

Household, Family, and State:
Negotiating Sovereignty and *Sarkar* in the Awadh *Nawabi*, c. 1775-1840

By

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Abstract

Through an examination of changing notions of sovereignty and statehood in the North Indian polity of Awadh (1722-1856), this dissertation charts the conceptual emergence of the modern state among dynastic polities in early colonial South Asia. A provincial governorship that achieved *de facto* independence from South Asia's Mughal empire in the early eighteenth century, Awadh became an important ally of the British East India Company in the mid-1760s and remained a linchpin of the emergent colonial order until it was annexed by the Company in 1856. Using Persian, Urdu, and English-language sources, the dissertation illustrates transformations in the political language of early colonial North India that were precipitated by moments of collaboration and contestation between East India Company officials, Awadh's ruling *nawabs*, and rival members of the ruling dynasty. In particular, it demonstrates how Company officials and the Awadh *nawabs* fashioned a mutually (if temporarily) acceptable vision of sovereignty as comprising exclusive proprietorship and patriarchal authority, and of the state as conceptually distinct from constituent royal households and the wider ruling family. It argues that in the short term this project allowed the *nawabs* to consolidate territorial dominion and to assert greater control over powerful members of the dynasty. In the longer term, however, it asserts that the conceptual differentiation of "the state" from royal households and the ruling family abetted the expansion of British control in Awadh and ultimately helped build the case for British annexation. In so doing, the dissertation contends that the conceptual vocabulary of so-called Mughal "successor states" like Awadh were shaped not solely by their pre-colonial intellectual inheritances but also by their complex ideological engagements with East India Company and the shifting gender and generational tensions of their own ruling dynasties.

Note on Transliteration

Persian words and passages have been transliterated according to the system found in Francis Steingass's *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*. Proper names, however, have not been transliterated, except when contained in directly quoted passages. Passages in Urdu have been transliterated according to the same schema, with long vowels indicated with superscript dashes and with ٲ, ڍ, ڙ standing respectively for the characters ٲ, ڍ, ڙ. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

Introduction

Writing in the *Calcutta Review* in 1845, Henry Lawrence, British Resident in Nepal, delivered a scathing assessment of the neighboring kingdom of Awadh and the state of its relations with the East India Company. According to Lawrence, Awadh—the Company’s wealthiest and most populous client state and “the fairest province in India”—was being ruined by systemic maladministration “for the benefit of one family, or rather, to support in idle luxury *one individual of one family.*”¹ The individual in question was the reigning king, Amjad Ali Shah (r. 1842-47), although for Lawrence he was hardly Awadh’s first such exploitative sovereign. Rather, he was only the most recent ruler of the province to prosper at the expense of his family, the state, and the people. More egregious still was the fact that this system of exploitation had taken root, not in spite of, but because of Awadh’s alliance with the Company. Since the late-eighteenth century British officials had regularly interfered in the regime but they had done so over “trifles,” standing “aloof when important questions were at issue.”² Such a haphazard approach ultimately diminished British standing, encouraged Awadh’s incompetent rulers to bankrupt the state and immiserate their subjects, and prevented Company officials from acknowledging the only reasonable conclusion—that the British government was obliged to save Awadh from its sovereign by assuming control of its local administration.

Although Lawrence’s proposal would not come to fruition for another nine years, assuming control of the Awadh state had long been contemplated by Company administrators. So too had British officials’ tendency to become embroiled in “trifling” concerns rather than dealing

¹ “The Kingdom of Oude,” in H.M. Lawrence, *Essays, Military and Political, Written in India*. (London: W.H. Allen, 1859), 130. Emphasis in the original.

² *Ibid.*, 129.

with “important” affairs of state. Indeed, nearly forty years prior to the publication of Lawrence’s essay, it had become commonplace among the Company’s upper echelons to lament these disruptive “trifles,” or “domestic” disputes between members of the ruling family that seemingly necessitated British arbitration. Yet what Lawrence and his predecessors failed to recognize was that these matters were hardly insignificant, either to the disputants involved or to Company officials themselves. Rather, such disputes proved so vexing, and so recurrent, precisely because they addressed fundamental questions about the nature of the Awadh state, local sovereignty, and the relationship of the ruling family to both. Indeed, the very categories employed by Lawrence and the Company to indict and eventually justify annexation of Awadh, i.e., the sovereign, the ruling family, and the state, had been defined during these trifling, domestic quarrels. While Lawrence and others took for granted the existence of a state conceptually distinct from the household of the king and the wider ruling family, their conviction ignored the fact that such an object had been created over the course of Awadh’s lengthy engagement with the Company. Indeed, as this dissertation argues, by shaping the discursive parameters by which the Company engaged with the Awadh regime, and by exacerbating existing tensions within the ruling dynasty, the processes of differentiating the state from ruling households and the wider ruling family, and of delimiting their respective sovereign and proprietary rights, guided the expansion of the Company’s influence in Awadh and ultimately its annexation of the province in 1856.

The state in South Asian historiography

Defining the state was no simple task, and the efforts of Company administrators were frequently haphazard and contradictory. Yet they have not been the only ones to struggle with

what constituted the state in Awadh and elsewhere; modern historians have been similarly challenged by notions of “the state” and state formation in South Asia. Although the literature is far too vast to be surveyed in detail here, it may be appropriate to consider here several of the more influential approaches to the study of the state in the South Asian context.³ The oldest and most durable of these has been the history of the state as the history of centralized, bureaucratic administration. Building upon late-nineteenth century assumptions that the British imperial regime had been constructed upon the framework of a highly centralized Mughal imperial edifice, colonial historians sought to highlight both the administrative antecedents of the colonial state and the institutional deficiencies of their Indian forbearers. Later, nationalist and Marxist historians jettisoned many of the more obviously pejorative assumptions of colonial historiography but nevertheless retained a focus on the state as a centralized, bureaucratic structure tasked principally with revenue extraction, military enterprise, and—to a lesser extent—the administration of justice. Such structures were identified throughout the subcontinent and as far back as the Mauryan empire of the third century BCE. While the cataloguing of bureaucratic forms seemingly admitted of little regional variation or historical change, the application of Marxist teleologies (particularly in the search for an Indian “feudalism”) suggested to many the possibility of institutional and historical parity between European and Indian states

³ The following section draws extensively from the introduction to H. Kulke, ed., *The State in India, 1000-1700* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a more recent survey of the literature, see the introduction to M. Kimura and A. Tanabe, eds., *The State in India: Past and Present* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

up to the Industrial Revolution and the establishment of British imperial hegemony in South Asia.⁴

Ironically, of course, Marx himself did not see the history of state and society in India as analogous to that of Europe.⁵ Instead, echoing Charles Metcalfe's assertion that Indian society was comprised of largely autonomous "village republics," Marx saw the Indian state as predatory and despotic but ultimately superficial, far too weak and isolated from the vast agrarian population to either undermine caste hierarchies and the Asiatic mode of production or to generate a historical dialectic, processes which ultimately depended on the arrival of British imperialism and European capitalism. Whatever the validity of Marx's conclusions, they were nonetheless highly influential, contributing to a second approach to the South Asian state by locating it within emergent typologies of comparative historical sociology and typically in opposition to more dynamic and successful European forms. Among European theorists influenced by Marx, Max Weber and Karl Wittfogel have had the greatest influence upon historiography of the state in India.⁶ However, while Weber's ideal types of pre-modern "patrimonial" and modern, "bureaucratic" states remain influential (if contested), Wittfogel's particular vision of "Oriental despotism" has largely fallen out of favor. Elsewhere, historians have also embraced sociological typologies of the state derived from outside the European

⁴ The late R.S. Sharma, in his *Indian Feudalism: C. 300-1200* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1965) and other writings, was the most vigorous proponent of the idea of Indian feudalism. For a recent reassessment, see A. Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World, Vol. 1, Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, 7th-11th Centuries*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 219-230. For a review of the debate over Indian feudalism, see the collected essays in H. Mukhia, ed., *The Feudalism Debate* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999).

⁵ For examples, see K. Marx, et al., *Karl Marx on India* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2006).

⁶ Weber's most important writings on the state in India can be found in M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, tr. and ed. by G. Roth, et al, as *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968). Wittfogel's most important work on the subject is K.A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

experience. Most notable among them is Aidan Southall's notion of the "segmentary" state, which Richard Fox applied to Rajput clans and which Burton Stein modified principally to describe the Chola dynasty but also precolonial political regimes in South India more generally.⁷

By the mid-1970s, however, many scholars had grown increasingly dissatisfied with these approaches. Reappraisals of the early twentieth-century British anthropologist A.M. Hocart, coupled with Foucauldian power/knowledge analysis and a Saidian critique of Orientalist scholarship, encouraged some to eschew analytic frameworks grounded in colonial epistemologies and the categories of European sociology. Instead, through ethno-historical methods, they looked to excavate socio-political formations disrupted by the colonial state and its attendant forms of knowledge, an enterprise that in practice emphasized holistic, typically "Hindu," political cosmologies unified by sacred kingship and royal gifting.⁸ Others looked to problematize the historiographic model of the state more generally, a project that found particular emphasis in studies of the Mughal empire. Here, some modified Weberian ideal types to dispute the extent to which the empire was in fact a "modern" bureaucratic state.⁹ Others rejected such schematic approaches, emphasizing instead an understanding of the state as a "process" and

⁷ R.G. Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja, and Rule: State-Hinterland Relations in Preindustrial India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971); B. Stein, *Peasant, State, and Society in Medieval South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980) and *Vijayanagara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁸ The most influential of these works remains N.B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For discussions of Hocart and kingship more broadly, see the collected essays in J.F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison, WI: South Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, 1978).

⁹ S.P. Blake, "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 1 (1979), 77–94, and "Returning the Household to the Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire: Gender, Succession, and Ritual in the Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman Empires," P.F. Bang and C. A. Bayly, eds., *Tributary Empires in Global History* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

encouraging a shift of scholarly focus away from fiscal machinery towards more nuanced understandings of imperial institutions and ideologies.¹⁰

These approaches have proven particularly productive in expanding our understanding of the diversity of polities in medieval and early modern South India, an area long derided as especially resistant to historical change, and in opening promising new avenues of inquiry into the Mughal empire, most notably the legacy of Timurid dynasticism;¹¹ intersections of Sufism, millenarianism, and Mughal kingship;¹² the formation of an imperial harem;¹³ the role of princely households in the politics of succession;¹⁴ and the evolution of aesthetic, ethical, and political cultures among the empire's scribal elite.¹⁵ These itineraries, however, have not been without their problems. As Norbert Peabody (following the insights of J.C. Heesterman and André Wink) points out, in seeking to recover coherent, precolonial political cosmologies, ethnohistorical studies have elided many of the structural tensions and contradictions of Indian regimes, rendering them effectively ahistorical and immune to change except that produced by a hegemonic European colonial state.¹⁶ Moreover, while a broad emphasis on kingship has

¹⁰ S. Subrahmanyam, "The Mughal State—Structure or Process? Reflections on Recent Western Historiography," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 29, no. 3 (1992), 291–321, and the introductions to M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Mughal State, 1526-1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) and *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). For an engaging case study of the Mughal state as "process" in Gujarat, see F. Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹¹ R.C. Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998); L. Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal India: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

¹² A.A. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

¹³ R. Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ M.D. Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ R. Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

¹⁶ N. Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6-8.

furnished a common framework for conceptualizing South Asian states and for bridging artificial conceptual divides between “Hindu” and “Muslim,” medieval and early modern state forms, it has necessarily produced highly normative, masculinist visions of precolonial politics that are difficult to reconcile with increasingly rich accounts of women’s deep and systemic roles in early modern states, as well as the reality of institutionalized yet ostensibly illegitimate forms of dissidence in South Asian political culture.¹⁷

To this it might be added that the very idea of the state itself remains a problematic one. Although much recent literature on the precolonial state has attempted to divest itself of categories and typologies derived from the European experience, “the state”—as a heuristic for modern scholarship and a discrete object both recognized and recognizable in the past—has remained a durable *a priori* assumption. However, as precolonial regimes (including those of the Mughal empire and its regional successors) are increasingly understood not as centralized, proto-modern bureaucracies but as diffuse constellations of households in which sovereignty was layered and shared, it is increasingly difficult to locate “the state” as a distinct institution. This problem has been compounded by the fact that, although the so-called “linguistic turn” has come and gone, surprisingly little attention has been paid to political vocabulary and etymologies of “state” terminology. While some have undertaken illuminating treatments of the “language of politics,” particularly in the Mughal empire and its successor states, these have been less studies

¹⁷ For the notion of institutionalized dissidence, see A. Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarājya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), particularly pp. 21-34; for women in precolonial polities, see, among others, I. Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) and *Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages, and Memories of Northeast India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013); Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*; R. Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in India C. 1500-1900* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007); L. Balabanlilar, “The Begims of the Mystic Feast: Turco-Mongol Tradition in the Mughal Harem,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 1 (2010): 123–47.

of terminology and or conceptual vocabulary as such and more examinations of the shared ethical frameworks that undergird political action.¹⁸ Indeed, efforts to trace the conceptual vocabulary of the state elsewhere in the Islamic world have remained limited to a few cursory treatments.¹⁹

This oversight—coupled with a tendency to assume an easy, and historically static, commensurability between European political vocabularies and their equivalents in modern Indian languages—has made it difficult to answer more fully one of the most significant questions for historiography of the state in South Asia, namely the extent to which the British colonial state constituted a significant break with, or a continuation of, precolonial state forms. Guided by Foucauldian conceptions of “governmentality” as the hallmark of the modern state, some have contrasted the centralized, colonial bureaucracy’s efforts to surveil, enumerate, and manage its subject populations with the far more modest agendas of relatively decentralized precolonial regimes to argue the modern state was effectively a colonial invention.²⁰ Others, looking to the ways in which the highly monetized, commercialized economy of eighteenth-century South Asia offered fiscalizing regimes (including the British East India Company) opportunities to expand state capacity, suggest important institutional continuities between

¹⁸ See, for example, M. Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India: 1200-1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), especially the essay “Shari’a, Akhlaq, and Governance,” 26-80; and S. Subrahmanyam, “The Coin of the Realm: (Un)making Polities in Late Pre-colonial South-Asia,” in Kimura and Tanabe, eds., *The State in India*, 120-39.

¹⁹ See B. Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) and *Political Words and Ideas in Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008). See also A. Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought from the Prophet to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

²⁰ Particularly significant here are the writings of Sudipta Kaviraj in S. Kaviraj, *The Trajectories of the Indian State* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010) and *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For the concept of governmentality, see M. Foucault, “Governmentality,” in M. Foucault, et al, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

precolonial regimes and the burgeoning Company state.²¹ While offering crucial insights into the formation and administrative programs of the colonial state, this literature, however, has had relatively little to say about the *idea* of the state in either the colonial political imagination or that of contemporary Indian regimes. Such ideas, however, were critical to the formation and expansion of the early colonial state under the East India Company. As Robert Travers has demonstrated compellingly, framing itself as the restorer of an imagined “Mughal constitution” was integral to the Company’s attempts to legitimate itself as territorial power, both within its administrative ranks and to the larger British public.²² Yet the Company’s audience was not solely Anglophone. What remains less clear is how Company officials adopted and adapted indigenous conceptual frameworks to articulate and legitimate itself in Indian languages (particularly Indo-Persian, the subcontinent’s administrative and diplomatic *lingua franca*) and to Indian audiences; how this process may have shaped, and been shaped by, the Company’s relationship with client regimes outside its direct control; and how this process of mutual translation and conceptual dialogue affected the expansion of British imperium in South Asia.

An ideal place to explore transformations in ideas of the state is among the colonial regime’s Indian allies and clients, frequently referred to in colonial discourse and subsequent historiography as “native” or, following the assumption of Crown rule in 1858, “princely” states.

Although long marginalized in historical accounts of colonial India and the formation of South

²¹ See, for example, C. A Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-34; and B. Stein, “Eighteenth-Century India: Another View,” in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 60-89. For surveys of revisionist perspectives on the eighteenth century, see the introductions to S. Alavi, ed., *The Eighteenth Century in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Marshall, ed., *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*.

²² R. Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For another recent look at Company ideology, see P.J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Asia's independent nation-states, the princely states have received significant attention in recent decades, with special attention being paid to the role of princely rulers in anti-colonial nationalist movements and to their realms as laboratories of alternate Indian modernities.²³ Bureaucratizing reforms, either mandated by British officials or spearheaded by modernizing ministers, have also been considered, but the conceptual changes that may have attended them have received far less scrutiny. Certainly analyses of persistent patrimonialisms, along with a burgeoning interest in competing notions of local sovereignty vis-à-vis the colonial state, have shed significant light on political culture and thought in the princely states.²⁴ Yet here again, such work has largely assumed fixed and explicitly articulated notions of the state on the part of both colonial officials and Indian rulers, particularly for the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Similarly, studies of Indian states' often fraught relationships with the Company in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have highlighted the specific mechanisms through which they were subordinated to the emergent colonial order, particularly the formation of a "system" of subsidiary alliances and the expanding powers of Company residents at Indian courts.²⁵ However, as Timothy Mitchell and others have demonstrated outside of India, the assertion of "indirect" forms of colonial rule was contingent as much on far-reaching conceptual

²³ For recent overviews of the princely states and princely state historiography, see B.N. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); W. Ernst and B. Pati, eds., *India's Princely States: People, Princes and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2007); and C. Keen, *Princely India and the British: Political Development and the Operation of Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012). For an attempt to frame Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan, rulers of eighteenth-century Mysore, as proponents of an alternate strand of "early modern absolutism," see P. Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 85-93.

²⁴ For the former, see M. Pernau, *The Passing of Patrimonialism: Politics and Political Culture in Hyderabad, 1911-1948* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000). For a very recent example of the latter, see E.L. Beverley, *Hyderabad, British India, and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, C. 1850-1950*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁵ See M.H. Fisher's very useful *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System, 1764-1858* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For an examination of colonial theories of indirect rule, K. Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

transformations regarding the nature and scope of the state itself as it was on coercion and the direct interference of imperial administrators.²⁶ Put differently, in order to extend control over indigenous states, colonial regimes frequently needed first to define the state as an object that could then be dominated or appropriated from indigenous rulers.

Where the impact of British imperial rule upon indigenous conceptions of the state has been considered, historians and anthropologists have largely debated the extent to which the colonial state demolished the socio-political cosmologies in which local kingship (particularly in “little kingdoms”) was embedded.²⁷ In highlighting the importance of competing epistemological frameworks, these works have demonstrated important conceptual dimensions to the formation of colonial rule. Yet as noted above, the emphasis on “kingship” as the primary mode for understanding precolonial notions of the state and political culture obscures not only the existence of competing views of the state but also the importance of ostensibly non-normative, but effectively institutionalized, actors and practices. As a result, such studies—as with more schematic treatments of indirect rule—foreground competing visions of Indian rulers and colonial officials with little reference to rival views held within indigenous ruling families or their administrative staffs. Although recently more attention has been paid to alternate views propagated by influential ministers, the omission remains particularly glaring in the case of high-ranking women within Indian ruling families, who (as a sizable literature now makes clear) held structurally significant positions of power in many, if not most, precolonial regimes; who often

²⁶ T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

²⁷ See particularly Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*. For alternate views, see P. G. Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity*; and A. Ikegame, *Princely India Re-Imagined: A Historical Anthropology of Mysore* (London: Routledge, 2009). For the concept of the “little kingdom,” see B.S. Cohn, “Political Systems in Eighteenth-Century India: The Banaras Region,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 82, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1962): 312- 320, reprinted in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

maintained independent if ambivalent relationships with colonial administrators; and, as this dissertation hopes to show, often held radically divergent ideas about the nature of their “states,” sovereignty, and political authority.²⁸

Furthermore, the notion of precolonial kingly cosmologies either succumbing to or resisting unilateral epistemic pressure from a colonial hegemon belies the existence of a subtler conceptual dialogue between colonial and Indian polities, particularly during earlier phases of colonial state formation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This process was especially significant between the Company and the so-called Mughal successor regimes, whose Indo-Persian political lexicon not only shaped the British colonial state’s own modes of self-representation but whose political and intellectual cultures were also radically remade by tensions between the emergent ideals of British liberal-imperialism and assumptions about the unchanging essence of Oriental despotism. The more recent focus on “Hindu” kingship and “little kingdoms,” however, with the seemingly implicit assumption that the “Muslim” Mughal successor states were more commensurable with European forms and, perhaps, less representative of pristine precolonial regimes, has caused this conceptual exchange to be overlooked. It is true that Company officials did find post-Mughal courtly society generally more

²⁸ This is not to suggest, however, that women’s political activities in the princely states have been entirely overlooked. For recent examples, see S. Lambert-Hurley, *Muslim Women, Reform and Princely Patronage: Nawab Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal* (London: Routledge, 2007) and A.D. Jhala, *Courtly Indian Women in Late Imperial India* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008).

intelligible and often more appealing than that of the little kings.²⁹ Yet this very assumption of commensurability and mutual intelligibility masked subtle but significant dissonances in how Company officials and the ruling elite of allied Mughal successor states perceived not only the contours of particular regimes but also how they respectively understood “the state” as discrete institution.³⁰ These dissonances, moreover, resulted not in mere semantic quibbling or purely abstract philosophical disputes. Instead, they created shifting parameters of diplomatic debate between the Company and its most important clients, continually reshaping patterns of interaction not only between British officials and ruling families but also between members of ruling families themselves. In turn, this evolving nexus of competing notions of the state and attendant modes of dynastic praxis defined the avenues by which indirect rule advanced into the Mughal successor states.

