, British judges aided by *qużżāt* became the chief arbiters of Anglo-Muhammadan law. Masud argues that as a direct consequence of being jettisoned from the colonial imagination of Islamic law, the moral authority of the *muftī* was augmented amongst "*sharīʿa*-oriented Muslims" who were unhappy with the Company's administration.[39] Although Masud does not

[38] The *muftī*'s defining requirement was that he be pious and knowledgeable enough to offer his legal opinion. See K. M. Masud, "Adab al-Mufti: The Muslim Understanding of Values, Characteristics, and Role of a Mufti," in Barbara Metcalf ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (London: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 124-51.

[39] Ibid., p. 142.

offer an example to suggest that "*sharīʿa*-oriented Muslims" were partisans of *muftīyān*, there is evidence from the "Ceded Territories"—i.e. the former Rohilla territories barring Rāmpur—that suggests that certain *muftīyān* did indeed challenge and question the East India Company's legal-administrative apparatus. In 1816, Muftī ʿIwaz led a demonstration against a house tax that had been introduced by the Company. The East India Company perceived the protests as the rumblings of recalcitrant Afghāns, but Company records of the events suggest that Muftī ʿIwaz became a popular figure across community boundaries in Barelī by advancing conceptions of "just governance" in his protests.[40]

In sum, during the early nineteenth century, within the Company's Ceded Territories as well as the indirectly administered princely court of Rāmpur, growing numbers of local actors fueled the expansion of the Company's jurisdiction. As minor clerks, managers of police stations, *qużżāt* and *muftīyān*, ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān and the figures whom he lists, interpreted, challenged and bolstered the early colonial legal regime at the regional level. In as far as the *Waqāʾiʿ* is an account of ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's life and times, the portion discussed here offers a snapshot of his role as a mediator of early colonial institution-building. Other parts of the *Waqāʾiʿ* demonstrate a similar pattern of incorporating regional functionaries into the lower ranks of the newly formed administration. The second part of the present chapter will pursue an inquiry into the responses provoked by this jurisdictional expansion, particularly in Rāmpur, which though formally separate from the Ceded Territories/former Rohilla territories, was inextricably linked to the changes unfolding in neighboring towns.

[40] See Waleed Ziad, "Mufti 'Iwāz and the 1816 'Disturbances at Bareilli': Inter-Communal Moral Economy and Religious Authority in Rohilkhand," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 7, no. 2 (2014): 189-218.

III. *Qānūn-i Khāndān-i Rohillahā*: A Canon for the Rohilla Family

3.1 *ʻAṭa'-yi Sulṭānī*: The Curse of the Royal Gift

When the East India Company defeated the Rohilla armies in 1775 and permitted a thin vein of political authority to Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān of Rāmpur (r. 1774 – 1794), it simultaneously divested his uncles, brothers and their children of the Rohilla Afghān household's patrimonial wealth. When Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān died in 1794, different family members—younger sons, their wives and daughters—locked horns in a bid to hang on to the properties that remained with the family. These events proceeded along a pattern that became familiar across the subcontinent, wherein regional potentates were squeezed out of their patrimonies and faced with the Company's interventions in the event of "misrule" or "political intrigue."[41]

By the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Ceded Territories surrounding Rāmpur had already been absorbed into the Company's administrative network. Under these conditions, some members of the family in Rāmpur repeatedly approached the Company to validate their claims, while others solicited the legal opinions of *muftīyān* and *qużżāt* to challenge rules and orders issued by the Company's courts, which determined matters of succession, inheritance and stipends in princely states. Historians have acknowledged the existence of this push and pull: the appeal of the Company to some Rohilla elites, as well as the resistance of others—like ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān's branch of the ruling family of Rāmpur—to its influence. The grounds for such gestures of resistance however have rarely been understood or explained, beyond suggesting that they were rooted in self-legitimation. The arguments generated by the pushback against the influence of the Company's legal regime in princely states such as Rāmpur contain clues to

[41] See Ramusack, ibidem., pp. 83-84.

understanding the transformation of former Muslim political elites into colonial subjects at the regional level. The historical value of the *Qānun-i Khāndān-i Rohillahā,* referred to at the beginning of the present chapter, is best understood in this light.

ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān was the "successor" (*sajjāda nashīn*, sic) and oldest son born to his father, Nawwāb Muḥammad ʿĀzam Khān, one of many Rohilla chiefs who claimed descent from the founder of the Rohilla state ʻAli Muḥammad Khān (r. 1739 – 1748). In ca. 1850, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān finished writing the *Qānūn-i Khāndān-i Rohillahā,* which he wrote mostly in Persian. Although the term *qānūn* came to signify state and international law later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān used it in a pre-modern sense.[42] The *Qānūn* that he wrote was a canon for the Rohilla family (*khāndān*): a document akin to a constitution, delineating the dynastic laws of the Afghān ruling family in Rāmpur. Much like the Ottoman imperial *kānūn* which signified a legal corpus that was connected with the ruling dynasty, or like the practices associated with the Chingissids and the Timurids, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān's *Qānūn* refers to the customs, traditions and laws of the *dynasty* of Rohilla Afghāns.[43] Although ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān used "*qānūn*" in this specific sense of the term, the context which he described was different from the Ottoman, Chingissid and Timurid cases in a significant way. In the pre-modern imperial context, it had often been a charismatic ancestor and lawgiver who bequeathed legitimacy to the practices of subsequent generations of a dynasty. In the case of Rāmpur, on the other hand, it was ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla's status as a recipient of an *ʻaṭāʾ-yi sulṭānī,* or royal gift, made to him by the Mughal Emperor Muḥammad Shāh (r. 1719 – 1748), that served as the

[42] G. Burak, "Qānūn," *The [Oxford] Encyclopedia of Islam and Law*, Oxford Islamic Studies Online, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t349/e0157 (accessed 01-Nov-2017).

[43] For a classic account of "kanun consciousness" in the Ottoman empire during the sixteenth century, see Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 191-200.

basis for the legitimacy of the practices of subsequent generations of Rohilla Afghāns. Evidently, ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla himself was not a *sulṭān* in this narrative, but the primary recipient of the *sulṭān*'s gift.

The matter of the foundational legitimacy of Rohilla *qānūn* is nevertheless obscured by the changing historical representation of ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān, even if he was never remembered as a charismatic, saintly or divine figure like Amīr Timūr, who was invoked by Mughal rulers as the "lord of auspicious conjunctions," underwriting their own dynastic practices.[44] In clarifying this question, we might first consider that in one of the two known manuscript copies of the *Qānūn*, the opening folio outlines a *nasabnāma* or a genealogy, tracing ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla's pedigree through a line of *sayyids*, or lineal descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad.[45] Most other accounts of the history of the Rohillas suggest that ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla was born a Jāt and was adopted by the heir-less Rohilla chief, Dāʾūd Khān who met the young boy at a gathering of people celebrating the Hindu festival, *Holī*.[46] This might suggest that, indeed, the *Qānūn* was holding up ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān as a kind of sanctified lawgiver. Looking beyond the genealogy, however, we see a different picture. At the outset of the main text of the *Qānūn*, before elaborating the purpose of writing this work, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān offers a synoptic history of the settlement of Rohilla Afghāns in north India during

[44] On the uses of the biographies of Amīr Timūr, see Ron Sela, *The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane: Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 22-53. On the Mughal emperor's title as "lord of auspicious conjunction" i.e. *Sāhib Qirān*, see A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[45] The Qānūn is an unpublished work; there are two known manuscripts in collections at the Raza Library, Rāmpur and the (now barely functional) Saulat Public Library, also in Rāmpur.

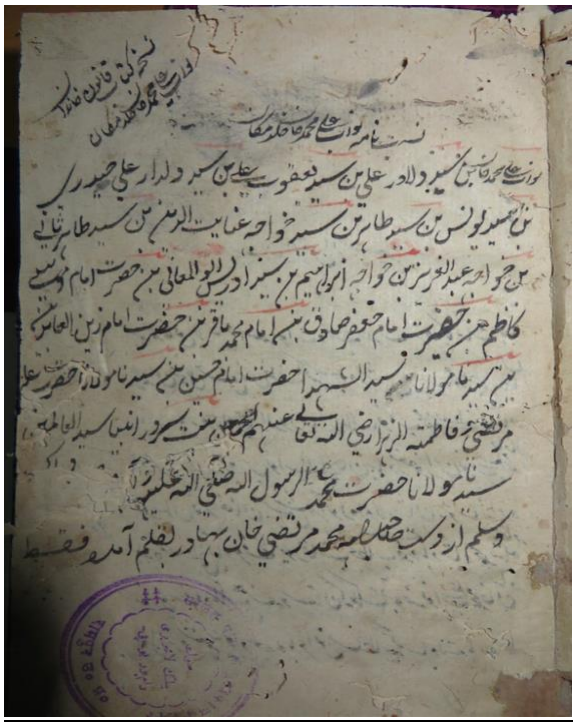
[46] See for example, Rustam ʿAlī Bijnori, "*Qissa'-yi Aḥwāl-i Rohilla*," in I. H. Siddiqui ed., *An Eighteenth Century History of North India: An Account of the Rise and Fall of the Rohilla Chiefs in Janbhasha* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005).

the emperor Muḥammad Shāh's reign. He elides any discussion of the conditions of ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla's heritage or adoption; instead, he dwells on ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla's proximity to the Mughal throne, portraying him as a figure who upheld and defended Mughal sovereign authority by participating in the murder of one of the brothers of Bārha, ʿAbd Allah Khān and Ḥasan ʿAlī Khān, who had deposed the emperor Farrukhsīyar (d. 1719) and endangered the stability of the Mughal Empire. We might additionally consider that a central focus of the *Qānūn* is the tension between the purportedly Afghān customary laws of inheritance, labeled *ʿurf*, that were practiced by the descendants of ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla, and other prescriptions and legal judgments that the author alleges were opposed to the *sharīʿa*. In short, in the *Qānūn*, ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla and his entire lineage are cast bewilderingly as *sayyids* and ethnic Afghāns, supporters of Mughal rule, pious Muslims and the bearers of Afghān customary traditions which were in compliance with the *sharīʿa*. Therefore, though lacking charismatic sovereign authority in the manner of Amīr Timūr, ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla is nevertheless remembered in the *Qānūn* as a *sayyid* and the founder of a sub-imperial dynasty, the legitimacy of whose practices was fed by many streams of authority, of which the principle one was the royal gift of the Rohilla territories that were guaranteed to pass indefinitely from one generation to the next (*naslan baʿd nasl wa batnan baʿd batan*) within the family (*khāndān*).

The problems that are treated of in the *Qānūn* derive from this royal patrimonial gift. The notion of a patrimony, and more specifically the contested formulation of a "patrimonial bureaucratic state," is familiar to historians of the Mughal Empire. It suggests that the Mughal state and its various administrative departments and personnel functioned as an extension of the imperial household. While such a construal of the Mughal state has been met with criticism, more recently it has been argued that the place of the "patrimony" in political culture

transformed over the course of Mughal rule. According to this view, the Persian word for "patrimony" in the Indo-Islamic tradition was *sarkār*, and the evolving meaning of *sarkār* over a period of time is a useful index of the history of state formation in India.[47] During Mughal rule, its meaning shuttled between referring to an imperial household such as that of the emperor, and a sub-imperial household such as that of a provincial noble-man. Historians have suggested that in the eighteenth-century era of political decentralization, when these provincial households and new conquest groups crystallized at the regional level by laying claims to land-holdings and constituting their own local dynasties, the contest over the meaning of *sarkār* was replicated at the level of "successor states". The claimants in these instances were individuals and families both from within and from outside the ruling household of the successor state. Such was the case in Rāmpur, where the sub-imperial household had become exogamous and fragmented into factions and even smaller households. The problem of discerning the nature of the patrimonial gift in this instance was several-fold: Who would inherit it? Was it taxable and divisible? Did women own parts of it? What role did members of the household "dynasty" play in adjudicating disputes related to inheritance? ʿAlī Hāsan Khān wrote the *Qānūn* with the intention of addressing these questions by outlining the dynastic practices of the descendants of ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla.