Awadh historiography: Courtly consumption between empires

With scholarly inquiry increasingly attuned to the multiple worlds of Mughal political thought and to the ideological foundations of Britain’s empire in India, the Mughal successor

²⁹ For discussions of European acculturation to Indo-Muslim society, see, among others, R. Llewellyn-Jones, *A Very Ingenious Man: Claude Martin in Early Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); M. Alam and S. Alavi’s “Introduction” to A. Polier et al, *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The I’jāz-I Aarsalānī (Persian Letters 1773-1779) of Antoine-Louis Henri Polier* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); W. Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in the Eighteenth-Century India* (New York: Viking, 2003); M. Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York: Knopf, 2005); D. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁰ For the role of cultural commensurability in early modern encounters, see W.R. Pinch, “Same Difference in India and Europe,” *History and Theory* 38, no. 3 (1999): 389-407; and S. Subrahmanyam, “Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris,” in H.V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby, eds., *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), reprinted in S. Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: Mughals and Franks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 143-72, and *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 154-210.

states—polities that linked the two empires politically and intellectually—would seem ideal for considering changing notions of the state in early modern South Asia, their impact upon Indian ruling dynasties, and their role in advancing British colonial rule. This dissertation aims to do that in the context of the North Indian polity of Awadh (1722-1856). Of the provincial governorships (*ṣubadārīs*) that achieved *de facto* independence from the Mughal imperial court in the mid-eighteenth century (i.e., Hyderabad, Arcot, Bengal, and Awadh), Awadh appears a particularly fruitful area to consider political and conceptual exchange between the successor regimes and the colonial state. While Hyderabad, Arcot, and Bengal provided the first opportunities for the Company to transform military entrepreneurship into territorial dominion, it was the Company's relationship with Awadh that was arguably its most mutually productive—and destructive.³¹ Although initially its most formidable adversary in North India, after 1765 Awadh became the Company's most strategically important client, providing a buffer from real threats emanating from the Maratha confederacy and the imagined peril of an overland invasion from Afghanistan. More significantly, through extorted loans and military subsidies, the rulers of Awadh provided, albeit coercedly, vital liquidity for the Company during frequent episodes of capital scarcity. Furthermore, the region served as the Army of Bengal's primary recruiting ground and thus furnished the main source of military manpower for many of the Company's campaigns in northern, central, and eastern India.³² As a result, Awadh became the epicenter of the 1857/8 Sepoy Rebellion, which ultimately destroyed Company, if not colonial, rule in

³¹ For discussions of Company military entrepreneurship and its emergence as a territorial power, see P.J. Marshall, *Bengal—the British Bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740-1828* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c.1750-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³² For Company military recruitment in Awadh, see S. Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770-1830* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

India.³³ Awadh's influence on the colonial state was not lost on British administrators: In the opinion of the aforementioned Henry Lawrence (who was himself killed during the siege upon the British Residency in Lucknow in 1857), "No portion of India has been more discussed in England than Oude."³⁴ As the remainder of the dissertation intends to show, the partnership with the Company, while undoubtedly unequal, was nevertheless similarly formative for the Awadh regime as well.

It might be argued that, apart from Bengal, Awadh has already received a disproportionate amount of attention from scholars of the late-Mughal and early colonial periods. Indeed, William Dalrymple's observation (now more than a decade old) that for every book on Hyderabad a library had been written on Awadh's capital of Lucknow is probably no less true today, despite recent interest in state formation and political culture in the early modern Deccan and South India.³⁵ Yet its relative volume masks the narrow range of concerns that have characterized the bulk of scholarship on Awadh. Within this literature, two broad preoccupations can be discerned. The first is a prosaic concern with the broad outlines of the regime's political history, particularly its disaggregation from the Mughal court, and its later subordination to British imperial power. This historiographic project began shortly after the Company's military

³³ The literature on the Sepoy Rebellion is large but useful overviews include R. Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt, 1857-1858: A Study of Popular Resistance* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984) and the collected essays in B. Pati, *The 1857 Rebellion* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁴ Lawrence, *Essays*, 61.

³⁵ Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, xxxviii, cited in B.B. Cohen, *Kingship and Colonialism in India's Deccan: 1850-1948* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 10. For some recent accounts of state formation in the early modern Deccan and South India, see V.N. Rao, D.D. Shulman, and S. Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); S. Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions: Making Politics in Early Modern South India* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001); R.M. Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300-1761: Eight Indian Lives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); R.M. Eaton and P.B. Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India's Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014). For recent work on the Hyderabad state, see (in addition to Dalrymple's *White Mughals*) Cohen, *Kingship and Colonialism*; M. D. Faruqi, "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 5-43; and Beverly, *Hyderabad, British India, and the World*.

victories over Awadh in 1764/5. As they struggled in the 1760s and 1770s to understand the North Indian political milieu in which they were now the dominant power, Company administrators became keenly interested in tracing the origins and history of the Awadh dynasty, an agenda that drove many early English-language accounts as well as British patronage of Indian historians writing in Persian.³⁶ In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, colonial scholar-officials and British historians looked to re-examine the great controversies of Anglo-Awadh relations, most notably the tenure of Governor-General Warren Hastings (1773-85), Richard Wellesley's partial annexation of Awadh in 1801, and the Company's complete annexation of the province in 1856.³⁷ Following Indian independence, however, a broader range of approaches emerged. A.L. Srivastava, a student of historian Jadunath Sarkar, along with historians trained at Lucknow and Aligarh Universities, conducted detailed surveys of some of Awadh's most notable rulers.³⁸ More radically, in the 1970s and 1980s, as part of a far-reaching reappraisal of the eighteenth century in Indian history, a new generation of historians explored how North India's shifting socio-economic landscape shaped Mughal imperial decline, "regional

³⁶ For an example of the former, see the appendix to A. Dow, *The History of Hindostan from the Earliest Account of Time, to the Death of Akbar; Translated from the Persian of Mahumud Casim Ferishta of Delhi, With an Appendix, Containing the History of the Mogul Empire, from Its Decline in the Reign of Mahumud Shaw to the Present Times*. (London: Printed for T. Becket and P.A. de Hondt, 1768). For early examples of the latter in the Awadh context, see Murtaza Hussain Bilgrami, *Hadīqat-ul-aqālīm* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1879) [commissioned by Jonathan Scott, c. 1778-82] and Ghulam Ali Khan, *Imād-us-sa'adat* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1897) [commissioned by John Baillie, c. 1808].

³⁷ See, for example, J. Paton and B. Prasad (ed.), *The British Government and the Kingdom of Oudh, 1764-1835* (Allahabad: University of Allahabad, 1944) [c. 1835-36]; H.C. Irwin, *The Garden of India* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1880); C.C. Davies, *Warren Hastings and Oudh*, (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1939). For these episodes in the broader historical context of Britain's Indian empire, see also J. Mill and H. H Wilson (ed.), *The History of British India*, 10 Vol., (5th ed.) (London: J. Madden, 1858).

³⁸ A.L. Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-Daulah*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: [S.N. Sarkar], 1939-45) and *The First Two Nawabs of Awadh* (Agra: Agarwala, 1954); S. Ahmad, *Two Kings of Awadh: Muhammad Ali Shah and Amjad Ali Shah, 1837-1847* (Aligarh: P.C. Dwadash Shreni, 1971). For the intellectual legacy of Jadunath Sarkar and his students, see D. Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

centralization” in the successor states, and the Company’s early engagement with Awadh.³⁹ Others explored the Awadh court’s relationship with rural society and the increasing authority of the Company’s resident over local administration.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Indian Marxists debated British historians of empire over the role of European trade in driving the Company’s territorial annexations in Awadh.⁴¹

At the same time, apart from its political and diplomatic history, scholars have also engaged extensively with Awadh’s literary and cultural heritage. Following the mid-eighteenth century decline of Delhi, Agra, and other centers of patronage in Bengal and Bihar, poets, scholars, artists, and artisans throughout North India flocked to the courts of Faizabad and Lucknow, producing novel and vibrant idioms of poetry, painting, music, dance, and architecture, along with rich cultures of culinary and material consumption. One of the first to document Awadh’s cultural heritage in detail was the early twentieth century Urdu journalist, novelist, and historian, Abd-ul-halim Sharar. Sharar, in his compilation of articles *Hindustān meiñ mashriqī tamaddun kā ākhirī namūna* (often translated as “The last phase of an Oriental culture,” but perhaps more precisely as “a final glimpse/example of Eastern civilization”), set the prevailing tone for subsequent discussions of Awadh’s cultural history.⁴² Writing with equal parts nostalgia

³⁹ R.B. Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980) and M. Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ Particularly notable is M.H. Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals* (Riverdale, MD: The Riverdale Company, 1987), which builds upon earlier studies, namely P. Basu, *Oudh and the East India Company, 1785-1801* (Lucknow: Maxwell Co., 1943), and D. P Sinha, *British Relations with Oudh, 1801-1856: A Case Study* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1983).

⁴¹ P. J. Marshall, “Economic and Political Expansion: The Case of Oudh,” *Modern Asian Studies* 9, no. 4 (1975): 465–82; R. Mukherjee, “Trade and Empire in Awadh, 1765-1804,” *Past & Present*, no. 94 (1982): 85–102 and “Early British Imperialism in India: A Rejoinder,” *Past & Present*, no. 106 (1985): 169–73.

⁴² Abd-ul-halim Sharar and M.I. Chughta’i, ed., *Guzashta lakhna’ū: Hindustān meiñ mashriqī tamaddun kā ākhirī namūna* (Lahore: Sang-i Mil Publications, 2006); ed. and tr. by E.S. Harcourt and F. Husain as *Lucknow, the Last Phase of an Oriental Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1976).

and embarrassment, Sharar catalogued Lucknow's cultural achievements and celebrated its courtly refinement while echoing the charges of earlier Urdu literary critics and contemporary Muslim social reformers that the city's elite had succumbed to decadence and effeminacy by the mid-nineteenth century. While later writers would eschew some of Sharar's more caustic assertions, the dominant mode of writing Awadh's cultural history has nevertheless remained elegiac, and it has only been relatively recently that particular poetic genres associated with the Awadh court,⁴³ Lucknow's urban development and distinctive Anglo-Islamic architecture,⁴⁴ or the growth of a local Shi'i clerical establishment have received more serious consideration.⁴⁵

Thus, despite generating significant insight into its political and cultural history, the two dominant strands of Awadh historiography have left many topics unexplored. Salient among them is that of ideology and political thought. The most recent scholarship (now nearly thirty years old) has produced elegant accounts of the mechanisms by which the imperial governors of Awadh (known colloquially as "nawabs") wrested provincial sovereignty away from the Mughal emperors and asserted control over powerful local gentry groups. It has similarly elucidated how the nawabs gradually ceded administrative authority to the East India Company over the course of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet this literature has had relatively little to say

⁴³ C.M. Naim, "Transvestic Words? The Rekhti in Urdu," in *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays of C.M. Naim*. (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 42-66; C. Petievich, *Assembly of Rivals: Delhi, Lucknow, and the Urdu Ghazal* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992); C.M. Naim and C. Petievich, "Urdu in Lucknow/Lucknow in Urdu" in V. Graff, ed., *Lucknow: Memories of a City* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 165-80; C. Petievich, *When Men Speak as Women: Vocal Masquerade in Indo-Muslim Poetry* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007); and R. Vanita, *Gender, Sex, and the City: Urdu Rekhtī Poetry in India, 1780-1870* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁴⁴ R. Llewellyn-Jones, *A Fatal Friendship: The Nawabs, the British, and the City of Lucknow* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985); B. Tandan, *The Architecture of Lucknow and Oudh, 1722-1856: Its Evolution in an Aesthetic and Social Context* (Cambridge: Zophorus, 2008).

⁴⁵ J.R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shīsm in Iran and Iraq Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); J. Jones, *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); For a more recent survey of Awadh's cultural history, see M. Trivedi, *The Making of Awadh Culture* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2010).

about how the Awadh rulers (to say nothing of other members of the ruling family) understood the regime they had fashioned nor how it was being transformed through its engagement with the Company. Where this scholarship has explored questions of ideology, informed by Weberian sociology, it has focused primarily on the practical and symbolic means by which the regime legitimated itself, particularly vis-à-vis the durably transcendent authority of the Mughal imperial dynasty. Consequently, the Awadh nawabs are portrayed engaging in lavish patronage of artists, poets, and Shi'i clerics, first to bolster their tenuous claims to legitimacy against the Sunni Timurids, and later to take refuge from British officials in a world over which they could continue to exert control in culturally familiar ways.⁴⁶ This may be so, but it overlooks the fact that many of the pressing debates between the Awadh regime and the Company—the ones that so vexed Henry Lawrence, his contemporaries, and his predecessors—had less to do with questions of legitimacy per se than how the regime itself should be constituted and how claims to power and property were to be distributed among members of the ruling dynasty.

Like studies of kingship more generally, approaches emphasizing the Awadh nawabs' search for legitimacy similarly overlook the often contradictory roles played by other members of the ruling family in these and other debates. This is particularly true of the nawabs' powerful, chief consorts and widowed mothers, commonly referred to as the "Begums of Awadh." Certainly most observers, whether eighteenth-century Company officials or present-day historians, have not failed to notice the influence of these women throughout the history of the Awadh regime. Yet few attempts have been made to understand how these same women conceptualized the political milieus in which they exerted such power. While some have detailed

⁴⁶ Fisher, 1-5.

the lives of the most influential begums as a kind of “mild corrective” to the overwhelming attention paid to Awadh’s male rulers, they have not delved extensively into the larger familio-political thought-worlds inhabited by the begums.⁴⁷ And where the begums’ arguments in defense of their rights to various forms of power and property have been considered, such as the claims of Bahu Begum (d. 1815) to the treasure of her late husband Shuja-ud-daula (r. 1754-1775), they have often been dismissed out of hand, in ways that not only overlook the substance of the arguments themselves but also reproduce the same gendered critiques initially deployed against these women by colonial officials.⁴⁸ The views of marginalized royal siblings, disenfranchised eunuchs, and lower-ranking wives and concubines—whose arguments often rested upon distinct understandings of the relationship between particular households, the larger ruling family, and emergent notions of “the state”—have been similarly elided, despite the fact that the Company’s reluctant arbitration of the ruling dynasty’s “familial” disputes was a critical means by which its officials expanded its influence in Awadh.⁴⁹

As a result, with political thought and the conflicting views of the wider ruling family deemphasized, Awadh historiography remains curiously bifurcated. On the one hand, its political and diplomatic history remains the province of the nawabs, ministers selected by the Company,

⁴⁷ Here I follow Bonnie Smith’s notion of the mild corrective in women’s history, particularly as applied to Mughal historiography by R. Lal in *Domesticity and Power*, 8. For surveys of the begums of Awadh, see Tasadduq Hussain, *Begumāt-i awadh* (Lucknow: Kitab Nagar, 1956), and K. S Santha, *Begums of Awadh* (Varanasi: Bharati Prakashan, 1980). For attempts to situate the begums within Awadh’s religious and cultural worlds, see J.R.I. Cole, “Shiite Noblewomen and Religious Innovation in Awadh,” in V. Graff, *Lucknow: Memories of a City*, 83-90; and M.H. Fisher, “Women and the Feminine in the Court and Culture of Awadh,” in G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 489-511.

⁴⁸ For example, compare Henry Lawrence’s assessment in “The Kingdom of Oude,” *Essays*, 98-99, with a more recent statement by R.B. Barnett in “Embattled Begams: Women as Power Brokers in Early Modern India,” in Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, 524.

⁴⁹ This point is demonstrated convincingly in M.H. Fisher, “British Expansion in North India: The Role of the Resident in Awadh,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 18, no. 1 (1981): 69–82, and in *Indirect Rule in India*.

and British officials, a world characterized by specific contestations over revenue collection and the administration of justice, and occasionally punctuated by the illegitimate intrusions of meddling wives, mothers, and grandmothers. On the other, its cultural history celebrates a glittering if ever-contracting sphere of elite patronage in which artistic achievement and courtly refinement reached new heights, only to be corrupted by decadence and the ruling elite's increasingly effeminate sensibilities. Within this division between arenas of anodyne, public politics and vibrant domains of private, cultural consumption, there remains little room for understanding how Awadh's ruling family participated in the regime's broad-based political culture or how the conceptual language of politics constituted a creative and influential field in its own right. Consequently, we miss a significant opportunity for understanding how the state was reconceptualized in the wake of Mughal imperial decline; how this reconceptualization shaped political culture in the successor states; and how it defined the contours of indirect colonial rule in North India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The argument

This dissertation aims to break down the division between politics and culture in Awadh historiography by exploring multivalent, conceptual conversations between members of the Awadh ruling family and East India Company officials over the nature and substance of state and sovereignty in Awadh. In particular, it examines ruling family members' competing understandings of the relationship between their households, the dynasty, and "the state," as well as their respective claims to dynastic property and sovereign authority. In so doing, it argues that, over the course of Awadh's ninety-year engagement with the Company, evolving notions of

sovereignty as unitary, hereditary, and proprietary, and of “the state” as physically and conceptually distinct from the regime’s ruling households, continually remade the Awadh dynasty’s political culture, opened new avenues for the Company to extend its influence, and ultimately paved the way for British annexation in 1856. Furthermore, it contends that this far-reaching process of conceptual change was not driven solely by the ambitions of colonial administrators but rather was realized through both conversation and conflict with competing members of the ruling family.

Chapter outline

The argument is developed over five thematic chapters arranged in roughly chronological order. The first considers the first fifty years of household, family, and “state” formation under the nascent Awadh dynasty between 1722 and 1775. It begins with a survey of the late-Mughal empire’s conceptual vocabulary, noting that while the notion of an abstract state in opposition to the royal household had emerged in imperial discourse by the mid-eighteenth century, this distinction was blurred by the disintegration of the empire, as the dynasts of incipient successor states consolidated imperial offices within their own expanding households and appropriated imperial terminology for their own burgeoning patrimonial regimes. The chapter then details this process in Awadh, illustrating how successive provincial governors established *de facto* regional sovereignty by building local networks of kinship and household patronage. It illustrates, however, that, despite their successes, the Awadh nawabs’ sovereign and dynastic authority remained tenuous and ill-defined until 1765, when Nawab Shuja-ud-daula allied with the East India Company following a dramatic defeat by British forces and the

payment of a massive indemnity. Over the following decade, the nawab and British officials jointly reimagined local sovereignty as both the nawabs' hereditary and proprietary right and as a gift of the Company. The chapter closes by describing how, empowered by this revised view of sovereignty and the Company's military support, Shuja-ud-daula continued to consolidate the Awadh regime and its ruling dynasty around a tight cluster of interlocking households.

Chapter 2 explores how the redefinition of local sovereignty continued to reshape relations between the Awadh regime and the Company and among members of the Awadh ruling dynasty after Shuja-ud-daula's death. It does so in the context of succession events, which furnished occasions for mutually re-articulating the meaning and substance of local sovereignty, as well as providing opportunities for Company officials to assert greater practical control over the Awadh regime. The chapter details how, during episodes of political succession in 1775, 1797/8, and 1814, the Awadh nawabs and British administrators not only affirmed the hereditary and proprietary nature of local sovereignty, but increasingly reframed the nawabs as exclusive heads of their households, the ruling dynasty, and "the state." Despite the conceptual consensus, however, the chapter demonstrates that the two diverged radically on the practical means by which succession was to be determined, as the nawabs favored personal, testamentary designations and the Company predictable, legalistic forms of primogeniture. Eventually the Company's preference prevailed, as elder sons repeatedly leveraged British support against their fraternal rivals. The chapter concludes by showing that, although regularizing transfers of power, the conceptual consensus upon the nawabs as sovereign patriarchs and the institutionalization of primogeniture created new fissures within the dynasty by displacing the nawabs' widowed chief

consorts, who had hitherto served as informal regents and arbiters of succession, and by designating the nawabs as sole proprietors of dynastic property.

Chapter 3 takes up the chief consorts' responses to redefined notions of sovereignty, an expanding conceptual divide between "political" affairs of state and the dynasty's "domestic" matters, and the nawabs' attempts to assert exclusive claims to sovereign authority and dynastic property. It begins by elucidating how, prior to 1775, power and property was shared loosely between the nawabs and the chief consorts, who often personally financed the regime in exchange for tacit recognition of rights to maintain independent household estates and to manage dynastic succession. It then demonstrates how, as the nawabs and Company officials sought to enforce the former's increasingly exclusive claims, this legacy of household finance and dynastic management allowed the chief consorts to posit themselves as defenders of "the family," a concept they used to denote both the ruling dynasty and the pre-1775 political dispensation of interlocking yet quasi-autonomous households. The chapter then illustrates how, as notional divisions between ruling households, the dynasty and the state become increasingly entrenched in the nineteenth century, the chief consorts argued instead that they occupied distinct offices in both the ruling family and "the state." It closes by noting that although British officials routinely denied the substance of the consorts' evolving arguments, it nevertheless continued to rely upon them to legitimate disputed successions, in exchange for which the consorts' rights to personal property and household autonomy were guaranteed by the Company.

Chapter 4 explores in greater detail the formation of conceptual binaries between household and state. It contends that the division entered Anglo-Awadh discourse following the death of Shuja-ud-daula, as the Company aimed to disaggregate "state" and "household"

finances and personnel to gain greater control over the collection and disbursement of the regime's fiscal resources. Considering household management an essential component of the exclusive, patriarchal sovereignty mutually promulgated by the nawabs and the Company officials, the Awadh rulers resisted the practical bifurcation of their households. In the nineteenth century, however, they eagerly embraced the conceptual division between household and state as a means of bypassing British guarantees for widowed chief consorts, arguing that, as opposed to the "political" affairs of the state, the "domestic" matters of the dynasty were exempt from Company interference. The chapter concludes that while British officials refused to renege on the guarantees, the nawabs' challenges nevertheless institutionalized conceptual divisions between household, family, and state in Anglo-Awadh discourse and regularized the scramble for British guarantees in dynastic political culture.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by illustrating how these institutionalized conceptual divisions, coupled with starker notions of sovereignty and the expansion of Company guarantees, helped lead to the Company's annexation of Awadh in 1856. As Awadh's nineteenth-century rulers continued to pursue their exclusive sovereign prerogatives with regard to dynastic property, chief consorts and other members of the ruling family sought to turn lifetime guarantees into perpetual bequests for surviving household dependents. British officials rejected many of these bequests as usurpations of the nawabs' sovereign rights yet resolved to shield several large estates by creating permanent pensions financed by interest paid on Company debt and by offering legal protections to their beneficiaries. The chapter shows that the Awadh rulers, while initially opposing the trusts as abrogations of sovereignty, eventually appropriated the device themselves to provide for and protect current favorites from future rulers. British

administrators, however, soon grew alarmed at the volume of “trifling” legal entanglements precipitated by the pensions and at the rapid growth of interest payments to the funds’ beneficiaries. Motivated, then, by a concern for increasing jurisdictional confusion and an unfavorable balance of payments between the two states, British officials used the funds to portray the interests of the Awadh rulers and their households as not only distinct from, but also in stark opposition to, those of the dynasty and the state. The chapter concludes that by the 1850s this perception, in conjunction with broader accusations of administrative mismanagement, allowed the Company to maintain that Awadh’s rulers had failed to meet the sovereign responsibilities it had bestowed upon them in 1765, thereby laying much of the rhetorical groundwork for the British annexation of Awadh in 1856.