[47] See Nicholas J. Abbott, "Bringing the Sarkār Back in: Translating Patrimonialism and State in Early Modern and Early Colonial India," in John L. Brooke, Julia C. Strauss & Greg Anderson eds., *State Formations: Global Histories and Cultures of Statehood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 124-137. In drawing attention to the changing semantic value of *sarkār*, Abbott seeks to revive Blake's focus on "patrimonial" authority without ascribing it to a "model" of state structure.



6. The *Nasabnāma* on the flyleaf of the uncatalogued manuscript at the Saulat Public Library, Rāmpur. Source: Author

3.2 ʿ*Urf*, *Sharīʿa*, Women and the Company's Legal Regime

The *Qānūn* unfolds by flagging specific cases pertaining to the inheritance of the Rohilla household. Based on these cases, its author ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān extrapolates larger, abstract principles that are morally grounded in legal compendia. It moves from the particular to the abstract, and in this way closely resembles the format of a *fatwāʾ* which is typically written as a lengthy answer to a specific question. And yet, even though he appears to have enough knowledge about the appropriate form and content that would bolster his elaboration of the Rohilla *Qānūn*, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān was no *muftī*. How did he summon the intellectual resources to write the *Qānūn*? He himself offers an explanation: towards the end of the manuscript of the *Qānūn*, he writes that he had perused a set of legal opinions or *iftāʾ* that had been drafted in connection with the matter of inheritance in the early nineteenth century within the household of the "Nawwāb Bāwan Hazārī" i.e. the household of the Nawwāb of Farrukhābād, Muḥammad

Khān Bangash (r. 1715-1743).[48] Like ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla, Muḥammad Khān Bangash had been the recipient of a "royal gift" and these legal opinions were written by none other than Maulāna Sharaf al-Dīn, the scholar-bureaucrat ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's renowned mentor, referred to above. Although the matter of inheritance in Muḥammad Khān Bangash's family was apparently never resolved in accordance with Sharaf al-Dīn's recommendations ("*fatwāʾ-yi haḍa dar sarkār naguzasht*"), ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān nevertheless drew inspiration from this set of legal opinions.[49] He reasons, "The practice (*riwāj*) in the Nawwāb Bāwan Hazārī's family and that of our own is very similar (*aksar barābar mānde and*)."[50] He further notes that all the respectable learned men (*ʿulamāʾ-yi ʿizzam*), including a judge (*qāżī*), endorsed these legal opinions with their stamps. ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān took the trouble to reproduce each of these legal opinions along with his impression of the stamps and seals of an array of these authorities, including a range of *muftiyān* and the *qāżī*, Ghulām Rasūl. He writes that "since the legal opinions pertaining to the household of the Nawwāb Bāwan Hazārī is very comprehensive (*mufaṣṣil*), I have thought it pertinent to append it to this *qānūn*, as it includes an explanation of how absolute property (*amwāl-i muṭlaqa*) and conditional property (*amwāl-i mashrūṭa*) ought to be disposed of, while taking into account custom and practice (*ʿurf o ʿādāt*)."[51]

Each of Sharaf al-Dīn's *iftāʾ* appears to have been drafted after 1811, when a specific case pertaining to the inheritance of daughters in the Bangash household was brought before the Company's *Niẓāmat ʿAdālat*. Sharaf al-Dīn responds to four questions related to this case, all of

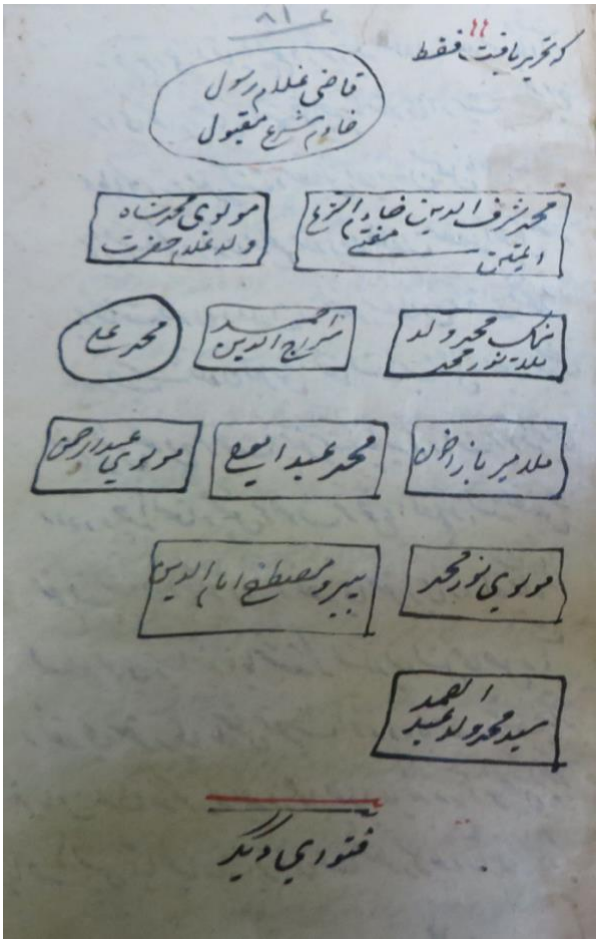
[48] The Nawwāb of Farrukhābād was a commander of 52,000 men in the Mughal army, hence the epithet "Bāwan Hazārī."

[49] ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān, *Qānūn-i Khāndān-i Rohillahā*, MS P1808, Rāmpur Raza Library, pp. 50-51.

[50] Ibid., p. 51.

[51] Ibid., p. 52.

which enquire about the correct guidelines for the distribution of the household's wealth. In his answers, he challenges a "decree" issued by the Company's courts, the terms of which he does not fully elaborate other than to foreground his own extensive counter-claims that the family's property was an irrevocable gift that could only pass on to male successors (*be rijāl na nisāʾ*). Not only are Sharaf al-Dīn's views mirrored in ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān's Rohilla *Qānūn*, they serve as an example of an instance in which elite Muslim families at the regional successor-state level identified and delineated their interpretation of their own *ʿurf o ʿādāt* that directly challenged the Company's distinction between *sharīʿa* and custom in its elaboration of civil justice.



7. A page displaying signatories to a *fatwā'* pertaining to the inheritance of the Bangash family, from the appendix in the *Qānūn*. Source: ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān, *Qānūn-i Khāndān-i Rohillahā*, MS P1808, Rāmpur Raza Library.

In drawing from Sharaf al-Dīn's work, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān hitched the Rohilla *qānūn* to a body of legal opinion from a neighboring Afghān household, and also to the long chain of examples that informed those opinions, all of which were grounded in legal compendia that were purportedly in keeping with the *sharīʿa*. In fact, the single-most consistent contention that he maintains through the *Qānūn* is that the customs of the family of ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla were very much in line with Islamic practice, i.e. they were *bā-sharaʿ*. He further explains that in order to fully substantiate this claim, he organized the *Qānūn* in two parts. The first concerns "the actions of the family that are *bā-sharaʿ*" and the second is centered on "that which is in every way permissible according to the *sharīʿa* but which is mistakenly understood by ignorant people as contravening it."[52] Methodologically, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān declares that he has offered numerous *riwāyāt* (narrative examples) to support these statements. He illustrates the *riwāyāt* by way of *qīyās* or analogy, a logical approach that is historically central to Ḥanafī and Shāfiʿī schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Notably, he cites from the same compilations of imperial jurisprudence that Sharaf al-Dīn refers to, including the *Ashbāh wa'l-Naẓāʾir* and *Fatāwa-yi ʿĀlamgīrī*, as well as older works associated with the sultanates of pre-Mughal India, such as the *Fatāwa-yi Tātārkhānī* which was compiled during the reign of Firūz Shāh Tughlaq (r. 1351 – 1388). He draws abstract logical principles and philosophical clauses from these works and applies them to actual instances of divorce and disputes over inheritance, thereby questioning the Company's right to manage such cases pertaining to the Rohilla household in Rāmpur. The analogies that he draws are shaped by a larger meta-analogy that structures the *Qānūn*: the notion that the *khāndān* or family of ʿAlī Muḥammad Rohilla was analogous to a sovereign dynasty.

[52] Ibid., pp. 2-4.

While he does not ever directly refer to the Nawwāb of Rāmpur as a *sulṭān* or a sovereign, he explains:

> …There are two types of *qānūn*: first, that which is established by the prophets, and that is the *sharīʿa*. The second, is that which is established by the noblemen and *ruʾasāʾ* (chiefs) for the administration of the land (*bandobast-i mulk*) and their own homes. Of these, some actions are ostensibly in accordance with the *sharīʿa* and some are apparently not in keeping with the *sharīʿa*, though in reality, these too are in accordance with the *sharīʿa*, and such an occurrence is known as *ʿurf* (custom) (*maʿrūf-i ʿurf*).[53]

This is the first instance in which he elaborates his use of the term *qānūn*. He refers to the administration of the "land" and the management of the "home" of the chiefs (*khāna-yi ruʾasāʾ*), explaining that the *qānūn* of the chiefs of Rāmpur was Islamic in that it was analogous to the *qānūn* of the Prophet of Islam (even when it appeared not to be). Further on in the work, he advances a qualification to this earlier explanation, noting that his focus is the *qānūn* of his *birādarī* (brotherhood):

> In our family, the *qānūn* of brotherhood [is applicable] wherein all of us are the descendants of Nawwāb ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān Bahādur, the chief of this region, and we have remained in the family. And it is this *qānūn-i barādarī* that I have elaborated on paper. At the time of collating this *qānūn*, I have lived for fifty-four long years… [I have written this] because all of us are descendants of the same *jadd* (patrilineal male ancestor), bearing in mind the respect and well-being of all.[54]

[53] Ibid., p. 5.

[54] The notion of brotherhood "az yek jadd" that he advances is akin to the sense of community that we find in the writings of the soldier, Qāsim ʿAlī Khān Āfrīdī, discussed in the preceding chapter. It appears that these references to "brotherhood" through patrilineal descent is a feature of Afghān writing in the nineteenth century. See *Risāla-yi Āfrīdī*, p. 20.