Chapter 1—Sovereignty, *sarkār* formation, and the *Shujā’ī* dispensation, c. 1680-1775

Introduction

Before state and sovereignty could be disaggregated from the Awadh dynasty’s ruling households and ultimately alienated to the East India Company, all three had to be created, conceptually and in practice. This chapter describes the practical and notional origins of the Awadh regime, its ruling family, and its claims to provincial sovereignty, focusing particularly on the dynasty’s appropriation of the late Mughal empire’s conceptual vocabulary, its tenuous claims to autonomy during the 1740s, and 1750s, and its formulation of hereditary, proprietary, provincial sovereignty in concert with Company officials after 1765. In so doing, the chapter builds upon the existing literature on state formation in Awadh by foregrounding the practical and conceptual roles played by households and an incipient ruling dynasty in the process of regional centralization.¹

Previous studies of imperial decentralization and the construction of the Awadh regime have focused largely on the ways in which its founders, Sa’adat Khan (r. 1722-39) and his son-in-law Safdar Jang (r. 1739-54), wrested *de facto* control of Awadh from away the Mughal court through administrative channels, describing in detail how they successfully augmented their provincial governorships (*ṣūbadārīs*) with bundles of local offices, particularly district-level commands (*faujdārīs*) and revenue farms (*ijāradārīs*).² Others have emphasized the parallel routes by which entrenched scribal families secured hereditary control of provincial revenue

¹ For rethinking Mughal imperial decline as a process of “regional centralization”, see M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam’s introduction to *The Mughal State, 1526-1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 46-68.

² R. B. Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), esp. pp. 23-34; M. Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 56-73, 204-212.

offices and records.³ Although these works have recognized in different way the importance of family politics to the construction of the Awadh regime and an at least notional relationship between “state” and family formation, they have not elucidated how a new ruling dynasty was delimited, how it was understood by its constituents, or how it related to the conceptual development of the “state” in Awadh.

Nor, for that matter, have they problematized the notion of Awadh dynasty’s claims to provincial sovereignty. Following the terminology of Indo-Persian chroniclers writing in the late eighteenth century, some scholars have accepted somewhat uncritically that, while they would not formally renounce Mughal suzerainty until 1819, Safdar Jang and his descendants nevertheless understood Awadh as being their *de facto* independent, “hereditary dominions” by the end of the 1740s.⁴ This may have been so but, as this chapter will attempt to make clear, the *articulation* of the ruling family’s provincial claims as specifically hereditary, proprietary, and territorially defined did not occur until the turbulent decade of the 1760s. More importantly, it will show that these claims were constructed in conversation with the East India Company, which was itself searching for the practical and theoretical foundations of its own territorial dominions throughout this period.⁵ As subsequent chapters will show, the Awadh ruling family’s collaboration with British officials in formulating a notion of hereditary sovereignty would have profound ramifications, defining not only the regime’s relationship with the Company but also

³ M. H. Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals* (Riverdale, MD: The Riverdale Company, 1987), 49-59.

⁴ For example, Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 16.

⁵ For which, see R. Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

framing contests over power and property relations within the ruling dynasty well into the nineteenth century.

To contextualize subsequent discussion of these issues, the present chapter traces the construction of a ruling family in Awadh and the parallel creation of hereditary provincial sovereignty, from the formation of marriage alliances in seventeenth-century Iran to the death of Nawab Shuja-ud-daula in 1775. Following an overview of the late Mughal empire's political vocabulary and its adoption by successor regimes and the Company, it begins by examining interrelated processes of household, family, and state formation during the governorships of Sa'adat Khan and Safdar Jang, attending particularly to their ambivalent relationship with the Awadh province and with the growing population of Iranian-Turcoman ("Mughal") kinsmen. It then considers the first half of Shuja-ud-daula's reign (1754-64), exploring the nawab's attempts to limit inclusion in the emergent ruling dynasty and to deny the claims of his Mughal kin to power and property. The chapter turns next to the aftermath of Shuja-ud-daula's defeat by the East India Company in 1764, contending that while subsequent treaties with the Company would provide a clear articulation of sovereignty over his "hereditary dominions," it would nonetheless obscure the source of that sovereign authority. This ambiguity would further exacerbate Shuja-ud-daula's already contentious relationship with the exiled Mughal emperor, Shah Alam, and, in turn, lead to provincial sovereignty being defined in increasingly absolute, if territorially circumscribed, terms. The chapter closes with a discussion of how this new understanding of provincial sovereignty as hereditary, territorial, and proprietary intersected with Shuja-ud-daula's efforts to bind the province to a tight cluster of interlocking households and a more narrowly defined ruling family in the decade before his death.

Late-Mughal political vocabulary and Company translation

Before delving into the particulars of state and family formation in eighteenth-century Awadh, it will be useful to introduce the key terms of late-Mughal political vocabulary that were used by contemporary Indo-Persian historians to conceptualize this process and that, through the interpretive efforts of European translators, underpinned the Awadh regime's subsequent conceptual exchanges with the Company.

a. *Sarkār*—Household and “state”

The most significant of these terms was the word “*sarkār*.”⁶ Throughout the century-long period covered by this dissertation, Company translators typically rendered the Indo-Persian term as an equivalent for “[the] state” and vice versa. Such a translation was, in a sense, both correct and highly misleading. Derived from the Persian words “*sar*” (head) and “*kār*” (work, task), the term originally connoted an individual superintendent or overseer. However, during the reign of the Timurids in Iran and Central Asia during the fifteenth century, the word seems to have acquired additional meanings, namely a territorial division or administrative unit, the individual tasked with overseeing that unit, and/or the household or group of administrators subordinate to that individual. It was this package of meanings that arrived in India with the Timurid conquerer

⁶ Much of this section draws on the author's “Bringing the *Sarkār* back in: Translating patrimonialism and the state in early modern and early colonial India,” in J. Brooke, J. Strauss, and G. Anderson, eds., *Histories and Cultures of Statehood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [Forthcoming]).

Babur (1526-1530), who used the term accordingly in his memoirs and helped to instantiate it in the nascent Mughal empire's Indo-Persian administrative and historiographic usage.⁷

The meaning of *sarkār*, however, did not remain static; like the Timurid regime in India, the term changed considerably during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Setting aside its relatively stable connotations as a district or territorial division, its use for a household or administrative collectivity underwent a number of alterations. Firstly, by the late sixteenth century, the term ceased to be used for any agglomeration of individuals other than a large, elite household and its military and administrative extensions. Additionally, while the Mughal state in actuality remained a constellation of imperial and other elite households, the word itself became increasingly restricted in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century dynastic historiography to the households of the emperors, their politically mature sons and grandsons, and their influential mothers, wives, and daughters.⁸ Within this group of households glossed with the word “*sarkār*,” the imperial household was further distinguished with modifiers like “noble” (*khāṣṣa*, *sharīfa*) or “sublime” (*wālā*), or rendered simply as “[the] *sarkār*.”⁹ This pattern of usage in imperial

⁷ Babur and W.M. Thackston, ed., *Baburnama: Chaghatay Turkish text with Abdul-Rahim Khankhanan's Persian Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1993): 62-63, 480-81, 542-43, 776-77. The term is used in both the Chaghta'i original and the Persian translation.

⁸ Compare the sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century usage in the *Bāburnāma* and Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, Vols. I and II, ed. by Abd-ur-rahim (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1876-77), and *Ā'in-i akbarī*, ed. by S.A. Khan (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy, 2005); Gulbadan Banu Begum, *Humāyūn-nāma*, ed. and tr. by A Beveridge as *The History of Humayun (Humayun-nama)* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1900) and Jahangir, *Tūzūk-i jahāngīrī*, ed. by S.A. Khan (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1914) with that of later works by Mutamad Khan, *Iqbāl-nāma*, ed. by Abd-ul-hayy and Ahmad Ali (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1865); Muhammad Salih Kamboh, *Amal-i ṣālīh al-mausūm bi-shāhjahān-nāma*, Vols. I and II, ed. by G. Yazdani and V. Qureishi (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqi Adab, 1967-72); Abd-ul-hamid Lahori, *Bādshāhnāma*, Vols. I and II, ed. by Kabir-ud-din Ahmad and Abd-ur-rahim (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1867-8); Muhammad Saqi Mustaid Khan, *Mā'aṣir-i ālamgīrī*, ed. by Agha Ahmad Ali (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1871); Muhammad Kazim, *Ālamgīrnama*, ed. by Khadim Hussain and Abd-ul-hayy (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1868); Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab-ul-lubab*, Vols. I and II, ed. by Kabir-ud-din Ahmad (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1869-74); and Muhammad Hadi Kamwar Khan, *Tazkirat-us-salāṭīn-i chaghtā'ī*, ed. by M. Alam (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1980).

⁹ Persian does not have a definite article. Without an indefinite article marker and/or a modifier, “*sarkār*” would be read with an implied “the.”

dynastic histories, coupled as it was with vivid descriptions of increasingly formalized court ceremony and the illuminationist imagery of imperial kingship, strongly associated the person of the emperor with the *sarkār*.¹⁰ At the same time, by removing explicit reference to the emperor himself, the term was simultaneously depersonalized, allowing it to serve as a metonym for an emergent notion of “the state” as a political abstraction and an autonomous, institutionally continuous governing body. Such meanings coincided in the late-seventeenth century with the expansion of bureaucratizing documentary regimes and their attendant scribal personnel, and were similarly bolstered by the term’s deployment in administrative manuals describing the (imperial) *sarkār*’s fiscal and proprietary claims and in court chronicles narrating its financial disbursements and appropriations of property throughout its dominions.¹¹

Yet despite its narrowing use, the term *sarkār* remained beset by a number of tensions. Firstly, despite being framed in dynastic histories and administrative documents as “the *sarkār*,” the imperial household remained only one of many similar bodies, and sub-imperial and other aristocratic households continued to serve as the linchpins of the Mughal imperial state and its successors.¹² Indeed, as Muzaffar Alam and Munis Faruqi have shown (and as we will see

¹⁰ See J.F. Richards, “The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir,” in Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*. For a recent study of evolving idioms of imperial kingship, see A. Afzar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

¹¹ See, for example, Nand Ram, *Siyāqnāma* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1879) and *Document Forms for Official Orders of Appointment in the Mughal Empire*, tr. and ed. by J. Richards (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1986).

¹² M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, rev. ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 161-62. For examples of relevant document collections, see: S.A.I Tirmizi, *Edicts from the Mughal Harem* (New Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1979); M.Z.A. Shakeb, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Batala Collection of Mughal Documents, 1527-1757 AD* (London: The British Library, 1990); Andhra Pradesh Archives et al., *Mughal Documents: Catalogue of Aurangzeb’s Reign* (Hyderabad: State Archives, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, 1980-2007), 6 Vols. For Mughal documentary regimes, see M. Mohiuddin, *The Chancellery and Persian Epistolography under the Mughals, from Bābur to Shāh Jahān, 1526-1658; a Study on Inshā’, Dār Al-Inshā’, and Munshīs Based on Original Documents*, (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1971). For imperial scribes, see M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, “The Making of a Munshi,” in *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) and R. Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

below), the households of provincial governors (*ṣūbadārs*, *nāẓims*) served as the epicenters of regional state formation in the early decades of the eighteenth century.¹³ More importantly, although the word *sarkār* was increasingly used in an abstract sense to describe an extra- or supra-household governmental institution, the term remained only loosely differentiated from the person and household of the emperor.

Discursive tensions notwithstanding, as the successor regimes gained *de facto* autonomy from the imperial *sarkār*, regional rulers like the nawabs of Awadh reproduced in the eighteenth century the same patterns of usage as their seventeenth-century Mughal predecessors. Framing their particular households as “the sarkār” within their domains and as a metonym for their own burgeoning polities, they too belied the fact that, like the Mughal “state,” their regimes were also composed of overlapping networks of households.¹⁴ The recycling of imperial terminology similarly influenced the East India Company’s evolving Indo-Persian conceptual lexicon. From their interactions with the establishments of Mughal officials in Surat and elsewhere, Company officials had become aware of the term and had used it without translation in internal correspondence since the early seventeenth century.¹⁵ Controversy in Britain, however, occasioned by the Company’s rapid territorial expansion in the mid-eighteenth century, resulted in a series of pamphlet wars contesting the actions of Company officials in India. Needing to render the Company’s internal dialogues more legible to the British public, pamphleteers often

¹³ Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 56-58; M.D. Faruqi, “At Empire’s End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 5–43, and *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 309-26.

¹⁴ For examples of such usage throughout, see Imperial Record Department, *Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Being Letters, Referring Mainly to Affairs in Bengal, Which Passed between Some of the Company’s Servants and Indian Rulers and Notables*, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1911), Vol. I, 1759-67.

¹⁵ W. Foster, *The English Factories in India, 1618-1621: A Calendar of Documents in the India Office, British Museum and Public Record Office* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 200, cited in Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility*, 161n.

included glossaries that typically construed “*sarkār*” as a synonym for “government” or “the state,” particularly when the term referred to the Company’s diplomatic engagements with successor regimes in Bengal, Arcot, and Awadh.¹⁶ This equivalence was further solidified in pedagogical materials designed to instruct British officials in Indo-Persian usage.¹⁷

At the same time, by the 1760s, the Company had adopted the term to refer to itself in official Indo-Persian discourse. The Company’s Persian-language archive is too fragmentary to say with certainty, but it appears that the Company-state’s Indian allies and local officials had begun to describe it as a *sarkār* shortly after the battle of Plassey in 1757, if not earlier.¹⁸ British administrators may have been more tentative: Evidence for deliberate usage on the part of Company officials does not appear before the mid-1760s, a period when, as will be illustrated below, the term may have bolstered the Company’s attempts to construe itself as part of a confederacy of *de facto* independent regional regimes nominally subordinate to the emperor.¹⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century, however, any previous hesitation had disappeared, as the Company routinely referred to itself in its vernacular correspondence with the phrase “*sarkār-i kampanī angrēz bahādur*,” a construction British translators took as direct equivalent to “[the government of] the Hon’ble [English] Company.”

¹⁶ See, for example, R. Cambridge, *An Account of the War in India, Between the English and French, on the Coast of Coromandel, from the year 1750 to the year 1760* (London, 1761), 14 and H. Vansittart, *A Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal, from the year 1760 to the year 1764, during the Government of Mr. Henry Vansittart* (London, 1766), xxix.

¹⁷ See, for example, translations of the term in various passages in F. Balfour, *Insha-yi Harkaran, or The Forms of Herkern Corrected from a Variety of Manuscripts, Supplied with the Distinguishing Marks of Construction, and Translated into English: with an Index of Arabic Words Explained, and Arranged under their Proper Roots* (Calcutta, 1781) and F. Gladwin, *The Persian Moonshee* (Calcutta: Chronicle Press, 1795).

¹⁸ For examples, see National Library of Wales, Robert Clive Papers, Original Correspondence, Letters in Persian, CR 9/1-30, especially letters from Jagat Seth Mahtab Rai to Clive.

¹⁹ For examples of Company usage in the mid-1760s, see H. Vansittart, *A Letter to the Proprietors of East-India Stock, from Mr. Henry Vansittart, Occasioned by a Late Anonymous Pamphlet, and by the East-India Observer*, No. VI (London, 1767), 91, and the original Persian language of the Company’s treaty with Shuja-ud-daula, British Library [BL], Richard Johnson Papers, OMS I.O. Islamic 4753/b, fols. 20a-22a.

Yet attempts to demonstrate an institutional commensurability between the Company-state and the *sarkārs* of the Mughal successor regimes masked profound differences in how the state was conceptualized in Britain and late-Mughal North India. Whereas British political discourse had posited since the seventeenth century an increasingly stark division, and frequently hostile opposition, between royal households and “the state,” the Mughal *sarkār* had been only ambiguously differentiated in its capacity as a household and a larger institutional abstraction.²⁰ Perhaps as a result of the successors regime’s discursive appropriation of *sarkār* and its political connotations, imperial chroniclers of the mid-to-late eighteenth century increasingly used the term “*salṭanat*” (kingship, dominion) to describe the Mughal empire in the abstract. Tellingly, these writers expressed considerable anxiety about the pernicious influence of “household” favorites upon imperial administration, suggesting the emergence of a more pronounced notional division between the imperial household and “the state.”²¹ Yet it is unclear whether an increasingly abstract notion of the empire also shaped ideas of the state in the successor regimes,

²⁰ For the emergence of the concept of “the state” in sixteenth-century continental discourse and, later, in the work of Thomas Hobbes, see Q. Skinner, “From the State of Princes to the Person of the State” and “Hobbes and the Purely Artificial Person of the State,” in *Visions of Politics, Vol. II: Renaissance Virtues* and *Vol. III: Hobbes and Civil Science*. For the growth of the post-1688 parliamentary state and the institution of the treasury in opposition to the monarchy and royal household, see, in particular, J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (New York: Knopf, 1989). For a long-term examination of the relationship between the state and royal households in Britain, see T. Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Chapter 4. For a useful, contemporary English definition of the state, see “State” in Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed.), Vol. II, (Dublin, 1775), 1110-1111.

²¹ See, for example, the observation of *munshi* Harcharan Das, c. 1787, that, during the reign of emperor Ahmad Shah (r. 1748-54), “Udham Ba’i, the mother (*wālidā*) of [the emperor] gained supremacy over the *salṭanat* (*mukhtār-i salṭanat gardīda*), and made [household] eunuch Jāwīd Khan her deputy (*nā’ib-i salṭanat gardānīdand*) ... Jāwīd Khan gained admittance and supremacy in all the affairs of the *salṭanat* (*dar hama amūr-i salṭanat madkhal wa mukhtār gardīd*)... They say from the time of Emperor Timur [d. 1405], no eunuch ever had such influence (*dakhīl*) in the affairs of the *salṭanat* and from Jāwīd Khan’s interference and supremacy, a great disorder arose in the *salṭanat* (*fitna wa fasād-i ‘azīm dar salṭanat paidā shud*).” British Library [BL], Oriental Manuscript [OMS] Or. 1732, *Chahār gulzār-i shujā’ ī*, ff. 19b-20a. For a thoughtful analysis of institutional loyalties among the empire’s service and scribal elite, see K. Chatterjee, “History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century Eastern India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1998): 913–48. For a comparative discussion of tensions between dynastic households and “state” administrations, see J.F.J. Duindam, *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), esp. pp. 168-200.

which, as we shall see, were formed through the patrimonialization and consolidation of imperial offices within the *sarkārs* of the empire's erstwhile provincial governors.

b. *Riyāsat*—Sovereignty and “the government”

A related trajectory of semantic change and translation can be traced for the Arabic term “*riyāsat*.” A derivation from “*rā's*” (head), *riyāsat* literally connotes “headmanship” or the position of being “*ra'īs*” (“headman,” “chief”); as such, it was often used to describe the position of a village or town's principal official, particularly in medieval Iran and Iraq.²² However, like the term “*ḥukūmat*” (i.e., the office of “*ḥākim*,” a governor or the one who gives commands), *riyāsat* in medieval and early modern Persianate discourse could also be used abstractly to describe “governance” in general.²³ As the didactic poet Sa'adi mused: “A ruler who cannot discipline his enemy/cannot guide the hand of his enemy” (*ra'īsī ki dushman siyāsat nakard/ham az dast-i dushman riyāsat nakard*).²⁴ It was in this sense that the term was principally used during the heyday of the Mughal empire: The emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), for instance, often lectured his sons about the proper behaviors conducive to *riyāsat*.²⁵

By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the word appears to have taken on additional and specific connotations to describe forms of sub-imperial, locally sovereign authority,

²² Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

²⁴ *Būstān, bāb-i haftum*, cited in the entry for “*riyāsat*” in the prodigious Indo-Persian lexicon of Lala Tekchand ‘Bahar,’ *Bahār-i ‘ajam: farhang-i lughāt tarkībāt, kināyat wa amṣāl-i fārsī*, ed. by K. Dizfuliyan (Tehran: Talayah, 1380/2001-2), Vol. II, 1133.