These concepts—the home, family and brotherhood—are offered by way of explaining what a *qānūn* is, but these definitions beg the question: why was it important that the practices of a family or brotherhood of Afghān chiefs, whose shrunken patrimony was surrounded by Company-administered lands, be seen as observing the path of the righteous? ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān does not address this question directly. It is only in the examples that he offers of different customary precedents that the family established, in the resolution of disputes and internal challenges, that the reader begins to comprehend the wider context and motivations that compelled ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān to produce this work. The examples that he cites reveal that there were two historical realities that he had trouble coming to terms with: first that legal cases involving his family were being aired in public; and second, that as the family grew larger and several members married into other households, the question of inheritance and the preservation of the patrimonial estate became extremely crucial. Both sets of problems were directly related to the development of splits and factionalism within regional households in the face of the Company's growing political authority. The Company's pattern of squeezing elite regional households, not by force but by the impositions of treaties, decrees, conditions of inheritance and legal injunctions, which famously pitted one part of the household against another, was also one that unwittingly provoked the production of traditions *in situ*.[55]

One of the central events that undergirds these concerns is the split that occurred in the Rohilla dynasty following the death of Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān. His eldest son and successor Muḥammad ʿAlī Khān, was not popular with a section of the Rohilla chiefs in Rāmpur who decided to support Ghulām Muḥammad Khān, Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān's younger son, in his

[55] For a general survey of narratives of legitimation that were advanced by "antique states", "successor states" and "warrior states" when faced with the Company's interventions, see Barbara D. Ramusack, idem., pp. 12-47.

bid to replace his older brother. Eventually, Ghulām Muḥammad Khān and his partisans were successful, and Muḥammad ʿAlī Khān stepped down when he was faced with a coup and he was eventually shot dead. Under the pretext that the state of Rāmpur was held under the "guarantee" of the East India Company and it was therefore incumbent on them to intervene, the head of the Farrukhābād Brigade together with the Nawwāb of Awadh, insisted that Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān, the son of the murdered rightful heir, be instated as the Nawwāb of Rāmpur.[56] These events led to a full-blown war, resulting in the instatement of Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān as Nawwāb of Rāmpur and the loss of a significant chunk of Rāmpur's treasury to the East India Company. The larger consequence of the war and the intervention of the Company is that it underscored a rift in the family over differences in perspectives on several issues, ranging from the role that the Company would play in the political affairs and administration of Rāmpur, to the distribution and redistribution of the family's wealth over multiple generations. This rift grew deeper still over the course of Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān's tenure (1794-1840). Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān developed a growing distrust of several members of his family, and reportedly refused to pay them their income as shareholders in the patrimonial estate.

As differences arose within the extended family during the reign of Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān, problems pertaining to the management and regulation of women became a matter of concern. Managing cases of divorce, remarriage and relationships with *kanīzaks* or concubines, proved particularly challenging for the Nawwāb to manage. Could these cases be managed without seeking the assistance of the Company's courts of law? Regarding this theme, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān offered a set of reflections on some complex customary settlements as they had

[56] See W. C. Abel, *Gazetteer of the Rāmpur State: 1911* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1911), p. 101.

occurred in his family. He writes in detail for instance, about the case of Maddū Mutriba (i.e. Maddū the Musician):

> …In this family, from the time of ʿAlī Muḥammad Khan until the death of my uncle…, there has never been occasion (*naubat*) for a case related to the family to reach a *sharīʿa* court or a *panchāyat*. [There are two exceptions to this.] One time, my uncle, Nawwāb Muḥammad ʿInāyat Allah Khān and Nawwāb Muḥammad Muzaffar ʿAlī Khān took a case (*muqaddama*) concerning the purchase of a title-deed… to the *raʾīs* or leaders who uphold the *sharīʿa*… And another instance was when Maddū Mutriba, the wife of Aḥad Khān Afghān, was divorced and the period of *ʿiddat* (or probation before a second marriage) had passed… Shammo, the sister of Imtīyāz Mahal who was the wife of Nawwāb Nīyāz ʿAlī Khān, became irritated and appealed to her sister. Imtīyāz Maḥal brought the matter to Nawwāb Aḥad ʿAlī Khān. In order to bring her peace of mind, Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān invoked the *sharīʿa* and said "This wife of Aḥad Khān Afghān is not divorced… Let us bring this case before the *shari'a*." For the sake of reputation (*nām*), The case was taken to a *shari'a* court at the Jāma' Masjid (Friday mosque). Over there, Mulla Mahmūd, Aḥad Khān's lawyer, in the presence of Qāżī Ghulām Rasūl and Muftī Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn Sāhab, stated that Maddū was Aḥad Khān's wife and that she should accept him as her husband, and should return to her first husband's home. Afterwards, she might present her case for a divorce, because Aḥad Khān is still legally responsible for the protection of her life (*zamānat-i ḥifz-i jānesh*). Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān summoned him, but he did not accept any terms. Maddū stayed for a while in the home of Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān, after which the matter no longer needed to be assessed according to *sharīʿa* (*hīch naubat-i sharīʿat na rasīde*)… Eventually, Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān returned [sic] Maddū to the care of Nawwāb Nīyāz ʿAlī Khān. Apart from these two incidents—the first of which occurred upon the volition of the actors, and the second of which was resolved because of the insistence of Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān, to order an inquiry into the matter from the perspective of *sharīʿa*—there have been no occasions on which this family has been assessed in light of the *sharīʿa*. Nor has there been an occasion for a *panchayat-i ʿaqlī-yi barādarān-i nāwāqifān* (a rational assembly of unbiased men). The chiefs and leaders of this region look to the documents of their relatives and elders (*tasnīfejāt-i sawāleḥ*), as their children, to pronounce decisions with the intention of preserving *ʿizzat o ābru*. Much like the way that these present pages of writing are written, which are actually in keeping with the *sharīʿa*. Therefore, when cases concerning members of the family are taken to the British

> government, over there too the way of the chiefs of this place is applicable… Many regard it inelegant to take cases involving women of the family to the court and the *panchayat* and to place private matters before listeners who are not from the family…[57]

This passage illustrates the significance that the management of the affairs of women in the family holds in the *Qānūn*. Specific provisions are elaborated for the income of women from the *bayt al-māl*, or treasury of the state of Rāmpur. It is noted however, that women could not inherit a share of the *ʿaṭāʾ-yi sulṭānī*, as that was specifically intended for the use of the armed forces, the *askarī wa jundī* who defended the Mughal Empire, and women took no part in the armed forces. Women who featured as concubines in the family, however, had a particularly interesting role to play. ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān suggests that in the instance that women from the family did not bear a male child and a concubine did in fact bear one, the concubine's male son would inherit his father's share of the royal gift. These various scenarios were not simply abstract. They suggest that women in the family probably *were* making various claims in courts of law that presented challenges to the pseudo-sovereignty of the patrimonial estate of Rāmpur as it was enshrined in the *Qānūn*. In fact, one of the more well-known complaints came from one Razm al-Nisāʾ Begum, who protested the untimely payment of her *mushāhira* or emolument. Regarding these events, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān writes the following:

> …some members of the family had turned against their home, and so they took their cases to Benares, after which an appeal went as far as the court in Calcutta. After their return to Rāmpur (following their stay in Benares), the requirements of *ʿurf* remained as they had been in the past (*bar ʿurf -i qadīm māND*). And as for the case/s of the appeal of the subjects against the members of the family, Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān took them—against an older precedent—to the court of law. However, respectfully, through the appeal of the appellant Maulwī Muḥammad ʿAzīm Ākhūndzādah, i.e. his deputy, Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān extended help to

[57] ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān, *Qānūn*, pp. 19-21.

> members of the family… The conditions of the time are apparently altered, and with change comes conflict of opinions…[58]

This passage refers to the growing momentum that surrounded Razm al-Nisāʾ's case, as other members of the extended household began to eventually demand confirmation of larger stipends and a greater share of the patrimony from the Company. A deposition led by one of Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān's sons, Karīmullah Khān, and an entire crew of Rohilla Afghāns who insisted that they were unhappy living in Rāmpur, approached Company officials in Benares in ca. 1823 with a plea for assistance.[59] They requested to be allowed to reside under the Company's protection in Benares. Although Karīmullah Khān and his allies were eventually unsuccessful in their attempts to seek formal resettlement, the protesting party proved difficult for the Company to halt. In fact, Karīmullah Khān's petition was ultimately sent to the Supreme Court in Calcutta before he and his supporters were finally denied their plea. He documented this four-year-long journey from Rāmpur, with lengthy stops in Murādābād, Benares, Shāhjahānābād and Barelī, in a travelogue titled *Sayr-i Karīmī* (which translates into "The Blessed Journey" and is also a play on his name).[60]

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[58] Ibid., p. 22.

[59] In a comparable case from the late-eighteenth century involving an Afghān soldier in the Company's service and his widow's right to inherit his property in Patna, Robert Travers draws attention to the Company's courts and their adjudicatory powers as interpreters of *sharīʿa*. The appellant petitioned the court's ruling after which the case was referred to the Supreme Court in Calcutta. See Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 191-200.

[60] The manuscript of the *Sayr-i Karīmī* is housed at the Saulat Public Library, Rāmpur. Although it is listed in the library's published catalog, it can no longer be accessed by the shelf-mark. See Abid Raza Bedar, *Catalogue of Persian & Arabic Manuscripts of Saulat Public Library* (Rāmpur: Saulat Public Library, 1966).

3.3 Karīmullah Khān's Petition: Persianate Documentation and the Legal Regime

Karīmullah Khān's extended journey is written as a memoir and a diary of the efforts and petitions of a branch of the Rohilla Afghān household to jockey for the Company's political favor. Notably, he traveled with his nephews, Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān's grandsons— Saʿadat ʿAlī Khān, Muzaffar ʿAlī Khān, Jaʿfar ʿAlī Khān and Niẓām ʿAlī Khān—all of whom were eager to relocate from Rāmpur to Benares. As they traveled up the Ganges, Karimullah Khān took stock of the *ajāʾib-o-gharāʾib*, or wonders and oddities, in the vein of the classic Persian traveling narrator, about the unfamiliar places they encountered. Karīmullah Khān writes for instance about the colorful fish in the river, the odd date trees of Mau-Rashidabad, the piers where the Brahmans lived in Benares, and the neighborhoods of Najafgarh and Shiwrājpūr, where the *gosā'iṅ*s lived in many an impressive building.[61] Above all however, he was struck by the physical transformations that had accompanied the formation of the Company's legal regime. For instance, upon the camp's arrival in Farrukhābād, he observes the *kothī* and *kachahri,* and the hundreds of *makānāt* or dwellings that belonged to the Company's senior service cadre. He notices roads that the Governor-General had built roads running between Allahabad and Benares, and that the British - i.e. the *sāḥibān-i ʿālīshān* - had constructed some of these structures with European materials. Furthermore, each stop along the journey required a *parwāna-yi rāhdārī,* or a certificate of passage, issued by the judge of the district. Some of these judges agreed to meet him and granted him an appointment while others like one Judge Smith in Kanpur issued a *parwāna* but left word that he was too busy to meet in person.[62] Bit by bit, Karīmullah Khān was able to meet a string of British judges and the *qużżāt, munshīyān* and translators who served

[61] *Sayr-i Karīmī,* pp. 4-7.

[62] Ibid., p 7.

them. While the family was granted permission to stay in Benares until a final decision from Calcutta was made about their fate, they made themselves at home in Benares, and one of them, Nawwāb ʿInāyatullah Khān, even wrote a *tazkira* about the respectable men of the city.