²⁵ Aurangzeb Alamgir, *Ruqa ‘āt-i ‘ālamgīr* (Kanpur: Matba-i Nizami, 1273/1856-7), 8 and 17 (Nos. 20 and 54).

particularly those held by the dynasts of regional successor regimes.²⁶ As Shuja-ud-daula told Governor-General Hastings shortly before his death in 1775, from moment he had allied with the Company until the present, “the English chiefs have in every regard been the cause of my prosperity and the stability of my sovereign authority (*bi-har šūrat falāḥ wa bihtarī wa qiyām-i riyāsat-i īn jānab az sabab-i sardārān-i angrēz ast*).”²⁷ Emphasizing the word’s sense of “chieftaincy,” this construction of *riyāsat* explicitly juxtaposed local authority against the universal sovereignty implied by the term most frequently associated with Mughal imperium, i.e., *salṭanat*, thus both preserving the useful fiction of Mughal suzerainty and acknowledging the reality of regional autonomy. For clan-based confederacies like those of the Marathas and Rohilla Afghans, *riyāsat* could also convey the sense of territorially defined ethno-polity.²⁸ But, as *sarkār* did for the Company, the word also provided a sense of commensurability with imperial governorships-turned-satrapies like those in Awadh. For example, in a letter forwarded by the Maratha ambassador (*wakīl*) at the court of Asaf-ud-daula (r. 1775-1797), the author urged the formation an Awadh-Maratha alliance against the Company, since “the interference of the English in the imperial court and also in every *riyāsat* is in no way pleasing (*dakhl-i angrēzān*

²⁶ This sense does not seem to have been exclusive to the rulers of the successor states. For the use of the term to convey an admixture of a local chieftaincy and a proprietary estate, see G.C. Kozłowski, *Muslim Endowments and Society in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 47-49. I am grateful to Elizabeth Lhost for sharing this reference with me.

²⁷ National Archives of India [NAI], Foreign Department-Persian Branch [FDPr], Copies of Letters Received [CR], Vol. 3 (1775), No. 26.

²⁸ For the formation of such ethno-political “patrias” and associated regional patriotisms in the eighteenth century, see C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. pp. 21-30.

dar pīshgāh-i ḥuẓūr-i ḥaẓrat-i ẓill subhānī wa nīz dar tamāmī riyāsat tawajjuhī khūshnumā nīst).”²⁹

Such usage suggests that, like *sarkār* and *salṭanat*, *riyāsat* was also taking on institutional connotations as well, meaning as much “[the] government” as “governance” and sovereign authority. Yet, like *sarkār* too, these meanings and semantic relationships remained overlapping and only partially differentiated. The extent the government and sovereignty could be separated from each other, or from the person of the sovereign, was quite vague. Put differently, it remained uncertain whether *riyāsat* could exist apart from the *raʿīs*. For their part, in their correspondence with the Awadh ruling family, Company officials did occasionally use the term in its more abstract senses, alluding to the convention of succession by being seated on the “throne of sovereignty” (*masnad-i riyāsat*) or adverting to “principles of governance” (*āʿīn-i riyāsat*).³⁰ As with *sarkār*, however, when referring to the Company itself, British translators used the word as an equivalent for “state” or “government” and, by the turn of the nineteenth century, this was the primary meaning given to the term in Anglo-Awadh discourse, particularly

²⁹ Maharashtra State Archives [MSA], Parasnis Daftar, Rumlal 16: *Bi-maujab-i yād-i gōbind rāʾō masūda-yi khatt-i mīrzā amānī wa saʿādat ʿalī khān wa mukhtār-ud-daula marqūm gharra ṣafar-ul-muẓaffar 1195 [sic?] hijrī*. A draft of a letter contained in a collection of miscellaneous correspondence addressed to the Maratha peshwas and their ministers and envoys, the exact provenance of this document is unclear. The date suggests the letter, purporting to be from Mirza Amani (Asaf-ud-daula), his brother Saʿadat Ali Khan, and his minister Mukhtar-ud-daula and committed to the memory to *wakīl* Gobind Rao, is spurious: In 1195 AH (1781), Saʿadat Ali Khan was living in exile in Benares and Mukhtar-ud-daula had been dead for five years, having been assassinated in May 1776 (see Chapter 2). Moreover, even if the letter had been composed in 1190 AH (i.e., Mar. 1776, the numerals for 0 and 5 being easily confused in handwritten Perso-Arabic script), it is difficult to imagine circumstances in which the men would have jointly proposed an anti-British alliance. Nevertheless, whether spurious or not, the letter’s use of the term *riyāsat* is still illustrative of broader patterns. For a description of materials in the Parasnis Daftar, see S.P. Desai, et al., *The Handbook of the Bombay Archives* (Bombay: Dept. of Archives, Government of Maharashtra, 1978), 121-22.

³⁰ See, for examples, the letters of Resident John Bristow in NAI, FDP, CR Vol. 5 (1775-77), No. 5 and Original Letter Received (OR) 35, 13 May 1783.

when discussing Awadh’s “public business” or its “affairs of state” (*amūr-i riyāsat*).³¹ Moreover, as we shall see, despite the tenacious efforts of the Awadh nawabs to claim *riyāsat* as an exclusive, proprietary, and hereditary right, by the mid-nineteenth century, the term, like *sarkār*, was increasingly detached from the hereditary *ra’īs* and his larger family and construed with their territories instead (e.g., *sarkār-i awadh*, *riyāsat-i awadh*).³²

c. *Khāndān*—“Family,” dynasty

Illustrating conceptual transformation and translational dissonance for the term *khāndān* is far more difficult. Linked etymologically to the Persian word for “house” (*khāna*), the word was, unsurprisingly, in frequent and everyday use. As a result, where eighteenth-century lexicographers frequently gave *sarkār* and *riyāsat* their own entries in dictionaries of Indo-Persian usage, *khāndān* was usually considered too quotidian to merit inclusion. If it was defined at all, it was either designated simply as “well-known” (*ma’arūf*) or glossed circularly with chains of synonyms, such as *khānawāda*, *khwīshāwand*, *dūda*, *dūdmān*, *tabār*, *qabīla*, etc. However, by compiling and comparing the entries from these dictionaries and juxtaposing them

³¹ For example, writing to the Company’s numerous Indian clients on the eve of Third Anglo-Mysore War (1790-92), Governor-General Charles Cornwallis explained that, because Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, had attacked the Raja of Travancore, “one of the well-wishers of the Company *sarkār*” (*yakī az khairkhwāhān-i sarkār-i kampanī angrēz bahādur*), he and the Company would defend the raja, his protection being by treaty “obligatory upon this government (*zīmmat bar himmat-i īn riyāsat*).” FDPr, Copies of Letters Issued [CI], Vol. 21, No. 41.

³² For examples, see Qasim Ali Nishapuri, and Shah Abd-us-salam, (ed.), *Tārīkh-i shāhīya-yi nīshāpūrīya* (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, 1998) [1842], 2, 99; Noor Microfilm Centre-Delhi, MS 50/3 (from Aligarh Muslim University, Persian MS *Tārīkh* 60), Lal-ji, *Mirāt-ul-auzā* [c. 1850-55], fol. 7a; BL, OMS Or. 6632, Jai Gopal ‘Saqib,’ *Zubdat-ul-kawā’if* [c. 1870], fol. 15b.

against the word's use elsewhere in the Indo-Persian corpus, a fuller spectrum of meaning becomes apparent.³³

From Arabic-Persian and Indo-Persian lexicons, three distinct meanings of *khāndān* can be discerned: 1.) “a storied [dynastic] lineage” (*silsila-yi mashhūr*); 2.) a more expansive kin group descended from a common ancestor; and 3.) a household and its members, a householder's “wife, sons, and other dependents” (*zan wa farzandān wa dīgar tawāba*). From a survey of eighteenth-century dynastic histories, correspondence, and intelligence reports, it is clear that each of these meanings was in use, whether the word was used to describe the dynastic lineages of the Mughal emperors (*khāndān-i tīmūrīya*) or the Awadh nawabs (*khāndān-i manṣūrīya*), the kin groups of imperial and local elites, or the dependents of particular noblemen. In this regard, following from this particular set of meanings, it is not surprising that British officials in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries translated *khāndān* almost exclusively as “family,” since the English word could encompass all of these meanings as well.³⁴

Yet, as several modern scholars have pointed out, the loose equivalence between these terms did not mean that British and Indo-Muslim notions of consanguinity, kinship, and

³³ For this section, I have drawn on the following seventeenth-, eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century Indo-Persian lexicons and Arabic-Persian dictionaries: Abd-ur-rashid Tattavi, *Muntakhab-ul-lughāt* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1877) and *Farhang-i rashīdī*, ed. by Abu Tahir Zulfiqar Ali Murshidabadi and Aziz-ur-rahman (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal 1875) 2 Vols.; Muhammad Hussain Tabrizi ‘Burhan,’ *Burhān qāṭi* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1888), 2 Vols.; Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad Rampuri and Siraj-ud-din Khan ‘Arzu,’ in *Ghiyāṣ-ul-lughāt ma‘a chirāgh-i hidāyat* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1900); and Lala Tekchand ‘Bahar,’ *Bahār-i ‘ajam*. For recent work on Persian in India and Indo-Persian lexicography, see M. Alam, “Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,” in S.I. Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 131-89; R. Kinra, “Make it Fresh: Time, Tradition, and Newness in Early Modern Indo-Persian Literary Culture,” in A. Murphy, ed., *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011); W. Hakala, “Diction and Dictionaries: Language, Literature, and Learning in Persianate South Asia” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2010), and A.D. Dudney, “A Desire for Meaning: Khān-I Ārzū’s Philology and the Place of India in the Eighteenth-Century Persianate World” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2013).

³⁴ Compare, for instance, these meanings with the entry for “family” found in Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol. I: “1. Those that live in the same house; household. 2. Those that descend from one common progenitor; a race; a tribe; a generation.”

familiarity were commensurate.³⁵ As the following chapter will show, successions in Awadh were often complicated by cultural differences over adoption, heirship, and the order of succession. More importantly, as the dissertation will show elsewhere, the meaning “family” proved to be elastic and highly “manageable.”³⁶ In the formulations of competing members of the Awadh dynasty, *khāndān*, in addition to the connotations enumerated above, could also stand for an established political dispensation, an expansive “domestic” sphere, or a more amorphous association of co-residential individuals. Of the concepts debated among members of Awadh’s ruling dynasty and with the East India Company, *khāndān* would be one of the most contentious.

Sarkār and khāndān formation in Iran and India, c.1680-1739

Although questions of family would become increasingly complex over the course of Awadh’s engagement with the Company, they were hardly straightforward at the time of the dynasty’s founding, as processes of family and state formation soon became inextricably linked. The founder of the Awadh regime, Mir Muhammad Amin, was born in Nishapur, Khurasan around 1680 to a family of reputable *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad).³⁷ Originally from Iraq, Mir Muhammad Amin’s paternal ancestors had settled in Khurasan in the early sixteenth century after Shah Isma’il Safavi (r. 1501-24) granted his great, great grandfather,

³⁵ For discussions of Persian kinship and familial terminology, see R. Lal, *Domesticity and Power*, 105-111, and Vatak, “‘Family’ as a Contested Concept in Early-Nineteenth Century Madras,” in Chatterjee, *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 160-9, 167-71. It should be noted, however, that, in considering the multiple meanings of Persian terms in the early modern and early colonial periods, these works rely primarily on late-nineteenth century English-Persian dictionaries, as well as the monumental *Lughatnāma-yi dihhudā* of twentieth-century Iranian nationalist Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, rather than more contemporary Indo-Persian lexicons.

³⁶ Here I follow Albert Cohen and John Comaroff’s conception of “the management of meaning,” as applied by Sylvia Vatak to disputes among the ruling family of Arcot: S. Vatak, “‘Family’ as a Contested Concept,” in Chatterjee, *Unfamiliar Relations*.

³⁷ A. L. Srivastava, *The First Two Nawabs of Awadh* (Shiva Lal Agarwala & Co., 1954), 2.

the position of *qāzī-ul-quzāt*, or chief jurispudent.³⁸ By the early seventeenth century, the family had begun to intermarry with local Turcoman clans. Many of these clans had been relocated from Tabriz to Khurasan by Shah Abbas I (r. 1588-1629), and some traced their lineage to the Qara Qoyunlu (“Black Sheep”), the Turcoman tribal confederacy that had once vied with the Aq Qoyunlu (“White Sheep”) and the Timurids for control of Iran.³⁹

In later legend, this pattern of intermarriage would be traced to an episode in which Shah Abbas had been attacked by a lion during a hunting expedition.⁴⁰ Serving in the party’s vanguard, Mir Muhammad Yusuf, Mir Muhammad Amin’s uncle, rushed to the shah’s aid and dispatched the lion. Although Shah Abbas offered Mir Muhammad Yusuf the position of *wazīr* (principal advisor to the emperor), the *sayyid* demurred, requesting instead that the shah arrange a marriage between his brother, Mir Muhammad Nasir, and the family of the current *wazīr*, Reza Quli Beg. The shah and the *wazīr* both agreed, although the latter stipulated he would give his daughter to Mir Muhammad Nasir on the condition that any daughters born of that or future unions would be married to men of his tribe. The brothers accepted and Mir Muhammad Nasir married the daughter of Reza Quli Beg, who bore him two children: a daughter and Mir Muhammad Amin. Whatever the truth of this much later account, from at least the early seventeenth century until the mid-eighteenth, Mir Muhammad Nasir’s offspring did practice

³⁸ Kamal-ud-din Haidar, *Tawārikh-i awadh* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1879), 19.

³⁹ Ibid., and Ghulam Ali Khan, *Imād-us-sa’adat* (Kanpur: Nawal Kishore, 1897), 8-10. For a critical study of Turcoman confederations in fifteenth-century Iran, see J.E. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ *Tawārikh-i awadh*, 19.

cross-cousin marriage, with his male descendants typically marrying *sayyid* women in patrilineal branches of the family and his female descendants marrying Turcoman men.⁴¹

Ironically, despite the attention later dynastic chroniclers would give to tracing intermarriage within and between branches of the Awadh royal family, little is known of Mir Muhammad Amin's own marriages, both in Iran and in India. This was, however, perhaps a deliberate omission. Although unsubstantiated by earlier works, mid-nineteenth century accounts suggest that Mir Muhammad Amin and his elder brother, Mir Muhammad Baqir, had both married cousins in Nishapur and that Mir Muhammad Amin may have left his wife in Iran when he emigrated to India in 1708/9.⁴² Mir Muhammad Baqir married, perhaps for the second time, while serving the *nāẓim* (provincial governor) of Bengal shortly after his arrival in India.⁴³ Mir Muhammad Amin, however, only married in 1713, when his appointment as commander of the *wālā shāhīs* (the imperial bodyguard) signaled his rising status among the Mughal elite.⁴⁴ Following the appointment, Mir Muhammad Amin contracted a series of instrumental marriages to gain influence among the imperial nobility, becoming, in the words of one chronicler, “possessed of name and voice” (*ṣāhib-i nām wa awāz*).⁴⁵ After playing an important role in the elevation of Emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-48), Mir Muhammad Amin (now titled Sa'adat Khan) was promoted rapidly through the Mughal ranks, becoming first the *faujdar* of Hindaun

⁴¹ *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 9-10 and 30; see also, M.H. Fisher, “Political Marriage Alliances at the Shi'i Court of Awadh,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, no. 4 (1983): 593–616.

⁴² *Tawārikh-i awadh*, 19-20.

⁴³ *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 5.

⁴⁴ Srivastava, *First Two Nawabs of Awadh*, 8-10.

⁴⁵ Abu Talib Khan, *Tafẓīḥ al-ghāfilīn, waqā'ī-i zamān-i nawwāb aṣaf-ud-daula*, ed. by Abid Reza Bedar (Rampur: Institute of Oriental Studies, 1965), 8.

and Bayana in 1719, then the *ṣūbadār* of Akbarabad (Agra) in 1720, and finally the *ṣūbadār* of Awadh in 1722.⁴⁶

Although he used his new marriage unions to advance within the imperial elite, Sa'adat Khan made little use of his kinsmen, either in India or in Iran. His administrative officers and military forces were primarily recruited from among Indian Muslim and Hindu groups,⁴⁷ and, as Muzaffar Alam suggests, Sa'adat Khan was able to cement his control of Awadh in part by insulating himself from the kinds of fractious familial conflicts that undermined larger and more well-established families within the Mughal elite.⁴⁸ He made one notable exception when, shortly after his appointment to the Awadh *ṣūbadārī*, he summoned his sororal nephew (*khwāharzāda*), Mirza Muqim, to marry his eldest daughter, Sadr-un-nissa Begum.⁴⁹ Yet aside from Mirza Muqim (who later succeeded him as the Nawab Safdar Jang), Sa'adat Khan seems to have taken little interest in inviting other relatives from Iran, leaving his four younger daughters unmarried at the time of his death.⁵⁰

He showed a similar disinclination towards establishing permanent residences for his *sarkār* in the province. Such a disinterest reflected the still indeterminate nature of Sa'adat Khan's authority in Awadh, as well as the scope of his further political ambitions. As *ṣūbadār* of Awadh and an influential imperial noble, Sa'adat Khan spent the vast majority of his last seventeen years on the move and between two worlds. In Awadh, he moved about the province ceaselessly, farming revenue for *jāgīrdārs* living outside Awadh, assuming various *faujdārīs*, and

⁴⁶ Srivastava, 10-20.

⁴⁷ Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, 49-59.

⁴⁸ Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 311.

⁴⁹ Srivastava, *First Two Nawabs of Awadh*, 86-87.

⁵⁰ *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 30.

conciliating (or chastising) restive *zamīndārs* (local kings and rural chieftains).⁵¹ At the same time, he also spent much of his time maneuvering at the imperial court in Delhi, trying (and failing) to secure additional *ṣūbadārī* appointments for the neighboring provinces of Akbarabad (Agra) and Malwa.⁵² As a result, Sa’adat Khan and the members of his household—like generations of Mughal nobles before them—spent much of their time in mobile military encampments. When the nawab did occupy sedentary structures, these were either mud fortresses (much like those maintained by his *zamīndār* adversaries), or urban mansions held on lease or at the owner’s discretion, such as the *ḥavēlī* of Dara Shukoh in Delhi/Shahjahanabad or the Panjmaḥalla-Machhi Bhavan complex rented from the Shaikhzadas in Lucknow.⁵³

After Sa’adat Khan’s death in 1739, the Awadh regime remained oriented towards Delhi politics throughout the reign of Safdar Jang (r. 1739-54), particularly during the latter’s tenure as *wazīr* from 1748 to 1753. Unlike his father-in-law, however, Safdar Jang took a much greater interest in developing an extended kin network in Awadh. Indeed, it was during this period that the regime assumed a far more consciously “Iranian” character. This was due, in part, to circumstance. Following the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739, thousands of the Iranian conqueror’s Qizilbash cavalry troopers remained in India, many of whom were recruited by Safdar Jang.⁵⁴ Although they did not displace the “Hindustani” (i.e., Indian Muslim and Rajput) forces that had been the mainstay of Sa’adat Khan’s army, the Qizilbash nevertheless found a

⁵¹ Srivastava, *First Two Nawabs of Awadh*, Chapter 3; Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 205-220.

⁵² Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 243-45.

⁵³ Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh, *Tārīkh-i farah bakhsh*, tr. by William Hoey as, *Memoirs of Faizabad, Being a Translation of the “Tarikh-i-Farahbakhsh” of Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh*, ed. by H.A. Qureshi (Lucknow: New Royal Book Co., 2004), Vol I, 2-3; Rampur Reza Library, MS 2149, Lal-ji, *Mir’āt-ul-auḡa*, fols.120-21; R. Llewellyn-Jones, *A Fatal Friendship: The Nawabs, the British, and the City of Lucknow* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 9; S.P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 75-76, 78

⁵⁴ Srivastava, 96.

privileged position under Safdar Jang, earning at fifty rupees per month nearly fifty-percent more than their Hindustani comrades. Moreover, owing to the presence of perhaps twenty-thousand Qizilbash “Mughals,” Persian was spoken widely in the camp, including among the Hindustani contingents.⁵⁵

Safdar Jang also built the Iranian presence in Awadh through more active measures. Whereas Sa’adat Khan had married exogamously to build his standing among the imperial elite, Safdar Jang relied upon endogamous, cross-cousin marriage to encourage his kinsmen to emigrate from Khurasan. Likely conscious of his disputed claim to succeed Sa’adat Khan, Safdar Jang did not marry again, Sadr-un-nissa Begum remaining his sole wife. He did, however, arrange marriages for his sisters-in-law to the late nawab’s *sayyid* nephews and his own Turcoman cousins.⁵⁶ Once his relatives arrived in India, Safdar Jang also used his new powers in Awadh to support them. By the time of his death in 1739, Sa’adat Khan had leveraged his control over local *faujdarīs* and tax farms to sufficiently entrench himself in the Awadh administration and resist transfer by the emperor. Building upon these powers, Safdar Jang was able to exert exclusive control over *jāgīr* awards within Awadh and to ensure that local grants were held solely by his supporters living in the province.⁵⁷

As Muzaffar Alam has shown using *jāgīr* records from the reign of Muhammad Shah, it is clear that the nawab used his authority to empower his household, his extended family, and his numerous retainers.⁵⁸ A closer quantitative analysis of the same sources also illustrates the ways

⁵⁵ *Imād-us-sa’adat*, 31. By the eighteenth century, the word “mughal” typically connoted in India an individual with origins in Central Asia or Iran. It was frequently conjoined with the ethnonyms “Turani” and “Irani” as synonyms for Sunni and Shi’i respectively. See *Imād-us-sa’adat*, 76.

⁵⁶ *Imād-us-sa’adat*, 29-30.

⁵⁷ Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 282.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

in which Safdar Jang was expanding his family and reconstructing his Turco-Iranian kinship network in India. Of the roughly six hundred distinct grants enumerated for this period (ca. 1739-48), slightly more than half were held by Safdar Jang himself (5%), his kinsmen (10%), and close members of his military entourage (*hamrāhīyān*; lit., “companions”) (37%). Revealingly, of the fifty-four individuals holding more than one *jāgīr*, forty-three (or 80%) were either Safdar Jang’s kin (26%) or *hamrāhīyān* (54%). Furthermore, of the twenty persons claiming more than four *jāgīrs*, seven (35%) consisted of the nawab and his close kin and twelve (60%) of his companions. Only one of these *jāgīrdārs*, Jāwīd Khan, the imperial eunuch and Safdar Jang’s powerful rival, resided outside of Awadh.⁵⁹

The influx of Mughal kinsmen and troopers also manifested itself in the built environment of Awadh. Like his father-in-law, Safdar Jang spent much of his life on the move. However, those few semi-permanent structures built by Sa’adat Khan were expanded significantly under his nephew. This was particularly true of the mud fortress the late nawab had constructed near Ayodhya on the banks of the Ghaghra river. Needing a rainy season refuge and a base for campaigns against *zamīndārs* in eastern Awadh, Sa’adat Khan constructed an earthen fortress that became known as the “*Bangla*,” after the wood and mud-brick bungalow that stood at the fort’s center.⁶⁰ Under Safdar Jang, a town soon emerged around the fort, branching out organically from the nawab’s household in a manner that had long characterized the growth of military-market cities in South Asia.⁶¹ Members of the nawab’s household, eunuchs, and

⁵⁹ BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4506.

⁶⁰ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, 3.

⁶¹ C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 115-25; Blake, 26-36; and A. Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Vol. III, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 64-78.

dependent cavalry commanders built their own residences within the fortress, which also accommodated the nawab's stables, artillery park, and workshops. Outside the walls, however, the Qizilbash were particularly influential in shaping the environs of the new city. Their commanders (*sardārs*) laid out numerous suburban gardens and, more importantly, Safdar Jang and his successor, Shuja-ud-daula, provided houses for the troopers and their families.⁶² By the beginning of Shuja-ud-daula's reign (1754-75), the many Qizilbash households made the town resemble "one of the great cities of Iran" (*yakī az bilād-i 'azīma-yi īrān*). Seeing its "complete resemblance" (*shabāhat-i kullīya*) to a town called Faizabad in his native Khurasan, Safdar Jang then re-named the city after its Iranian counterpart.⁶³

At the same time, the *sarkār* at the center of Faizabad was also expanding. Here, however, consanguineous kinship receded in importance. Although the sources provide only scant detail, we can surmise that, like the great households of his contemporaries among the Mughal elite, the *sarkār* of Safdar Jang was probably staffed by hundreds, if not thousands, individuals who were bound to the household by various forms of servitude and enslavement.⁶⁴ Of these, two groups were particularly influential: eunuchs (*khwājasarās*) and "disciples" (*chēlas*). The former had been integral to the Mughal imperial household since the late sixteenth century, when the sacralization of the imperial household's interior spaces and centers of dynastic reproduction (*ḥaram/andarūn*) necessitated a class of non-consanguineous service providers who could move freely between the palace's "public" and "private" realms.⁶⁵

⁶² *Memoirs of Faizbad*, 3; Ahmad Behbahani, *Mir'āt-ul-aḥwāl-i jahān-numā: safarnāma-yi hind dar āghāz ṣadā-yi nūzdahum*, ed. by Shayista Khan (Patna, New Delhi: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1992), 150.

⁶³ *Mir'āt-ul-aḥwāl-i jahān-numā*, 150.

⁶⁴ Blake, 86-90.

⁶⁵ For the formalization of the imperial household, see R. Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. pp. 176-213.

The presence of eunuchs seems to have grown through the seventeenth century, not only as Mughal imperial households expanded and proliferated, but also as powerful courtiers procured eunuchs to emulate imperial practice and to staff their own households. By the mid-eighteenth century, they had become highly visible and influential in the increasingly urbanized politics of the imperial capital in Delhi, where their liminal status permitted them to act as effective emissaries between rival households, as well as to seize effectively the household property of deceased or disgraced nobles.⁶⁶ In Awadh, they became similarly prominent under Safdar Jang. Although, as subsequent sections will show, *khwājasarās* gained particular status during the reign of Shuja-ud-daula, many of the practices attributed to him actually began under his father. Indeed, Safdar Jang, as well as the Mughal kinsmen who served as *faujdārs*, seems to have been eager to make and acquire eunuchs, maintaining specially trained castrators in their entourages for the purpose.⁶⁷ While most of these would not come of age until the reign of Shuja-ud-daula, several *khwājasarās* did come to prominence under Safdar Jang, most notably Miyan Tamkin and Miyan Yaqut, both of whom served as *nā'ibs* (deputies) and held *jāgīrs* in Awadh and Allahabad.⁶⁸

Similarly influential in Safdar Jang's expanding household were the nawabs' *chēlas*. Although meaning in the context of Hindu ascetic practice a *gurū*'s disciple, in elite Indo-Muslim households the term had taken on a different connotation since at least the reign of

⁶⁶ See, for example, the attempt of the eunuch Jāwīd Khan (Nawab Bahadur) to plunder the mansion of Safdar Jang in 1750: *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 50.

⁶⁷ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, Part II, 218.

⁶⁸ Jean Law de Lauriston, *A Memoir of the Mughal Empire: Events of 1757-1761*, ed. and tr. by G.S. Cheema (New Delhi: Manohar, 2014), 150-52, 267; *Memoirs of Faizabad*, II, 235; Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabataba'i, *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, ed. by Abd-ul-majid (Calcutta: Dar-ul-imara, 1832), Vol. II, 55; BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4503 and 4506.

Akbar, when the emperor recast enslaved bodyguards (*ghulāmān*) as “disciples.”⁶⁹ As with *khwājasarās*, *chēlas* became widespread among imperial and noble households in the seventeenth century. Like eunuchs, *chēlas* were at least nominally enslaved, although the status could also be assumed voluntarily as mark of honor.⁷⁰ Unlike eunuchs, however, *chēlas* were also frequently married to female slaves, the daughters and widows of other household slaves and servants, or similar individuals in other households in order to establish dense networks of marriage and service within and between elite households.⁷¹ The physical proximity and marriageability of *chēlas* often created feelings of intense intimacy between *chēlas* and their masters, so much so that by the eighteenth century, *chēlas* had come to be understood not only as slaves but often as adopted sons (*mutabannas*).⁷² In Awadh, while never becoming as influential as they did in neighboring Farrukhabad, where they were referred to as *tīfl-i sarkār* (“offspring of the household-state”),⁷³ *chēlas* rose to prominence alongside *khwājasarās*. For example, Safdar Jang’s *chēla*, Ismail Quli Khan, eventually became the nawab’s *nā’ib*, a great commander in his *sarkār*, and “the prime axis of his house (*mudār-i ‘alīya-yi khāna-ish*).”⁷⁴

The growth of his household and extended family in Awadh did not, however, prevent Safdar Jang from continuing to pursue advancement at the imperial court. The death of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah in 1748 furnished him a critical opportunity. On campaign in

⁶⁹ J. J. L Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire : 1500-1700* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 61.

⁷⁰ Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh *Tārīkh-i farah bakhsh*, Vol. II, ed. and tr. by Shah Abd-us-salam, (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, 2010), 93.

⁷¹ See for example the wedding of Asaf-ud-daula’s *chēla*, Mu’azzam in 1795, in Royal Asiatic Society [RAS], Persian MS 93, *Intikhāb-i akhbarāt*: 17-18 *Sha‘bān* and 5-7 *Ramzān*.

⁷² *Siyar-ul-muta`ākhkhirīn*, II, 12.

⁷³ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazars*, 142-43.

⁷⁴ *Siyar-ul-muta`ākhkhirīn*, II, 55.

the Punjab with the heir-apparent when news of the emperor's death arrived, Safdar Jang raised the boy as Emperor Ahmad Shah and had himself made the imperial *wazīr*. For the next five years, Safdar Jang used the position and his control over imperial appointments to assert his family's control over the empire. He rewarded Nawab Sher Jang, his cousin and one-time rival for the Awadh *ṣūbadārī*, by making him governor of Kashmir.⁷⁵ In the neighboring province of Allahabad (the *ṣūbadārī* of which Safdar Jang had secured during the reign of Muhammad Shah), the nawab appointed as his deputy Muhammad Quli Khan, a fraternal nephew (*barādarzāda*) he had invited from Iran to marry one of Sa'adat Khan's daughters.⁷⁶ In Awadh, rather than appointing his son and presumed successor Jalal-ud-din Haidar, he left the province under the control of his trusted secretary-cum-deputy, Raja Nawal Ra'i, and his *chēla* and household manager, Ismail Quli Khan. Afterwards, he brought his teenaged son—along with the rest of his household—to the imperial court, where the boy was given the title of Shuja-ud-daula and installed in key positions in the imperial household. These included the offices of *mīr ātish* (commander of the imperial artillery) and the *dārōghagīs* (superintendencies) of the *ghusalkhāna* (privy chamber), mace bearers (*gurzburdārān*), imperial foot soldiers (*aḥādīs*), and the imperial fortress's workshop/office complex (*jilau-yi khāṣṣ*).⁷⁷ Although Shuja-ud-daula had little personal control over these offices, Safdar Jang successfully infiltrated the imperial household through hand-picked deputies appointed in his son's name.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Srivastava, 102-3.

⁷⁶ 'Imād-us-sa'ādat, 29; A. L. Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daulah*. (Calcutta: [S.N. Sarkār], 1939), Vol. I, 12.

⁷⁷ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 7-9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

While he had himself occasionally resided in the imperial fortress when serving as *mīr ātish* under Muhammad Shah, Safdar Jang tightened his grip upon Ahmad Shah and the imperial household primarily from the nearby *ḥavēlī* of Dara Shukoh, which had been under the control of the Awadh *ṣūbadārs* since at least the 1730s.⁷⁹ Although Sa'adat Khan had constructed a new mansion for himself near Shahjahanabad's Ajmeri Gate, he had, by the time of his death in 1739, begun residing in Dara Shukoh's vast mansion, a structure which served in the seventeenth century as the official residence of Mughal heirs-apparent and in the eighteenth as a home for the heads of reigning elite factions.⁸⁰ The *ḥavēlī*'s close proximity to the imperial fortress meant that it was often the scene of violent clashes between Safdar Jang and his rivals, such as in 1748, when musketeers fired on the nawab's entourage on his return from the fort; in 1750, when his enemies at the Mughal court ordered the plunder of his house on rumor of his death; in 1751, when the nawab assassinated the imperial eunuch Jāwīd Khan in his own courtyard; or in 1753, when he was dismissed as *wazīr* and evicted by force from the mansion and the city by his replacement, Ghazi-ud-din Khan Imad-ul-mulk.⁸¹

Despite the ignominious end to his career in Delhi as *wazīr*, Safdar Jang nevertheless remained in a position of strength as *ṣūbadār* of Awadh and Allahabad. Only his sudden death from cancer in 1754 prevented him from re-equipping his forces and re-engaging with Imad-ul-mulk for control of the *wizārat*. Yet the very resources that allowed Safdar Jang to contemplate renewing his fight with the *wazīr* would present significant challenges to his son and successor, Shuja-ud-daula. Building upon Sa'adat Khan's bundle of provincial offices, Safdar Jang had

⁷⁹ Blake, 76-77.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Srivastava, *First Two Nawabs*, 127-28 and *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 7-10.

begun to reconstruct the province as a dynastic patrimony by expanding his local kinship network and by developing new urban spaces around a growing household dominated by his wife and by influential eunuchs and *chēlas*. Following Safdar Jang's death, however, none of these powerful groups were keen to cede control of the regime to the young Shuja-ud-daula. Moreover, the relationship between the nawab's household, his extended kin group, and the province remained ambiguous at best. The limits of the nascent ruling family remained amorphously defined, as did particular family members' respective claims upon the province, a situation that was compounded by an incipient split between Indian and Iranian-born branches of the family. The problem was indeed intractable and one, as we shall see, that would take the better part of Shuja-ud-daula's twenty-year reign and the assistance of the East India Company to solve.

Managing the dynasty at mid-century: Shuja-ud-daula and the "Mughals," 1754-65

In the short-term, however, Shuja-ud-daula found himself in more precarious circumstances. The *wazīr* Imad-ul-mulk, having expelled Safdar Jang and his kin-client network from Delhi, was eager to use his control over the Timurid royal family to oust Shuja-ud-daula from Awadh altogether. While he had reissued *sanads* for the Awadh *ṣūbadārī* for Safdar Jang and then Shuja-ud-daula, the *wazīr* had no intention of preserving the family's hold on the province, hoping instead for an opportune moment to lead a coalition against his rivals.⁸² Closer to home, Safdar Jang's war with Imad-ul-mulk had exhausted the late nawab's treasury, exacerbating existing tensions among his military commanders. These rivalries were particularly

⁸² Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 11-15.

acute between the “Mughal” *sardārs*, i.e. the Qizilbash and Safdar Jang’s Turcoman kinsmen, and the bands of Naga Gossains that had recently entered the nawab’s service, groups that clashed not only over financial resources but also over their vastly different forms of courtly comportment.⁸³

These difficulties fell especially hard upon the twenty-two year-old Shuja-ud-daula. Having spent the entirety of his adolescence in Delhi, residing either in the Mughal palace-fort or in his father’s *ḥavēlī*, Shuja-ud-daula had established no separate household of his own. Moreover, although he held nominal posts in the imperial household, these offices had been administered by *nā’ibs* appointed by his father. Consequently, at the time of his accession, he held few connections independent of his father. In the immediate aftermath of the succession, his principal allies were his brothers-in-law, Mirza Ali Khan and Salar Jang (who had also fled Delhi) and the leading Gossain *gurūs*, Umraogiri and Anupgiri.⁸⁴ These, however, were little match for the Mughal *sardārs* and the senior members of Safdar Jang’s household. Foremost among the latter were the late nawab’s widow, Sadr-un-nissa Begum, his *chēla* Ismail Quli Khan and eunuchs like Miyan Tamkin and Miyan Yaqut. Summarizing the situation succinctly, one observer recalled: “[When] Shuja-ud-daula...became empowered in place of his father (*bi-jā-yi pidar-ish mutamkun gasht*), Ismail Beg...remained the arbiter of all important matters (*rātiq wa fātiq-i muhimāt mānd*), and all his father’s companions (*jamī’-i rufaqa-yi pidar*)...remained in place, with their customary positions renewed (*bi-dastūr bi-ḥāl wa bar qarār māndand*).”⁸⁵ Jean

⁸³ *Imād-us-sa’adat*, 63-64. For the history of Naga military entrepreneurship, see W.R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 66, and BL, OMS Or. 1732, Harcharan Das, *Chahār gulzār-i shujā’ī*, fol. 267a.

⁸⁵ *Siyar-ul-muta’ākhkhirīn*, II, 55.

Law de Lauriston, the French factor of Chandernagore who visited Shuja-ud-daula's court in 1757, remarked that, following the succession:

[The nawab] seemed fated to a life of quiet tranquility...His mother, who was assisted by able and faithful ministers, attended to all matters requiring regular and constant application and attention, while he indulged in the pleasures of the chase and violent and vigorous exercises.⁸⁶

De Lauriston's impression is confirmed by the letters of Maratha *wakīls*, who negotiated primarily with the nawab's mother during this period.⁸⁷

Later sources portray the regime's generational and kinship conflicts in even starker terms. According to the *Imād-us-sa'ādat* (1808), whose account of this period would become canonical for subsequent Indo-Persian and Urdu histories of Awadh, Ismail Quli Khan wished "to keep Shuja-ud-daula like a prince (*shujā' -ud-daula-rā miṣl-i ṣāhibzāda nigāh dārad*) and be himself the lord of command (*khūd ṣāhib-i ḥukm bāshad*)." To this end, "he allied with the Mughal commanders (*sardārān-i mughlīya bā khūd muwwāfiq*) and alienated them from [Shuja-ud-daula] (*az ū munḥarif*)." Consequently, "no one in this faction obeyed [the nawab] as they should have (*hīchkas az īn firqa itā'at-i ū chūnānki bāyad namīkard*), but rather declared themselves his [paternal] uncles (*balki khūd-rā 'amū-yi ū qarār mīdādand*)." The Mughal *sardārs* were even greater opponents of Shuja-ud-daula than Ismail Quli Khan. They "were constant supporters of [the nawab's Iranian-born cousin and *nā'ib ṣūbadār* of Allahabad] Muhammad Quli Khan, (*paivasta daulatkhwāh-i muḥammad qulī khān būdand*) and desired to seat him on the throne (*mīkhwāstand ki ū-rā bar masnad nishānīda*)." In response to the

⁸⁶ De Lauriston, 128.

⁸⁷ *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar*, Vol. 21, no. 128 and Vol. 27, no. 191, cited in Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 46.

Mughals’ “absolute divergence” (*inḥirāf-i kullī*) from him, Shuja-ud-daula pursued a close—and possibly sexual—relationship with the two Gossains.⁸⁸

From here, the *‘Imād-us-sa‘ādat* presents a highly apocryphal account of a near-rupture between the nawab and Mughal *sardārs*. Upon spying a beautiful young Khatri woman during a tour through Faizabad, Shuja-ud-daula supposedly ordered the Gossains to bring her to him. After breaking into her home at night, the Gossains carried her upon her bed to the nawab, who proceeded to rape her. The injured girl returned home and her account of the assault prompted her Khatri kinsmen—many of whom had been secretaries and accountants in the households of Sa‘adat Khan and Safdar Jang—to rally and demand justice. Seizing the opportunity, Ismail Quli Khan invited Muhammad Quli Khan from Allahabad, and the Mughal *sardārs* demanded the nawab hand over the Gossains for punishment. Only the timely intervention of Sadr-un-nissa Begum quelled the uprising. After summoning the Khatri leaders and the *sardārs* inside her palace, she berated them through a curtain for their ingratitude to the late Safdar Jang and their faithlessness to her son. At the same time, she bestowed lavish “gifts” upon the disaffected Khatri and Mughals, who returned home duly chastised.⁸⁹

Owing to the *‘Imād-us-sa‘ādat*’s prominence in Indo-Persian and Urdu historiography, this story was reproduced widely in nineteenth-century chronicles of the Awadh regime.⁹⁰ Indeed, several modern historians have also accepted the *‘Imād-us-sa‘ādat*’s account as

⁸⁸ *‘Imād-us-sa‘ādat*, 66.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁹⁰ Among others, the story appears, in various iterations, in: BL, OMS Or. 1652, Harnam Singh Bahadur, *Yādgār-i bahādūrī*, Vol. I, fols. 502a-b; *Tārīkh-i shāhīya-yi nīshāpūrīya*, 22-23; Andhra Pradesh State Archives [APSA], Oriental Manuscript Library and Research Institute [OMLRI], MS *Jadīd* 68, Mahdi Ali Khan, *Tārīkh-i iqtidārīya*, Vol. I, 345-65; and *Tawārīkh-i awadh*, 51-52.

fundamentally true, despite the silences of more contemporary sources.⁹¹ Yet while the trope of sexual assault by Muslim governors figures widely in Khatri family histories, and certainly suggests the plausibility of the story, it might be more productive to read the *‘Imād-us-sa‘ādat*’s account allegorically and in conjunction with earlier sources.⁹² Considered in this fashion, two aspects of the story are especially striking. The first are the conflicts among senior members of Safdar Jang’s household, particularly his widow, Sadr-un-nissa Begum, and his *chēla*, Ismail Quli Khan. While more contemporary accounts indicate that both were committed to preserving a shared generational authority over Shuja-ud-daula, the *‘Imād-us-sa‘ādat* suggests that their varying degrees of kinship with the young nawab—and varying commitments to his being on the throne at all—strained their relationship with one another. More importantly, perhaps, the story also illustrates how the influx of Safdar Jang’s Mughal kinsmen complicated the relationship of the expanding ruling family with its dominions in Awadh. In this regard, the Mughal *sardārs*’ construction of themselves as Shuja-ud-daula’s “[paternal] uncles (*‘amū-yi ū*)” is especially revealing. While many may well have been at least distant relations of the nawab, it seems clear that the Mughal *sardārs* and their troopers had come to see themselves as holding certain rights from the family of Safdar Jang upon the Awadh territories. Coupled with Shuja-ud-daula’s personal financial difficulties, this may explain why, in the first few years of the nawab’s reign, “the entirety of the country was held in *jāgīr* and *tankhwāh* by the Mughals” (*tamām-i mulk dar jāgīr wa tankhwāh-i mughlīya būd*) and why “every *maḥal*” had been appointed to meet “the

⁹¹ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 15-17; Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 44-45.

⁹² For such oral narratives, see C.A. Bayly, “Pre-colonial Merchants and Rationality,” in Mushirul Hasan and Narayani Gupta, eds., *India’s Colonial Encounter: Essays in Memory of Eric Stokes* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993), 20.

demands of the army (*ṭalabkhwāh-i sipāh*).⁹³ It also indicates why the nawab was compelled to travel every year during the fall harvest to enforce his tributary claims over Raja Balwant Singh, the powerful *zamīndār* of Benares and Ghazipur.⁹⁴

Finally, it also suggests why Shuja-ud-daula was so committed to eliminating familial rivals who might be supported by the Mughal *sardārs*. This meant, in particular, dealing decisively with Muhammad Quli Khan, his cousin and the ruler of the neighboring province of Allahabad. The younger son of Safdar Jang's elder brother, Muhammad Quli Khan had been appointed by his uncle as *nā'ib ṣūbadār* of Allahabad in 1751 when the latter held *sanads* for both the Awadh and Allahabad *ṣūbadārīs*.⁹⁵ These *sanads* were renewed in 1753 by the *wazīr* Imad-ul-mulk in exchange for Safdar Jang abandoning his claims to the *wizārat* and returning to Awadh.⁹⁶ However, following Safdar Jang's death, Shuja-ud-daula only received a *sanad* for the Awadh *ṣūba*, Imad-ul-mulk preferring to grant Allahabad first to himself and then to Ahmad Khan Bangash. When neither could enforce their claims to the province, however, the *wazīr* finally agreed to restore the *ṣūbadārī* to Shuja-ud-daula in 1756.⁹⁷

Throughout this time, Muhammad Quli Khan remained the effective ruler of Allahabad. Although he was once again designated the nawab's *nā'ib ṣūbadār* following Shuja-ud-daula's receipt of the Allahabad *sanad*, he was widely considered the province's independent governor. More importantly, he acted accordingly, remitting little of the province's revenues to Shuja-ud-

⁹³ *Yādgar-i bahādurī*, I, fol. 502b; BL, OMS Or. 1707, Inam Ali, *Auṣāf-i aṣaf*, fol. 77b.