The *Qānūn* and the *Sayr-i Karīmī* reflect two sides of the same historical conjuncture. The *Qānūn*, as outlined above, mirrors the fears of ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān and his partisans about the growing jurisdictional influence that the Company wielded in areas like Rāmpur which were technically under "indirect rule". The *Sayr* on the other hand, represents the views of a group within the Rohilla elite who were attempting to work within the legal regime by appealing to the proverbial hierarchical "system" of courts and offices that the Company had established across the subcontinent by the early nineteenth century. Both of these works were modeled along forms of Persianate documentation that preceded the arrival of the Company; the *Qānūn* drew from a tradition of *iftāʾ* and *fiqh*-based works, whereas the *Sayr* drew upon conventions of writing complaints and petitions—*istighāsa* and *arzdāsht*—that had become increasingly ramified and complex during the initial stages of Mughal decentralization in the early eighteenth century.[63] In their responses to a new reality—i.e. the constitution of the Company's jurisdictional authority and its potential effect on the lives of a fractured household of sub-imperial regional elites—they used these older forms of writing as vehicles for negotiating authority between themselves and with the Company.[64]

[63] For a brief summary of the use of the term "*arzdāsht*" in pre-colonial India, see S. Inayat A. Zaidi, "Introduction," in *The British Historical Context and Petitioning in Colonial India*, ed. Majid Siddiqui (New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2005), pp. 9-16.

[64] On the relationship between petitioning and the elaboration of local politics within the Mughal Empire, see Abhishek Kaicker, "Petitions and Local Politics in the Late-Mughal Empire: The View from Kol, 1741", *Modern Asian Studies*, forthcoming.

IV. Conclusion

When Nawwāb Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān died in 1840, the East India Company successfully instated his rival's son, Muḥammad Saʿīd Khān, as Nawwāb. The latter had previously served in the Company's legal-administrative establishment as a deputy collector in neighboring Badāyūn and was familiar with its courts and bureaucracy. Company officials praised him for auguring a new moment of unmitigated acceptance of their political vision, as he introduced a system of courts of justice, a set of fiscal measures which brought "untold relief to the cultivators," and organized a regular cavalry of "Rohilla horse".[65] During the revolt of 1857, when the Company was faced with armed rebellion in parts of northern India, the princely state of Rāmpur offered unequivocal support to British intelligence. Some historians have likened the progression of this arc—from successor state to pacified princely state—to a "hollowed crown" wherein regional potentates, losing their autonomy, retained the outward and symbolic forms of political power.[66] The present chapter, while taking this disempowerment as background, has aimed to move beyond the quest to describe the process of "pacification" through the lens of the Company's maneuvers. Rather, the goal has been to identify the cracks in the account of early colonial conquest and analyze a range of attempts on the part of regional actors to seize control of the narrative in the early nineteenth century. In Rāmpur, this process is seen in the writings of disenfranchised Muslim elites and service figures who stretched the boundaries of the Persianate

[65] See W. C. Abel, *Gazetteer of the Rāmpur State*, pp. 61-63, 101.

[66] See Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of a South Indian Little Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Dirks in turn drew inspiration from Bernard Cohn's categorization of eighteenth-century polities., in which he advanced the idea of the "little kingdom" to describe the most localized unit of state formation. See Bernard Cohn, "Political Systems in Eighteenth Century India: The Benares Region", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1962), 312-320.

tradition of writing to record the expansion of the Company's legal regime through its absorption of *qużżāt* and *muftīyān,* the creation of a system of courts, and its efforts to extend its political authority over regions like Rāmpur that it did not directly control.

ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's *Waqāʾiʿ* reveals a regional scholar-bureaucrat's effort to grapple with the prospect of an emerging single authority that held the promise of containing and monopolizing warfare. In the passages of the *Waqāʾiʿ* analyzed here, the reader is invited to consider the micro-level engagements between the Company's juridical authority and a constituency of petty legal officials who staffed its lower offices in the Ceded Territories and in Rāmpur. In contrast with ʿAbd al-Qādir Khān's strident celebration of a perceived order that the Company brought to a heavily militarized context, ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān's *Qānūn* challenges the Company's assumption of the authority to select and modify his community of regional political elites. The *Qānūn* reflects a moment in which members of such regional elite households on the brink of dispossession advanced their own constructed traditions to counter the institutional mechanisms that were reordering their collective lives. The *Qānūn* thus presents a set of practices of the Rohilla Afghān "dynasty" as *ʿurf -i ʿām*, i.e. as established customs, which were aligned with the *sharīʿa*. It distinguishes these customs from *ʿurf -i khāṣ*, or practices that were too narrow and specific to be compatible with the universal righteous way of Muslims. In this manner, the *Qānūn* directly challenges the judgements of the Company-administered *sharīʿa* courts, which had been in favor of a portion of the members of the Rohilla household. ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān's elaboration of the family's dynastic canon was not the last word on this subject. The sons and grandsons of the first Nawwāb, Fayzullah Khān, rallied around Karīmullah Khān to enlist the Company's assistance in permanently relocating them. Karīmullah Khān recorded the contents of his petitions to the Company and his own experience communicating with judges and

functionaries of the legal regime in a diary. He thus used a long-standing Persianate and Mughal tradition of diary-keeping and petitioning to formulate his response to the specifically early colonial circumstances in which he and the disinherited sons of Nawwāb Fayzullah Khān were placed.

Finally, it might be noted that the works discussed in this chapter emerged at a peculiar moment in the developing material culture of writing. The *Waqāʾiʿ* (ca. 1831) was written when print was taking off in different parts of the subcontinent, and by the time that ʿAlī Ḥasan Khān wrote the *Qānūn* (ca. 1850) several presses were fully functional and thriving across the subcontinent. Yet, neither of these works was published at the time in which they were written. They did not inhabit the world of high-demand texts, or materials that circulated easily in the early nineteenth century, which largely consisted of educational books, songbooks, poetry and major courtly chronicles.[67] The *Waqāʾiʿ* and the *Qānūn*—and even the Benares-bound Karīmullah Khān's *Sayr-i Karīmī*—had a more immediate functional dimension to their authorship. They were produced reflexively, as direct responses, with the awareness of the rise of a new political order, and by authors who felt a distinct need to define and defend their conceptions of how a state, patrimony, or legal regime ought to exist in their immediate surroundings.[68]

[67] On the circular relationship between popular oral texts and popular print during the widespread establishment of printing presses in north India, see Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009).