⁹⁴ *Auṣāf-i aṣaf*, fols. 77b-78a.

⁹⁵ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 12.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

daula.⁹⁸ Additionally, although there is no contemporary evidence to suggest, as the *‘Imād-us-sa‘adat* does, that he accepted the Mughal *sardārs*’ invitation to usurp the *ṣūbadārī* from his cousin, he may well have “considered himself worthy of the inheritance of Safdar Jang and Buhan-ul-mulk (*khūd-rā lā‘iq-i wirāṣat-i ṣafdar jang wa burhān-ul-mulk mīdānist*).”⁹⁹ In any case, by the late 1750s, he was decidedly unsatisfied with Allahabad’s “meager income” (*wajh-i kamī*) and looking for opportunities outside the province.¹⁰⁰ Whether from fear of his cousin’s designs on Awadh, offense at his pretensions to autonomy, or a combination of the two, by 1757 Shuja-ud-daula “had long wished Muhammad Quli Khan ill and desired his expulsion from Allahabad (*az mudatī badkhwāh wa awārāgī-yi muḥammad qulī khān az allahabād būd*).”¹⁰¹

In the end, the tumultuous events of that year provided both men with opportunities to realize their ambitions. The East India Company’s defeat of Nawab Siraj-ud-daula and its elevation of Mir Ja’afar in his place had unsettled the political landscape of neighboring Bengal and Bihar. Moreover, the flight of the Mughal *shāhzāda* (prince) Ali Gauhar from Delhi provided the competing governors a chance to legitimate potential campaigns of expansion with imperial credentials. Muhammad Quli Khan was especially eager to do so, the “lust for conquest of Bengal” (*havas-i taskhūr-i bangāla*) having “lodged itself in his brain” (*dar dimāgh-ish jā girift*).¹⁰² He not only invited the prince to join him, but also solicited the assistance of Jean Law de Lauriston and his small but well-trained body of French soldiers and Indian sepoys. For his

⁹⁸ Ghulam Ali Khan, *Shāh ‘ālam nāma*, ed. by H. De (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1912), 64; De Lauriston, 260.

⁹⁹ BL, OMS Or. 1726, Muhammad Riza, *Akhbārāt-i hind*, fol. 287b.

¹⁰⁰ *Siyar-ul-muta‘ākhkhirīn*, I, 245.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

part, Shuja-ud-daula encouraged his cousin and pledged to support him in his endeavor, though few—including, perhaps, Muhammad Quli Khan himself—believed him to be sincere.¹⁰³

These suspicions would prove correct in the spring of 1758, once the disastrous expedition was under way. Under the pretense of needing to guard Awadh against the machinations of Imad-ul-mulk and Ahmad Khan Bangash, Shuja-ud-daula proposed to follow behind the prince and Muhammad Quli Khan and to support them once they had established a foothold in Bihar. Furthermore, he appealed to the demands of his household and their shared bonds of kinship to gain control of the Allahabad fortress. He requested his cousin turn over the fort, since it was the only “building fit for the residence of his female relatives” (*imāratī-yi lā’iq ki maḥal-i aqāmat-i begumāt bāshad*) and capable of protecting his “family” (*nāmūs*) from the *wazīr*.¹⁰⁴ Once Shuja-ud-daula had gathered in a single location his and Muhammad Quli Khan’s relations, whom he said were “like a single family (*chūn nāmūs wa ābrū-yi wāḥid*),” he promised to join the invasion.¹⁰⁵ Anxious for his cousin’s support, Muhammad Quli Khan agreed and the fort was transferred to Shuja-ud-daula. The nawab appeared to make good on his promise, moving his army towards the frontier after Muhammad Quli Khan’s campaign had stalled during his siege of Allahabad. However, Shuja-ud-daula’s only intention was to take control of the Allahabad fortress, which he did once again under the guise of protecting his family. According to de Lauriston, while moving in his wives and female relatives, he also smuggled inside their

¹⁰³ De Lauriston, 260.

¹⁰⁴ *Siyar-ul-muta’ākhkhirīn*, I, 247. For a more detailed discussion of the concept of “*nāmūs*,” see Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

baggage a group of soldiers, who subsequently overpowered the garrison and occupied the fort.¹⁰⁶

Once in control of Allahabad's principal fortification, Shuja-ud-daula had effectively seized control of the province. As Muhammad Quli Khan's army fled in disarray from a Company force sent to relieve Patna, Shuja-ud-daula ordered his *nā'ib*, Raja Beni Bahadur, and the *zamīndār* of Benares, Raja Balwant Singh, to intercept Muhammad Quli Khan and prevent his forces from reaching Allahabad. After a brief skirmish, Muhammad Quli Khan surrendered, allowing Beni Bahadur and Balwant Singh to implement Shuja-ud-daula's orders "to plunder [Muhammad Quli Khan's] camp and to seize his property (*lashkar-i ū-rā ghārat wa amwāl-ish-rā zabt numāyand*)."¹⁰⁷ Shuja-ud-daula then ordered his captive cousin to be imprisoned in the fort of Jalalabad outside Lucknow. Several years later, once Shuja-ud-daula discovered that his cousin was attempting to correspond with the Afghan emperor, Ahmad Shah Durrani, he ordered—perhaps at the “encouragement of his mother and others (*bi-targhīb-i wālida-yi khūd nawwāb begum wa ba 'azī dīgar*)”—for Muhammad Quli Khan to be executed and his body to be dumped down a well.¹⁰⁸

However, the seeming ease with which Shuja-ud-daula removed Muhammad Quli Khan belied the difficulty of asserting his authority over the rest of his extended family and the Mughal *sardārs*. Many of Muhammad Quli Khan's Mughal supporters refused to submit to Shuja-ud-daula, preferring instead to take service with the new *nāẓim* of Bengal, Mir Qasim.¹⁰⁹ Even after

¹⁰⁶ De Lauriston, 266.

¹⁰⁷ *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, I, 259.

¹⁰⁸ *Mir'āt-i aḥwāl-i jahān-numā*, 235.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example the father of Mirza Abu Talib Khan: Abu Talib Khan, *Mā'ṣir-i ṭālibī, yā, safarnāma-yi mīrzā abū ṭālib khān (1219 H.Q.)*, ed. by Hussain Khadivjam (Tehran: Sāzmān-i Intishārāt va Āmūzish-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1984), 8-9.

Mir Qasim himself took refuge with the Awadh nawab in 1763 and the Mughals joined a coalition to reinstall him in Bengal, they continued to resent the actions of Shuja-ud-daula. Responding to offers in 1764 by Major Munro, commander of the Company's forces, to abandon Mir Qasim and Shuja-ud-daula, one Zain-ul-abidin Khan admitted that, "although it is dishonorable for all men, *particularly for men of family*, to desert the service," there were several reasons which justified "such conduct in the Mughals." Foremost among these, Shuja-ud-daula had "murdered the Nawab Muhammad Quli Khan, who was the glory of the Mughals...[and] dearer than a father or a brother."¹¹⁰

Yet Zain-ul-abidin's other grievances against Shuja-ud-daula, and his conditions for joining the Company's forces, suggest larger efforts on the part of the nawab to weaken his distant kin and to deny their claims upon the province. These consisted principally of several projects often associated with the latter half of the nawab's reign, namely the resumption of *jāgīrs* and *madad-i ma'āsh* grants, the replacement of the *sardārs'* *jāgīr* assignments with cash payments from his own treasury, and the promotion of eunuchs and *chēlas* as *faujdārs* and revenue collectors in place of the Mughals. Shuja-ud-daula may have attempted a complete resumption of all *jāgīrs* as early as 1757, though the Mughals' dominance and the meagerness of his own treasury likely undercut the effort.¹¹¹ Instead, he seems to have pursued a course by which the Mughals' *jāgīrs* were gradually resumed into the nawab's *khālīṣa* ("demesne"), the revenues from which would be collected by eunuchs and *chēlas* into the nawab's treasury and subsequently paid out in the form of cash stipends. In so doing, Shuja-ud-daula weakened the Mughals' ability to provide for themselves and their contingents, ensuring their obedience and

¹¹⁰ CPC I, No. 2416.

¹¹¹ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 47.

dependence on his largesse. As Zain-ul-abidin Khan complained to Munro, “the Mughals, who are strangers in this country, and who, having nothing to depend upon but their monthly pay, are brought to distress whenever that is stopped,” and Shuja-ud-daula “thinks of nothing but how to oppress and ruin them.”¹¹² The nawab apparently found the deaths of troopers particularly opportune times to either renegotiate terms with their kinsmen and dependents or to dismiss them outright. Munro’s proposed treaty with the Mughal *sardārs* stipulated not only that they would be “granted a proper place in the country for the habitation of their families and dependents” but also that “whenever a Mughal is killed in battle or dies a natural death, his son or relation should be received in his place.”¹¹³

The Mughals resented not only what they perceived as the nawab’s illegitimate attempts to disenfranchise them of hereditary and kinship claims to service and support, but also those whom they saw displacing them. According to the Zain-ul-abidin Khan, Shuja-ud-daula took “no notice of men of family, but [instead placed] all his confidence in low and worthless people.”¹¹⁴ In addition to the Gossains, with whom Shuja-ud-daula would maintain a complex and often contentious relationship, these “family-less” individuals comprised two distinct groups. The first comprised free-born individuals who often headed their own households but served primarily in the nawab’s *sarkār*. These included the nawab’s companions such as his emissary (*jārchī*) Ali Beg Khan, his brothers-in-law Salar Jang and Mirza Ali Khan, and new officials like Beni Bahadur, who together served as a coterie of confidential advisors.¹¹⁵ The second were an

¹¹² CPC I, No. 2416.

¹¹³ CPC I, No. 2423.

¹¹⁴ CPC I, No. 2416

¹¹⁵ *Siyar-ul-muta’ākhkhirīn*, I, 518; *Imād-us-sa’ādat*, 94-95.

increasingly influential group of nominally enslaved *chēlas* and eunuchs with diverse origins. Many of the most prominent *chēlas* were Africans (*sīdīs/ḥabshīs*) whose families had been in India for several generations and who, owing to their profession of Shi'ism, found service with the Twelver Shi'i nawabs of Awadh.¹¹⁶ Eunuchs, however, typically came from cultivating castes in Awadh or the Doab. Although African slaves—and especially eunuchs—would be highly sought after by the Awadh nawabs well into the nineteenth century,¹¹⁷ most eunuchs in Shuja-ud-daula's growing household were procured locally, either captured, purchased or, increasingly, traded for grants of rent-free land.¹¹⁸

As the following section will illustrate, the nawab's project to displace the “Mughal” *sardārs* was also aided, if begrudgingly, by a more regal Mughal, the *shāhzāda* Ali Gauhar (later the emperor Shah Alam), who was eventually taken into Shuja-ud-daula's custody in 1761. Through the emperor, Shuja-ud-daula regained the title of *wazīr* lost by his father and, more significantly, the ability to have imperial *sanads* issued for territories outside Awadh. This emboldened the nawab to pursue new conquests in Bundelkhand and the Doab as a means of expanding the regime's revenue base, in turn permitting the nawab to replace more *jāgīrs* with cash stipends and to weaken the Mughals' hold on the province.

The complaints of Zain-ul-abidin Khan and his fellow *sardārs* to Maj. Munro suggest that this process was well under way by the time of Shuja-ud-daula's clash with the East India Company in 1764. Nevertheless, on the eve of the battle at Buxar, the Mughals still wielded

¹¹⁶ *Akhbārāt-i hind*, 294a; BL, Hastings Papers, Add. 29202, fol. 115a.

¹¹⁷ See R. Llewellyn-Jones, “Africans in the Indian Mutiny,” *History Today*, 59, no. 12 (2009); for examples of the trade in African slaves and eunuchs in Awadh, see BL, OMS Add. 16,721, fol. 202a, BL, OMS Add. 22,624, fol. 175b, and RAS Persian MS. 93, *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*: 29 *Sha' bān*, 19 *Ramzān*, and 28 *Ramzān*.

¹¹⁸ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, I, 46, and II, 193 and 218.

considerable power within the nawab's army. Moreover, the nawab's own title to the province remained tenuous, contingent upon an imperial *sanad* and the power to repel would-be challengers. In a series of dramatic clashes, the Company would illustrate decisively the inherent fragility of Shuja-ud-daula's claims, as it marched rapidly across Awadh and threatened to expel him and his family from the province. By the end of 1765, however, the Company had suddenly reversed course, restoring the nawab to the province and establishing a durable alliance with him and his descendants. In so doing, British officials would not only perpetuate the long-term consolidation of the Awadh regime around the households of the ruling nawabs but would also inaugurate a profound reformulation of the Awadh dynasty's claims to sovereign authority.

Making dominion hereditary: The treaty of Allahabad, 1765

To summarize, in the four decades prior to Shuja-ud-daula's defeat by Company forces, the nawab and his predecessors had constructed an increasingly autonomous regional regime around their expansive households and growing networks of kinship, enslavement, and service. However, while the strength of his "Mughal" (Turcoman) kinsmen and Qizilbash contingents had helped Safdar Jang strengthen his position in Awadh and at the Mughal court, their continued presence in the province presented Shuja-ud-daula with considerable challenges to his personal authority and to the formation of a distinct ruling lineage. Through careful maneuvering, in the decade after his accession, the nawab was eventually able to oust Muhammad Quli Khan, his cousin and most viable rival, thus beginning a slow erosion of his Mughal kinsmen's political and financial privileges and a steady expansion of his own network of household retainers.

Yet despite his successes, by 1764, Shuja-ud-daula faced growing resentment from the Mughals as well as on-going threats from rivals at the imperial court and in neighboring provinces. This situation was compounded by the fact that although he and his predecessors had managed to retain the Awadh *ṣūbadārī* for three generations, often against the express orders of the emperor and his *wazīr*, the rights of Shuja-ud-daula's still burgeoning dynasty were hardly uncontested. Indeed, the power of the Awadh nawabs to resist imperially mandated transfers of office rested solely upon the inability of rivals to contest their hold on the province in any meaningful way. While they certainly possessed claims to hereditary, and ostensibly continual, imperial service (*khānazādāgī-yi maurūṣī*), theoretically these claims did not entail ongoing instatement in a particular office, let alone permanent possession of territory. Ironically, in the East India Company, Shuja-ud-daula would find the one group of political rivals who were able to easily displace him from Awadh yet eager to see his dynasty's sovereign authority acknowledged and perpetuated in perpetuity.

The rapid reconceptualization of provincial sovereignty in Awadh in 1765 and the Company's role therein are easy to overlook. From the vantage point of the late eighteenth century, it seemed obvious to many observers that Shuja-ud-daula had assumed control over a hereditary principality. Indeed, in the aftermath of Shuja-ud-daula's death in 1775, both British officials and the late nawab's children spoke regularly of the province as his "hereditary dominions" (*mumālik-i maurūṣī*).¹¹⁹ By the 1780s, Indo-Persian chroniclers like Ghulam Hussain Tabataba'i began projecting the Awadh nawab's hereditary and proprietary dominion back

¹¹⁹ See, for example, National Archives of India [NAI], Foreign Department-Secret Consultation [FDSC], 17 Feb. 1777, No. F; Foreign Department-Persian Branch [FDPr], Copies of Letters Received [CR], Vol. 7 (1776), No. 15, and Original Letter Received [OR], 10 Jan. 1787, No. 22.

further into the 1730s. For example, in narrating Safdar Jang's succession in 1739, Tabataba'i states that, following the death of Sa'adat Khan, Safdar Jang

was exalted by his appointment to the Awadh governorship (*bi-ṣūbadārī-yi awadh sarfarāzī yāfta*)[and], having amassed great power in his abode of kingship, which was that aforementioned province, (*dar dār-ul-mulk-i khūd ki ṣūba-yi mazkūra būd iqtidār-i bisiyār bi-ham risānīda*), he strengthened the foundations of his dynasty (*mubanī-yi daulat-ish istiḥkām pazīruft*).¹²⁰

Yet in the 1740s, it was not widely acknowledged that Safdar Jang had assumed the Awadh *ṣūbadārī* by virtue of hereditary succession, let alone that he had established a hereditary dynasty with legitimate claims to the province. For example, in his compendium of Persian poets, the *Riyāz-ush-shu'arā* (1748), Ali Quli Khan Daghestani 'Valih'—himself closely linked with the incipient Awadh dynasty—remarked of Safdar Jang that he simply happened to be Sa'adat Khan's "successor" (*qā'im muqām*: lit., "standing in place of").¹²¹ Anand Ram 'Mukhlis', another Indo-Persian litterateur familiar with Safdar Jang, wrote in his *Safarnāma* (1746) that "the governorship of the Awadh province (*nizāmat-i ṣūba-yi awadh*)" was "connected (*muta'alliq*) to the *mīr ātish* [ie., Safdar Jang's current imperial office]."¹²² While the use of the word "*muta'alliq*" may have suggested semantically that Anand Ram and his contemporaries perceived the Awadh *nizāmat* as a kind of "*ta'alluqa*"—that is, a "dependency" or "private interest" of the nawab—there was no sense that the interest was a permanent one, or that it

¹²⁰ *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, I, 110.

¹²¹ Ali Quli Khān Valih, *Riyāz al-shu'arā*, Vol. I, ed. by Sharif Husain Qasimi (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, 2001), 704.

¹²² Anand Ram Mukhlis, *Safarnāma-yi mukhlis*, ed. and tr. by S.A. Azhar (Rampur: Hindustan Press, 1946), 68.

extended beyond his portfolio of imperial offices to encompass actual rights to the territory itself.¹²³

This ill-defined, vaguely customary understanding of the Awadh nawabs' claims to the provincial governorship similarly characterized descriptions of Shuja-ud-daula's succession written prior to the 1765 treaty of Allahabad. In 1759, some five years after Shuja-ud-daula's accession, the anonymous author of the *Tārīkh-i 'ālamgīr ṣānī* described deliberations over the appointment of the Awadh *ṣūbadārī*, noting that Imad-ul-mulk was eventually persuaded to appoint Shuja-ud-daula governor “in the manner/custom of his father (*bi-dastūr-i pidar*).”¹²⁴ Yet as we have seen in previous sections, “custom” (*dastūr*) had little to do with Shuja-ud-daula's appointment. Rather, Imad-ul-mulk's desire to remove Shuja-ud-daula as a rival for the *wizārat* led him to conciliate the young nawab with a renewal of his father's appointment. However, as soon as Shuja-ud-daula attempted to reassert himself in the politics of the imperial court in 1755, the *wazīr* had new *sanads* issued for the Awadh and Allahabad *ṣūbadārīs* and later launched a failed campaign to dislodge him from the provinces.¹²⁵

The failure of the *wazīr*'s venture, and his subsequent reissue of *sanads* in Shuja-ud-daula's name, depended less on the enduring strength of the nawab's claims and more upon the lack of cohesion among the *wazīr*'s allies, the Rohilla and Bangash chieftains. For their part, the Bangash Afghans seem to have had particularly little regard for the Awadh nawabs' territorial

¹²³ Both “*muta'alliq*” and “*ta'alluqa*” are derived from the Arabic root ع-ل-ق, meaning “to hang (from).” For a discussion of the origin and variable meanings of “*ta'aluqa*” in the context of landholding, see I. Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 172-74 and 211-12; N.A. Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals, 1700-1750* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1970), 25-28; and T.R. Metcalfe, *Land, Landlords, and the British Raj* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), 24 and 188.

¹²⁴ BL, OMS Or. 1749, *Tārīkh-i 'ālamgīr ṣānī*, fol. 24b.

¹²⁵ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 21-23 and 33-36.

pretensions, having occupied the province briefly in 1750 and having readily accepted *sanads* for the Awadh and Allahabad *ṣūbadārīs* in 1755 and 1756.¹²⁶ However, the Afghan *sardārs*' unwillingness to sublimate their own internal conflicts, coupled with Shuja-ud-daula's success in rallying his fractious kinsmen and local allies convinced Imad-ul-mulk of the campaign's infeasibility.¹²⁷

The *wazīr*'s inability to transfer the Awadh and Allahabad *ṣūbas* from the control of Shuja-ud-daula demonstrated powerfully the reality of mid-century imperial politics, in which incipient regional dynasties refused to recognize each other's respective claims, at least officially. This situation was described perceptively by the erstwhile *comptoir* of Chandernagore, Jean Law de Lauriston, who traveled widely in North India and the Deccan following his expulsion from Bengal in 1757. As noted by de Lauriston:

It is accepted that the governments of the *ṣūbas* and other provinces—barring the territories of certain rajas—have never been hereditary by right. But if some of them give the impression of being hereditary today it is only on account of the weakness of the government, that is of the prince [the emperor] and his minister [the *wazīr*].

Using the example of the family of Nizam-ul-mulk, *ṣūbadār* of the Deccan—whose sons had vied with French and British assistance to succeed him throughout 1750s—de Lauriston maintained that, “as all these governors were of the same family as the Nizam, one might be forgiven for assuming that the post had in fact become hereditary in that family.” This however was false. “This long and uninterrupted succession of governors, all from the same family... was not a consideration in the court of Delhi, which favored them only because there were not other

¹²⁶ Alam, 264-277 and Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 23.

¹²⁷ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 23.

aspirants.” Moreover, he had “never heard anyone in the court of Delhi say that the Deccan was regarded as a hereditary possession.”

If up till now it has remained in the possession of successive members of that family, it is only because of the weakness of the government. I am of the firm belief that the first nobleman of the court who is in a position to conquer the Deccan and is in a position to offer Rs. 10 lakh at one go to the Mughal [emperor] will easily obtain the necessary patents. And the Mughal will readily give similar patents to 20 other persons, one after the other, in the space of a month, *not only for the Deccan but for any other suba as well.*¹²⁸

However, preserving the fiction of imperial integrity and denying hereditary and territorialized claims of *de facto* independent governors did not merely serve the interests of the beleaguered emperors. It also retained for the governors the possibility of expansion within a framework of imperial offices and established territorial divisions. As de Lauriston pointed out, with sufficient military strength and adequate funds for imperial tribute, additional provinces could be acquired and legitimated with “the necessary patents” (*sanads*) from the imperial court. Such a view was particularly espoused by the Maratha confederacy, which sought to legitimate itself and its territorial conquests from within the imperial framework, and it certainly seems to have been an idea to which Shuja-ud-daula also subscribed.¹²⁹ Indeed, as much as Imad-ul-mulk’s machinations threatened his own hold on Awadh and Allahabad, Shuja-ud-daula was keen to pursue intra-imperial expansion, pursuing not only his “rights” to Bundelkhand (theoretically entailed by its inclusion within the Allahabad *ṣūba*) but also portions of the Doab and, later, Rohilkhand, segments of the Agra and Delhi *ṣūbas* respectively.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ De Lauriston, 42-44. Emphasis added.

¹²⁹ A. Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarājya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 153-55.

¹³⁰ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 123.

In this regard, the flight of the future emperor Shah Alam from Delhi provided Shuja-ud-daula with a significant opportunity. Following two failed invasions of Bihar and the capture of Muhammad Quli Khan, the prince was finally forced to take refuge in Shuja-ud-daula's court in 1759. Once there, he was "requested" to restore the *wizārat* to Shuja-ud-daula and to grant Mirza Amani, the nawab's eldest son, offices within the imperial household formerly held by Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-daula (positions later construed as the nawab's "hereditary offices" [*khidmāt-i maurūsī*]).¹³¹ From there, in the caustic words of Company official-cum-historian, Alexander Dow, the nawab "mocked the unhappy man [Shah Alam] with a farce of royalty, and obliged him to ratify all grants and commissions... [and] under the sanction of these extorted deeds, Suja ul Dowlat made war upon the neighboring states."¹³²

Of these wars, the most pivotal was fought against the East India Company in 1764-65. The precise details of the conflict have been exhaustively examined elsewhere and need not concern us here.¹³³ It may be worth noting, however, that both Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-daula had attempted to assert their influence in Bihar and Bengal for more than two decades.¹³⁴ Given this long-term interest, it is not surprising that when Shuja-ud-daula formed a volatile partnership with Mir Qasim (the recently deposed *nāẓim* of Bengal) and Shah Alam, he showed less interest in the group's ostensible aims of restoring Mir Qasim and imperial authority, and more in expanding his own dominions. Despite his treaty with Mir Qasim, Shuja-ud-daula's regular

¹³¹ *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, I, 351.

¹³² Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan from the Earliest Account of Time, to the Death of Akbar; Translated from the Persian of Mahumud Casim Ferishta of Delhi; With an Appendix, Containing the History of the Mogul Empire, from Its Decline in the Reign of Mahumud Shaw, to the Present Times* (London: Printed for T. Becket and P.A. de Hondt, 1768), Appendix, 77.

¹³³ For a useful summary, see Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II.

¹³⁴ Srivastava, *First Two Nawabs of Awadh*, 93-98 and *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 69-70.

correspondence with Company officials suggests that, had British officials been willing to cede control of Bihar or to supply him with sepoys for campaigns in Bundelkhand and elsewhere, he would gladly have abandoned his tenuous support for the former *nāẓim*.¹³⁵

Confident of its military supremacy, however, the Company refused to negotiate unless the nawab delivered Mir Qasim and other individuals implicated in the killing of English officers in Patna in 1763. More importantly, emboldened by its defeat of Shuja-ud-daula's massive army at Buxar in 1764 and the subsequent defection of Shah Alam, the Company saw an opportunity to remake the imperial order west of Bihar. The charge was led by the commander of the Company's forces, Major Hector Munro. Enjoined by the Company's council in Calcutta to carry the war into the nawab's dominions if he continued to shelter Mir Qasim, Munro occupied Benares and Allahabad in November 1764. Meanwhile, Shuja-ud-daula fled to the east, leaving his *nā'ib* Beni Bahadur in Benares to secure an agreement with Munro, if possible.¹³⁶

With Shuja-ud-daula scrambling for new allies to resume the war, the possibility of a negotiated settlement seemed distant, and Munro began contemplating whom the Company would install in the nawab's stead. Indeed, he began planning to replace Shuja-ud-daula even before the battle of Buxar, offering several Mughal commanders the chance to become the Awadh *ṣūbadār* if they captured the nawab and turned him over to the Company.¹³⁷ He made a similar proposal to Beni Bahadur during their meetings in Benares, telling him that he should abandon Shuja-ud-daula so that the English could "establish [him] in the *subadarry* in [the nawab's] room, according to the ancient custom."—the ancient custom here being the regular

¹³⁵ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 158-60, 184.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 219-224. For a recent reappraisal of this episode, see S. Leonard, "A Fit of Absence of Mind? Illiberal Imperialism and the Founding of the British Empire, 1757-76," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2010), 93-112.

¹³⁷ CPC I, No. 2415.

rotation of non-hereditary provincial governors.¹³⁸ Despite having told Munro previously that Shuja-ud-daula would spend all the treasure accumulated since the reign of Sa'adat Khan to preserve his hold on the province, Beni Bahadur initially accepted the offer, though he eventually balked when the Company demanded to keep his family hostage as a security.¹³⁹

It was at this point that Shah Alam entered the deliberations. The dominion-less emperor wrote to Munro in November 1764, proposing that “if this country is to be kept, put me in possession of it,” and promising that, with a borrowed contingent of Company troops, he would defend it successfully against all enemies.¹⁴⁰ While the hapless Shah Alam did not press his theoretical suzerainty over Awadh and Allahabad, neither did he concede Shuja-ud-daula any proprietary rights over the provinces. This was left to the council in Calcutta, who readily accepted the emperor’s offer—at first. In a list of proposed articles sent back to Munro—a document which would form the substance of the *farmān* subsequently issued by Shah Alam—the council agreed that the Company’s army would put the emperor “in possession of Illiabad [Allahabad] and *the rest of the countries belonging to the nizamat of the Nabob Shujah ul-Dowlah.*”¹⁴¹ While it is uncertain precisely how Company translators rendered the council’s proposals into Persian, given their usage elsewhere, they likely employed the word “*muta ‘alliq*” for “belonging,” thereby conveying the same vague sense of “proprietorship” or “connection” indicated by writers like Anand Ram “Mukhlis” for the *ṣūbadārī* of Safdar Jang in the 1740s.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 224.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 224 and 248.

¹⁴⁰ C. U Aitchison, ed., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries* (Calcutta: Savielle and Cranenburgh, 1862-66), Vol. V, Part I, No. 1, 7.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁴² See, for example, the *fārighkhaṭṭī* and *qaulnāma* executed between Nawab Asaf-ud-daula, Bahu Begum, and the Company in 1775 regarding her *muta ‘alliq jāgīrs*: Aitchison, Vol. II, 78-80, and FDP, CR Vol. 3 (1775-77), Nos. 65-66 and 78.

In the immediate aftermath of Buxar, when the council and Company military officers sincerely contemplated redistributing conquered territory in Awadh and Allahabad, perpetuating this ill-defined dispensation suited both the Company and Shah Alam, particularly since the territories in question would appertain not to an individual but to the theoretically transferrable office of the *nizāmat/sūbadārī*. British officials, however, soon reversed course. Concerned that the emperor would not be able to insulate Bengal from the Maratha confederacy, Governor Robert Clive persuaded the council to rescind its agreement with Shah Alam and restore the Awadh *ṣūba* to Shuja-ud-daula.¹⁴³ Reflecting the Company's desire to establish a durable buffer zone in the particular hands of the nawab, the subsequent treaty clearly articulated perpetual, proprietary, and hereditary rights to the Awadh territory for Shuja-ud-daula and his family. Significantly, it abandoned any pretense that the province was merely “connected” (*muta'alliq*) to the provincial governorship. Instead, it construed the Awadh territories as “the nawab's country” (*mulk-i nawwāb*) or “his own country” (*mulk-i khūd*). More importantly, his country was to be a hereditary possession, extending from the nawab to his heirs (*āl-i aulād-i ūshān*), as was his “perpetual friendship” with the Company, which in turn guaranteed British military assistance in the event of aggression against “his country.”¹⁴⁴

More radically, the treaty framed Shuja-ud-daula's rights to the province largely without reference to the emperor. Following his negotiations with the Company in late 1764, Shah Alam had issued a *farmān* decreeing that British forces were to place Awadh and Allahabad in his possession in exchange for the tributary payments of Raja Balwant Singh of Benares.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 3.

¹⁴⁴ For the Persian-language treaty, see BL, R. Johnson Papers, OMS I.O. Islamic 4753, fols. 20a-22a; for the English translation, see Aitchison, II, Part II, No. 24, 67-69.

¹⁴⁵ Aitchison, V, Part I, No. 1, 7-8.

Accordingly, Major Munro issued proclamations declaring that the emperor was now “supreme in Shuja-ud-daula’s dominions” and subsequently appointed new *ṣūbadārs* in Shah Alam’s name.¹⁴⁶ Yet by the following summer the transfer was decisively reversed without regard for the earlier documents. Given how irrevocable and sacrosanct the Company had long considered imperial *farmāns* in general and the immense weight they would give to Shah Alam’s *farmān* (also issued in August 1765) granting them the Bengal *dīwānī*, this seems rather curious.¹⁴⁷

In part, the reversal had much to do with divisions among the Company’s leadership, particularly following Robert Clive’s return to India in 1765. Yet the ability of Clive to set aside the previous agreement also revealed how, at least for the Awadh dynasty, the sources of its territorial rights and sovereign authority had suddenly shifted from the Timurid emperors into the hands of the Company. In this regard, Shah Alam’s *farmān* of 1764, although heralded with much less fanfare than that granting the *dīwānī* the following year, was perhaps as significant in remaking the political landscape of eighteenth-century North India. While the *farmān* indicated only the grant of revenue from Benares and stipulated that the emperor was to be installed in Awadh and Allahabad, the document was reinterpreted to have transferred the entire provinces into Company hands. Thus, when Shuja-ud-daula paid the fifty-*lakh* indemnity mandated by the 1765 treaty, he was in effect buying back the province from its “original proprietor.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 227, 235.

¹⁴⁷ For the role of *farmāns* in Company ideology, see Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, esp. pp. 55-66, and P.J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

¹⁴⁸ The phrase “original proprietor” is Warren Hastings’s. Hastings to J. Dupre, 9 Mar. 1773, in G. R. Gleig, *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Hon. Warren Hastings, First Governor-General of Bengal: Compiled from Original Papers* (London: R. Bentley, 1841), Vol. I, 302.

Given the emperor's displeasure with the Allahabad treaty (which left him only the districts of Kara and Kora in the Allahabad *ṣūba* for his "royal demesne") and the Company's desire to reach a settlement over the *dīwānī*, it is unsurprising that Clive and others did not trumpet their revised view of the 1764 *farmān*. Yet the consensus established between Shuja-ud-daula and Clive would have profound effects for the relationship between the Company and the Awadh ruling family. As Chapter 3 illustrates, the notion of Awadh having been purchased from the Company would allow Shuja-ud-daula's widow, Bahu Begum, who paid half of the indemnity from her own treasury, to argue after her husband's death that she had financed the restoration and was therefore entitled to share in that purchased authority. At the same time, the desire of the Awadh ruling family and the Company to obscure the imperial roots of Shuja-ud-daula's sovereign and territorial claims led both to emphasize the nawab's hereditary title to his territories a source of authority in its own right.

Accordingly, in the wake of the treaty of Allahabad, Awadh would be suddenly reconstructed in English and Persian discourse as Shuja-ud-daula's "hereditary dominions" (*mumālik-i maurūṣī*). And although the construction was convenient for both the Awadh family and the Company, the principle of hereditary proprietorship would remain in perpetual tension with a narrative of the province's restoration by the Company, a notion that would itself anticipate later theories of British paramountcy.¹⁴⁹ Even fifty years later, Shuja-ud-daula's grandson, the Nawab Ghazi-ud-din Haidar would demonstrate the enduring contradictions at the heart of the Anglo-Awadh consensus, as he awkwardly attempted to reconcile the two views:

¹⁴⁹ For a useful overview of late-nineteenth-century theories of British paramountcy, see B.N. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 92-98.

Although my grandfather [Shuja-ud-daula] held hereditary and proprietary rights to the vazir-ship (*milkiyat-i wizārat-i maurūṣī*)...had the Company not restored his hereditary territory (*mulk-i maurūṣī*) ... this family's sovereign authority (*riyāsat-i īn khāndān*) would not have endured."¹⁵⁰

Defining local sovereignty and the limits of imperial authority, 1764-75

In the short term, however, the reinterpretation of the *farmān* and the reconstruction of the Awadh province as the nawab's hereditary dominions only served to alienate Shah Alam from Shuja-ud-daula and the Company during the emperor's continued exile in Allahabad. Until his return to Delhi in 1772, the emperor wrangled incessantly with the nawab and British officials over his ability to exercise independent, sovereign authority from the transplanted imperial court. Although Shuja-ud-daula and the Company would remain wary of one another, especially after the former began to expand the size and sophistication of his armed forces, they remained a largely unified front in their disputes with Shah Alam, conflicts that would continue to redefine the limits of territorial sovereignty within the North Indian remnants of the Mughal empire over the next decade.

These debates between the emperor, Shuja-ud-daula, and the Company concerned three interrelated issues. The first was the extent to which the nawab's authority in Awadh would be recognized as supreme and exclusive, an issue which was contested primarily through disputes over whether the nawab was obliged to honor local revenue grants assigned by former or current emperors. As others have illustrated, Safdar Jang's ability to wrest away the prerogative to grant *jāgīrs* in Awadh was a pivotal step in establishing *de facto* provincial autonomy.¹⁵¹ Moreover, as

¹⁵⁰ Ghazi-ud-din Haidar to Lord Moira, FDPt, OR 13 Oct. 1814, No. 16, and CR, Vol. 44 (Sep. to Dec. 1814)

¹⁵¹ Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 282.

we have seen and as the next section will illustrate further, Shuja-ud-daula continued to consolidate his household's supremacy in Awadh by resuming various revenue grants and by transforming *jāgīrs* into an exclusive perquisite for his close relatives and retainers. This did not, however, mean, the process went unchallenged. In November, 1765, following the ratification of the treaty of Allahabad, the emperor sought to test the new dispensation, as well as the Company's commitment to upholding imperial sovereignty, by awarding ostensibly irrevocable, hereditary grants (*altamghā*) in Awadh to Shuja-ud-daula's long-time foe, Ahmad Khan Bangash, and by requesting the Company to enforce the grant. Governor Clive, having secured peace with Shuja-ud-daula and legitimacy for British power in Bengal, had no intention of upsetting his new ally. Instead, he declined to intervene, remarking that it would unbecoming since the nawab was "entirely independent."¹⁵²

Several years later, a related case arose, this time concerning more long-standing rights in Awadh. In 1771, the Nawab of Arcot wrote to Warren Hastings to renew a dispute that he had taken up repeatedly with the governor's predecessors. According to the nawab, Shuja-ud-daula had seized from his relatives "lands, gardens, and other properties" in the *pargana* of Gopamau, assets which they had held under *altamghā* grants issued by the emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707). Yet despite the Nawab of Arcot's protests that this property was "theirs by right of the [imperial] *altamghā*," he nevertheless tacitly acknowledged Shuja-ud-daula's local authority by offering either to purchase the *pargana* from him outright, or to offer tribute in exchange for a new grant. Hoping to placate the nawab, who had been a lucrative ally for the Company in South India, Hastings wrote to Shuja-ud-daula in support of the offer.¹⁵³ Although it is unclear how the

¹⁵² CPC, I, Nos. 2743 and 2750

¹⁵³ CPC, Vol. III (1770-72), Nos. 986 and 993.

matter was resolved, Hastings seems to have conceded not only that past or present imperial mandates could not be enforced in Awadh against the nawab's will, but also that he held full proprietary rights to his territorial dominions, theoretically negating imperial *altamghās* altogether.

The territorial scope of his sovereign authority was, however, still subject to some debate, as one final incident shows. In 1773, Kalyan Singh, the son of the late Shitab Rai, an influential servant of the Company who had helped negotiate the treaty of 1765, complained that the nawab had resumed his father's *jāgīrs* in Awadh and Allahabad.¹⁵⁴ Earlier in the year, following the conclusion of a new treaty between the Company and Shuja-ud-daula, the latter province had been sold (back) to the nawab, British officials considering possession to have reverted to them following Shah Alam's departure for Delhi in 1771. Continuing the program he had begun in Awadh, Shuja-ud-daula began confiscating imperial grants in Allahabad as well. Hastings, however, was determined to prevent a loyal Company servant from being disenfranchised and he eventually pressured Shuja-ud-daula to restore Kalyan Singh's *jāgīrs* in Allahabad.¹⁵⁵

Yet unlike Kalyan Singh, who believed he derived his "legitimate rights" from the *sanad* issued by Shah Alam, Hastings not only dismissed the emperor's ostensible prerogatives and authority, but also made a clear distinction between Shuja-ud-daula's sovereignty in Awadh and his privileges in more recently acquired territories. In a letter sent to the nawab in early 1774, Hastings conceded that "[he] was free to deal as he like[d] with the *jāgīr* in the province of Oudh, which depended entirely upon his bounty." However, stressing that the nawab's claims to Allahabad were categorically different than those to Awadh, the governor continued: "When the

¹⁵⁴ CPC, Vol. IV (1772-75), No. 623.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 868

Company ceded the provinces of Kora and Allahabad to the Nawab, it was not their intention that ... the *jagir*, which neither belonged to the King nor to the Company, should go along with them.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, while they were willing to enforce his newly defined rights to hereditary, proprietary sovereignty over Awadh, British officials were hardly prepared to see such authority extended outside the province’s territorial boundaries.

This territorialization of sovereignty similarly informed a second point of contention between the nawab, the Company, and the emperor, namely Shuja-ud-daula’s rights as *wazīr* outside of Awadh. Following the invasion of the Afghan emperor Ahmad Shah Durrani and the battle of Panipat in 1761, Ahmad Shah and, later, Shah Alam had awarded Shuja-ud-daula the imperial *wizārat*, a post that had been held by his father Safdar Jang from 1748 to 1753.¹⁵⁷ Although he was stripped of the position after the defeat at Buxar and his separation from the emperor, the nawab became *wazīr* once again in 1766 when Clive pressured Shah Alam to reappoint him.¹⁵⁸ The restoration suited both Shuja-ud-daula and the Company quite well, ideally allowing the former to assume control over imperial appointments and the latter to manipulate the emperor through an indigenous intermediary.

The emperor’s begrudging appointment, however, hardly signaled his intention to cooperate with Shuja-ud-daula or the Company. Bitter at how he had been treated by the nawab in the years prior to Buxar, the emperor had no desire to see Shuja-ud-daula managing his affairs. Furthermore, the emperor was increasingly frustrated by the refusals of the nawab and a succession of British governors to install him on the imperial throne in Delhi, which Clive had

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., No. 759. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁷ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 100-101, 126.

¹⁵⁸ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 30-33.

promised to do in exchange for Shah Alam conceding Shuja-ud-daula's restoration in Awadh and for granting the *dīwānī* to the Company.¹⁵⁹ In Shah Alam's eyes, despite being lauded as “the strong arm” (*quwwat bāzū*) of the *salṭanat*—here understood as the emperor's personal sovereign authority—the Company was deliberately failing to use its considerable power and restore him to his rightful place.¹⁶⁰ To demonstrate his displeasure with British officials and to block Shuja-ud-daula's interference in his affairs, the emperor invested Munir-ud-daula, his trusted *khānsāmān* (steward), as deputy *wazīr* to manage his household and truncated “royal demesne” in Allahabad.¹⁶¹

This move, and the emperor's refusal to remove Munir-ud-daula, resulted in several years of conflict between Shuja-ud-daula and Shah Alam. In their ensuing correspondence with Company officials, the nawab and the emperor not only fought rhetorical battles over the powers of the deputy *wazīr*, but also over their respective visions for the empire. Envisioning a sphere of influence extending well beyond the circumscribed territorial boundaries of his “hereditary dominions,” Shuja-ud-daula presented an expansive view of his office, claiming not only exclusive management of the emperor's household (*sarkār-i wālā*), his “demesne” (*khāliṣa-i sharīfa*), and his political and military affairs, but also rights to additional *jāgīrs* and perquisites outside of Awadh.¹⁶² Moreover, perhaps hoping to shape the empire in the image of his increasingly centralized, household-based administration in Awadh, the nawab frequently likened the imperial hierarchy to the formalized rankings of the Company's military, with the *wazīr* at its

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁰ For the emperor's use of the phrase “*quwwat bāzū-yi salṭanat*,” see his letters to Clive, in National Library of Wales, Robert Clive Papers, Original Correspondence, CR 9/24-26.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Chapter 13.