[68] Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers eds., *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Conclusion

This dissertation has offered an account of inter-imperial South Asia, a world in which long-standing transregional political connections were realigned, fragmenting the large stretch of Persianate empires to which South Asia had belonged since the sixteenth century, generating new states and imperial networks in the process. It has examined how, in such a context, South Asian subjects reflected upon the forms of political and legal control that accompanied the formation of a regime of colonial power and authority. Accordingly, it explored the writings of service professionals and dispossessed elites who were anchored in regional settings during the British East India Company's piecemeal annexation of a grid of Mughal successor states in northern and central India.

The setting for this exploration was the Rohilla state in Kaṭehr, which emerged to semi-autonomy in the eighteenth century and became a political and commercial outpost of the Durrānī Afghān Empire, only to be subsequently dominated by the Company during the long development of colonial rule (ca. 1774 – 1857). Taken together, these serial changes of political regime formed the conditions under which circulating service professionals—scribes, petty bureaucrats and soldiers—mediated, observed and documented an era of transition. In their works, they elaborated new conceptions of regional identity, political ethics, military service, and customary law. The overarching goal of explicating these materials has been to understand precisely how political opinions and sensibilities coalesced in regional settings at the intersection of multiple political formations and a rapid sequence of conquests.

The foregoing chapters makes two main contributions towards the study of modern South Asia. First, while previous analyses of the transition to colonialism in South Asia privileged the

perspectives of East India Company officials and the writings of Mughal elites and belletrists, the present dissertation has demonstrated that we can access this transition through the perspectives of a more socially diverse set of actors who mediated it. Their writings on this process form a major archive of political and social thought that warrants close analysis. Second, this dissertation has offered a regionally differentiated account of the early history of colonialism: an alternative to influential studies that treat northern India as a uniform space. It adopted the category of the "region" to refer to two notions. First, to indicate the patchy and overlapping sovereignties at the intersection of the receding Mughal Empire and its incipient political successors. The region of Kaṭehr, where the Rohilla state was situated, featured numerous small towns and *qaṣbāt.* Such physical spaces were in turn fertile sites for the growth of a second region—an intellectually constructed discursive space—where service professionals and recently marginalized former elites documented their fluctuating opportunities under early colonial conditions.

Taken together, these two connotations of the "region" enabled us to consider that the locus of cultural life in the inter-imperial period included places like the fortress, the military camp, and the highway. These were important spaces for the formation of a regional service culture that shaped historical developments, beyond the cities that harbored the colonial service elite. In doing so, this dissertation offers an alternative to the prevalent assumption that consequential political discourse was solely shaped at urban centers. The transition to colonialism had culturally ramified effects beyond the formation of an urban middle class—a theme that historians have accorded much heft—implicating questions of identity, ethnicity, political culture, and customary law that possessed a much wider social and geographical remit.

In a more general sense, this dissertation has recreated a highly militarized world where statehood was constantly being redefined and bureaucracies faded in and out of significance. While it owes a great debt to research on the Rohilla Afghāns initiated by Jos Gommans and Iqbal Hussain, it is avowedly not a history of Afghāns or their rise to legibility and statehood. Rather, it is an attempt to capture a snapshot of the social and political reorientations that followed the demise of Afghān statehood in India on the eve of colonialism.

As is the nature of most historical research, several lines of inquiry have emerged as offshoots from this initial effort. First, it became apparent through the course of writing this dissertation that most of the bureaucrats, soldiers and former elites who were affiliated with the Rohilla state were Muslims. The Rohilla Afghāns themselves were Sunnī Muslims who were the disciples of different Ṣūfīs, many of whom were resident in the *qaṣbāt* of Kaṭehr. The inter-imperial period was also the age of piety-based Islamic reform, ranging from figures like Shāh Walī Allah (d. 1762) to Sayyid Aḥmad (d. 1831) of Barelī, an advocate of *jihād* against the East India Company. Sayyid Aḥmad famously served in a military unit alongside the independent Rohilla soldier, Amīr Khān. Just as this dissertation focuses on discourses surrounding politics, ethnic and religious identity, and law, it would be fruitful to inquire into the fate of the Ṣūfī and piety-based networks in the wake of the Rohilla state. In what ways did the condition of political flux in the region reorient these channels of pietistic and devotional sociability?

Second, the inter-imperial period was one in which multiple "successor states" capitulated to direct or indirect rule by the Company. Bearing that in mind, what kind of comparative exercises can the historian undertake to fully calibrate the experiences of regional service figures and minor dispossessed elites across regions in South Asia? The narrative of Amīr Khān's journey through Central India and his time in the service of Yashwantrāo Holkar

present some initial possibilities. The Maratha confederacy was strained and gradually separated into five major households at the same time that the Rohilla-Durrānī alliance came undone. It would be fruitful to pursue further exploration into how the various service figures and dispossessed elites among the Marathas and the Rohillas melded and produced trans-regional alliances like Amīr Khān's and Holkar's. Avenues for such an investigation exist not only in the manuscript and written tradition but also in the visibly altered topography of these regions. The material remains of the former Afghān states of both northern and central India yield layers of occupation, in the form of fortifications, tombs and step-wells that were constructed in the period covered by this dissertation. A portion of these structures incorporate or repurpose materials from Maratha-commissioned structures from the same period. It remains to be seen if this constructed environment mirrors the processes by which regional successor and conquest states splintered.

Today, the regional state is a complex political entity and a fundamental element in India's federal structure. Since the partition of India, several states have sought to subdivide and rename themselves. Various nationalisms—ethno-linguistic, class-based or religious—are attached to such movements, though little consideration is given to the early colonial histories of settlement and conquest that shaped these regions. In a heavily militarized environment, mobile service communities often relocated over generations and both physically and intellectually reshaped regional collective identities before they were fixed by the Company by the late nineteenth century.

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