¹⁶² CPC, Vol. II (1767-69), Nos. 768, 799, 848, and 948.

summit. Just as “a colonel, a captain, and a sergeant in a battalion have a personal, vested authority in their respective stations and...claim control of whatever is within the circle of that authority,” so too did imperial officials, with the *wazīr* necessarily possessing the widest circle.¹⁶³

The emperor predictably disagreed, construing rights and privileges within the empire as contingent not upon office but upon fidelity to the imperial dynasty. As he wrote regarding the continued service of Munir-ud-daula, the *khānsāmān* had not only attended him since his youth but had also served former emperors with great loyalty. Consequently, “if he [did] not reward those who [had] long and faithfully served him, it would be a deviation from the rules of Empire.”¹⁶⁴ More importantly, unlike Shuja-ud-daula, Munir-ud-daula recognized that the emperor was “the sole and absolute sovereign of his own realm and of all the transactions in his own Royal Court, and that His Majesty [would] never permit the pretensions of another to the administration of his affairs.”¹⁶⁵

Despite the rancor between them, the emperor and the *wazīr* were eventually able to reach an agreement in 1769, when a brief power vacuum around Delhi and Agra seemed to present an opportune time for Shah Alam’s return to the imperial capital. In exchange for escorting Shah Alam back to Delhi and attending him there for two years, Shuja-ud-daula would receive the full extra-territorial powers and perquisites of the *wizārat* (with a new *sanad* to confirm them) as well as a large share of any reconquered imperial territories.¹⁶⁶ The possibility

¹⁶³ Ibid., No. 799.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., No. 950.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., No. 834

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Nos. 1364-69.

of using the emperor to legitimate conquests outside of Awadh had long appealed to the nawab and he seems to have sincerely intended to accompany the emperor back to Delhi. The Company, however, feared that loss of the emperor would rupture the new confederacy of “imperial” states and permit a rival power to assemble a similar counter-coalition.¹⁶⁷ For a time British officials successfully prevailed upon the *wazīr* and Shah Alam to delay their departure. The emperor, however, finally forced the Company’s hand in 1771 by allying with the Marathas and declaring his absolute intention to quit Allahabad. Unwilling to keep the emperor in Allahabad by force and wary of hostilities with the Marathas, Shuja-ud-daula and a detachment of Company forces escorted Shah Alam to the provincial frontier, from whence he entered Delhi in early 1772.¹⁶⁸

Ultimately, the emperor’s return to Delhi would spark a final debate, this time concerning the very sources of sovereign authority in India. For the seven years that he resided in Allahabad following the battle of Buxar, the emperor had served, in the eyes of Company officials, as the titular sovereign of a Mughal empire being reunited under the aegis of the Company and Shuja-ud-daula. This new empire, however, was not to be a restoration of the Timurid dynasty’s (theoretical) universal authority, or of the *salṭanat* as unified state apparatus, but rather a confederacy of *de facto* independent states—of which the emperor and his exalted *sarkār* were to be but one. As Governor Verelst enumerated to Shah Alam in 1768, compared “with the distracted and confused state of the Empire but a few years ago...the royal demesne of Allahabad and Kora, the territories of Shuja-ud-daula, the *ṣūbas* of Bengal, Behar and the Carnatic [i.e., provinces held by the Company] all form part of the Empire now.”¹⁶⁹ The territorial claims of

¹⁶⁷ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 150.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-69.

¹⁶⁹ CPC, II, 660.

these states, as discussed previously, were to be grounded in perpetual grants that had originated with the emperor. In this regard, the Company's vision of empire differed from those of the Mughal elite or the Marathas only, perhaps, in the irrevocability they attached to the imperial *sanads*.

The departure of Shah Alam in 1771, however, and his renunciation of the imperial confederation, seemed to upend the foundations on which this formation had been constructed, particularly with regard to the sources of sovereign authority. As long as the emperor had remained in Allahabad, both Company officials and Shuja-ud-daula maintained that the Awadh *ṣūba* had been Shah Alam's to restore. As the nawab wrote as part of his pledge to return the emperor to Delhi, he enjoyed possession of Awadh "by the blessing of God and through his Majesty's munificence."¹⁷⁰ For his part, the emperor gladly upheld this view. When accused of undermining Shuja-ud-daula's authority as *wazīr*, Shah Alam demanded to know how it was possible that he "should think of doing anything to the prejudice or disgrace of a person whom he himself [had] graciously restored to the possession of his country."¹⁷¹

This pretense extended similarly to the *ṣūba* of Allahabad, the *sanads* for which Shah Alam conferred upon Shuja-ud-daula prior to his arrival in Delhi. The grant, however, soon exposed how fictive the nawab and the Company considered the emperor's authority. As British officials had feared, once back in Delhi, the emperor soon fell under the sway of the powerful Maratha *sardārs*, who by this time controlled nearly all "imperial" territories south of the Ganga. Angered by a treaty signed in 1772 between Shuja-ud-daula and the Rohilla Afghans, in which the nawab pledged to assist the Afghans against the Marathas, the Marathas pressured the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., No. 1366.

¹⁷¹ CPC, I, No. 2759.

emperor to transfer to them the two primary districts constituting the Allahabad *ṣūba*, namely Kora and Kara.¹⁷² Shuja-ud-daula and the Company, however, were not prepared to recognize the transfer. Instead, both disavowed the emperor's rights over Allahabad altogether. As Shuja-ud-daula now explained to Warren Hastings, the Company's new governor-general in Bengal, sovereignty over the province had always resided with him but he had ceded the province to the emperor *temporarily* out of respect for the Company: "It is known to all that Kora, Kara, and Allahabad were formerly in [my] possession but were subsequently handed over to [Shah Alam] agreeably to the desire of the English *sardārs*, whose pleasure and satisfaction was the foremost object of [my] heart."¹⁷³ The nawab made a similar argument in a letter of protest to the emperor: "Previously this house-born slave (*khānzād*) had given Kora and Kara in honorary tribute (*nazr*) to the royal household (*sarkār-i wālā*). He had never contemplated it for the Marathas." More defiantly, he asked the emperor to keep in mind that he would never waive his claims to the territory, pledging "by divine and imperial favor" that he would "seize *his territory* from the Marathas (*jā-yi khūd-rā az marhata-hā khwāhad girift*) and never relinquish it (*hargiz nakhwāhad guzāsh*)." ¹⁷⁴

Hastings made similar arguments, though he invested the Company, rather than Shuja-ud-daula, with original authority over Allahabad. While he would later make much of Shah Alam's deliberate renunciation of the Company alliance and his abandonment of Allahabad, it is clear that neither action had fundamentally altered the chain of proprietary claims or sovereign authority over the province. Rather, it had merely returned title to the Company, the province's

¹⁷² Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 205

¹⁷³ CPC, IV, No. 172.

¹⁷⁴ BL, Hastings Papers, Add. 29,195: Letters from Natives, fol. 65a. Emphasis added.

“original proprietors,” who had allegedly assumed it in 1764-5 by right of conquest.¹⁷⁵ For Hastings, these proprietary rights permitted him to sell the province to Shuja-ud-daula, which he did by treaty in 1773 for five million rupees. While masking them with declarations of the emperor’s bad faith and deliberate forfeiture, the first article of the new treaty made clear that rights and sovereignty over Allahabad—and perhaps Awadh, as well—lay first and foremost with the Company:

Whereas, in the Treaty concluded at Allahabad...it is expressed that the districts of Corah and Allahabad were given to his His Majesty for his expenses; and whereas, His Majesty has abandoned the possession of the aforesaid districts...contrary to the meaning of the said Treaty, and hath thereby forfeited his right to the said districts, which have reverted to the Company *from whom he received them*; it is therefore agreed, that the aforesaid districts shall be put into the possession of the Vizier...*in the same manner as the Province of Oudh*.¹⁷⁶

Besides formally denying Shah Alam’s dominion over Allahabad, the 1773 treaty negotiations signaled other ways in which Shuja-ud-daula and Hastings hoped to nullify imperial authority still further. During his conversations with Shuja-ud-daula in the summer of 1773, Hastings—presaging the Company’s later efforts—attempted to persuade the nawab to declare himself an independent emperor. Shuja-ud-daula declined but agreed to pursue an investiture from King George III as the English monarch’s *wazīr* in India, sending petitions to the king

¹⁷⁵ This was also Hastings’s view regarding the Company’s claims over Bengal and its cessation of tribute payments to Shah Alam. See Hastings’s minute of 12 Oct. 1773, in G. Forrest et al., *Selections from the Letters, Despatches and Other State Papers Preserved in the Foreign Department of the Government of India, 1772-1785* (Calcutta: Printed by the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, 1890), Vol. I, 46-51. Such a view, however, was disingenuous and perhaps illegal on Hastings’s part, as royal jurists had determined that territories conquered by the Company’s forces were in fact property of the Crown. For an illuminating discussion of this point, see R. Travers, “A British Empire by Treaty in 18th-Century India,” in Salia Belmessous, ed., *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 144.

¹⁷⁶ Aitchison, II, Part II, No. 28. Emphasis added.

shortly before signing the treaty in September.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, Hastings and the nawab resolved that the Company should cease paying from the revenue of Bengal annual tribute to the emperor, an arrangement which had long been a matter of dispute between Shah Alam and the Company.¹⁷⁸ Most significantly, Hastings approved the nawab's undertaking a campaign of conquest against the Rohillas—with or without imperial sanction—and pledged to assist him with the Company's forces. Hastings would later justify the controversial measure by framing the Rohilla Afghans as “foreign” usurpers, who had not only broken a treaty with Shuja-ud-daula, but who had also illicitly occupied territories that, by both political and geographic logic, should be part of the Awadh dominions.¹⁷⁹ For his part, Shuja-ud-daula viewed the matter more cautiously and purchased from the imperial court *sanads* for Rohilkhand, as well as territories in the Doab he had recently reconquered from the Marathas.¹⁸⁰ Once in possession of the documents, however, the nawab considered the transfer irrevocable and proceeded to renege upon agreements to share the annexed territories with the emperor.

Unfortunately for Shuja-ud-daula, the nawab did not enjoy his new territories for long, succumbing to an infection shortly after returning from the campaign in January 1775. However, his successor, Asaf-ud-daula, hoped to take full advantage of them, having been recognized by the Company as “the sole heir to the late nawab's property and [to all] his territorial possessions” (*wāriṣ-i qawwī-yi mamlūka wa mumālik-i mutaṣarrufa-yi nawwāb-i marḥūm*), including

¹⁷⁷ CPC, IV, Nos. 477-78. The Awadh rulers would not declare themselves independent “emperors” (*bādshāhs*) until 1819. For a discussion of the imperial coronation and its aftermath, see M.H. Fisher, “The Imperial Coronation of 1819: Awadh, the British and the Mughals,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, no. 2 (1985): 239-77, and *A Clash of Cultures*, 115-52.

¹⁷⁸ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 221-23.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁸⁰ A. Polier, *Shah Alam II and His Court, a Narrative of the Transactions at the Court of Delhy from the Year 1771 to the Present Time*, ed. by Pratul Chandra Gupta (Calcutta: S.C. Sarkar and Sons, 1947), 36.

Rohilkhand, Kora, and Allahabad.¹⁸¹ More importantly, he hoped to capitalize upon the compartmentalization of imperial authority and regional sovereignty constructed by Shuja-ud-daula and the Company over the previous decade. Considering himself “the sole possessor of his Subah,” Asaf-ud-daula applied indifferently to the emperor, and only to renew the *wizārat* and other imperial household offices held by his father.¹⁸²

As subsequent chapters will show, Asaf-ud-daula’s attempts to enjoy sole possession of his hereditary dominions would soon be challenged by the Company’s growing ambitions in Awadh, both for additional sources of revenue and for greater administrative control. They would also be complicated by his close relatives and members of his late father’s household, who, over the course of the previous decade, had assumed greater control of provincial administration and finance. Indeed, as much as the separation of imperial authority and local sovereignty furthered Shuja-ud-daula’s extraterritorial designs, they also permitted him to expand the process of consolidating military power, local administration, and proprietary sovereignty among a close network of households and a narrowly defined ruling dynasty. It is to this process that the final section now turns.

The *Shujā’ī* dispensation: Household, family, and state formation, 1765-75

For contemporary Company observers and many modern historians, the most important changes occurring in Awadh following the treaty of Allahabad were military in nature, as the

¹⁸¹ FDP, CR 3, No. 8.

¹⁸² The Swiss mercenary and adventurer Antoine Polier claimed that Asaf-ud-daula applied for *sanads* for his various territories as well as for the household offices (*Shah Alam II and His Court*, 41-42). This claim, however, is not substantiated by other sources, and the extant copies of Shah Alam’s relevant *farmāns* and *shuqqas* mention only the *wizārat* and household offices. FDP, CR 5, Nos. 71-72.

nawab transformed his massive and unreliable cavalry force into a disciplined infantry drilled in the European style.¹⁸³ This, however, was not a purely “military” endeavor. Rather, it was also shaped by the on-going processes of household and family formation, and the creation of hereditary, proprietary sovereignty over the Awadh dominions. This was most evident in the new army’s pay and enlistment structure, as well as the composition of its commanders. Prior to the battle of Buxar, many if not most of the nawab’s most important cavalry commanders (*sardārs*, *risāladārs*) were “Mughals,” many of whom were at least distantly related to the nawab. After the battle, however, many of the Mughals deserted the nawab, taking service with either the emperor in Allahabad or with the Company.¹⁸⁴ Those who remained or returned later were given small stipends by the nawab “out of regard to their [shared] kinship” (*az pās-i qaumiyat*) but were also stripped of command.¹⁸⁵ In their place, the nawab installed “eunuchs, *chēlas*, and household slaves (*khwājasarāyan wa chēla-hā wa ghulāmān-i khānagī*)” over most of the newly formed infantry units (*paltan*).¹⁸⁶ Moreover, he reserved for himself the sole control over the enlistment, payment, and demobilization of soldiers, removing issues that had often put him at odds with his Mughal kinsmen in the years before Buxar.¹⁸⁷

The creation of a standing infantry army necessarily created additional financial burdens for the nawab, pressures he dealt with by further centralizing his administration along what have been described as “military-fiscalist” lines.¹⁸⁸ Yet here as well, this was part of a larger process of

¹⁸³ See, for example, Barnett, *North India Between Empires*, 75-83.

¹⁸⁴ *Imād-us-sa’adat*, 98; *Ma’āşir-i ṭālibī*, 8-9.

¹⁸⁵ *Imād-us-sa’adat*, 98.

¹⁸⁶ BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4764, Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh, *Tārīkh-i farah bakhsh*, fol. 3a.

¹⁸⁷ *Imād-us-sa’adat*, 101-2.

¹⁸⁸ B. Stein, “Eighteenth-century India: Another View,” in P. J Marshall, ed. *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62-89.

household and family formation, one that was in turn shaped by the new consensus between the nawab and the Company concerning local sovereign authority. As we have seen, this shared vision of sovereignty, as territorially circumscribed, compartmentalized from imperial authority, and increasingly proprietary, had permitted the nawab to resume *jāgīrs* and grants awarded by Mughal emperors, past and present. It also allowed him to resume a controversial project of his grandfather's, namely the resumption of hereditary *madad-i ma'āsh* grants from Awadh's influential Muslim gentry.¹⁸⁹ Finally, he also gained the freedom to institute "customary seizures" (*rasm-i zabṭī*) of property from deceased or disgraced members of his family and administration, including those protected by the treaty of Allahabad.¹⁹⁰

In this regard, the case of Beni Bahadur, Shuja-ud-daula's *nā'ib*, is particularly illustrative. Although initially tempted by the Company's offer to assume the Awadh *ṣūbadārī* himself, Beni Bahadur eventually returned to the nawab's service. Shuja-ud-daula, however, no longer trusted his once reliable deputy, secretly plotting against him and later asking Clive to allow him to depose the *nā'ib*. Despite the nawab having pledged in the treaty not to harm "any of [his] relations and dependents who have assisted in the Company in earlier conflicts (*har ki az aqrabā wa mutawassilān-i nawwāb shujā'-ud-daula dar jang-hā-yi māzīya a'ānat-i firqa-yi angrēz namūda-and*)," Governor Clive gave his assent anyway.¹⁹¹ According to a later account that echoed the evolving discourse of Anglo-Awadh relations, Clive supposedly replied: "We have no business with the nawab's domestic affairs (*mā-rā bi-amūr-i khānagī-yi nawwāb ṣāhib*

¹⁸⁹ For the position of the *madad-i ma'āsh* holders in rural Awadh and their relationship with Sa'adat Khan, see Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 114-17 and 220-24.

¹⁹⁰ The phrase *rasm-i zabṭī* is Abu Talib Khan's. *Tafzīh-ul-ghafilīn*, 120.

¹⁹¹ *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 100.

sar wa kār nīst). He should do whatever he wants. He is supreme (*mukhtār*).”¹⁹² With the governor’s permission, Shuja-ud-daula arrested and blinded Beni Bahadur, seizing the massive fortune he had amassed as *nā’ib* and *faujdār* of Khairabad.

“Military-fiscalism” and household centralization further intersected in post-1765 administrative appointments. Here, enslaved eunuchs and *chēlas* played as significant a role as they did in the nawab’s new military establishment. As Chapter 5 will explore in further detail, within the Awadh regime and the sovereign household-state (*sarkār*), there was tremendous overlap between the conceptual divisions of the household as domestic space (*khāna*), the army (*sipāh*), and provincial administration (*mulk*), and the most influential eunuchs and *chēlas* held important offices in all three.¹⁹³ In one notable example, Bahar Ali Khan supervised the nawab’s main treasury (*khizāna-yi khāṣṣ*), mint (*dār-ul-ḡarb*), litter house (*palki khāna*), traveling equipage (*khīma wa khargāh*), elephants, carriages, pharmacy (*davā’ī khāna*), kitchen (*bāvarchī khāna*), as well as other “domestic affairs” (*amūr-i khānagī*) of Bahu Begum, Shuja-ud-daula’s chief consort. He also commanded sizable bodies of troops as the *faujdār* of several large districts. While Bahar Ali Khan’s portfolio was perhaps unusually expansive, it was hardly exceptional, and many eunuchs are described as having “duties and offices inside and outside [the palace] (*kār wa khidmāt-i andarūn wa bīrūn*).”¹⁹⁴

As shown below, the eunuchs’ ability to move freely between the interior spaces of the household (*ḥaram/andarūn*) and the outside world (*bīrūn*) made them vital instruments for the

¹⁹² For the Persian-language treaty, see BL, R. Johnson Papers, OMS I.O. Islamic 4753, fols. 20a-22a; for the English translation, see Aitchison, II, Part II, No. 24, 67-69.

¹⁹³ For these conceptual divisions of the “state” under Akbar, see S.P. Blake, “The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 1 (1979): 77–94.

¹⁹⁴ *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, II, 23.

nawab's senior female relations to project power outside the palace. It also made them critical agents in binding the *nawwābī* household(s) to the province. While some theorists have seen eunuchism as the highest expression of slavery's operation by "natal alienation" or an extreme example of the despotic Oriental state's tendency to rule through "foreign" slave elites, the Awadh regime defies both of these characterizations.¹⁹⁵ Although the Mughal court often procured eunuchs from the distant, "foreign" frontier regions of Bengal, the fragmentation and territorialization of political power in the eighteenth century likely weakened the long-distance slave trade between the Gangetic plain and the Burmese borderlands.¹⁹⁶ As a result, most eunuchs in eighteenth-century Awadh were procured from local non-Muslim populations within the province or from the neighboring Doab, although they were subsequently converted to Islam.

These local origins permitted eunuchs to retain or reestablish contact with their natal families, even over relatively long distances. For example, Basant Ali Khan, Shuja-ud-daula's foremost infantry commander and drill master, had originally been "descended from a good family" in Delhi before being captured, castrated and sold to the nawab. However, after learning of these circumstances, the nawab later sent for Basant Ali Khan's family and "settled a very handsome maintenance upon them."¹⁹⁷ In another instance, a "natural eunuch" (*khwājasarā-yi aṣlī*) whose family had exchanged him for tax-free lands, Darab Ali Khan used his Hindu brothers to lend money from Bahu Begum's *sarkār* and thereby escape Islamic legal prohibitions

¹⁹⁵ O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 315-25; and K.A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 344-62.

¹⁹⁶ G. Hambly, "A Note on the Trade in Eunuchs in Mughal Bengal," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 1 (1974): 125-30.

¹⁹⁷ BL, Hastings Papers, Add. 29,202, fol. 116b.

against usury.¹⁹⁸ More well known, Almas Ali Khan relied upon his Jat origins and familial connections to establish himself under Asaf-ud-daula as the regime's most successful revenue farmer and a virtually independent ruler of the Doab.¹⁹⁹

From these and other examples it is evident that not only did the *nawwābī* regime do little to “alienate” eunuchs from their natal families, they in fact encouraged them to maintain close ties with their families. This was not, of course, merely a matter of compassion on the part of the regime. Rather, it was a calculated effort to make them more effective commanders, administrators and revenue collectors, as eunuchs often drew upon their natal connections in Awadh's cultivating and commercial communities in fulfilling their various duties. And while eunuchs in Awadh have been portrayed as an important cultural “interface” between “Hindu” and “[Shi'i] Muslim” communities, it may be equally productive to think of eunuchs as establishing a continuum between, on the one hand, the *nawwābī* household-state in the growing urban capitals of Lucknow and Faizabad, and rural society on the other.²⁰⁰

The role of eunuchs in facilitating this increasingly close linkage between the *sarkār* and rural society, as well as in the contraction of the ruling family, can be seen in the oft-transferred *faujdārī* of Khairabad, a district in northwest Awadh near the frontier with Rohilkhand. At the beginning of Shuja-ud-daula's reign the district was governed by one Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, a “Mughal” cousin of Safdar Jang who had long held the *faujdārī*.²⁰¹ He was eventually

¹⁹⁸ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, II, 193-94; *Tārīkh-i farah bakhsh*, II, 92. Presumably “*aṣlī*” here connotes that the child was born intersex and/or with other genital abnormalities.

¹⁹⁹ C.A. Elliott, *The Chronicles of Oonao. A District in Oudh*. (Allahabad: Printed at the Allahabad Mission Press, 1862), 124-26.

²⁰⁰ Cf. J.R.I Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shīsm in Iran and Iraq Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 225. For another view of eunuchs in Awadh, see J. Hinchy, “Enslaved Childhoods in Eighteenth-Century India,” *South Asian History and Culture*, 6, no. 3 (2015): 380-400.

²⁰¹ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, I, 46

replaced, however, by Beni Bahadur, who impressed Shuja-ud-daula with his ability not only to secure loans from local bankers but also to oust Mughal *tankhwāhdārs* (stipendiaries) from Khairabad.²⁰² Following Beni Bahadur's arrest in 1767, Shuja-ud-daula assigned the *faujdārī* to his young sons, Sa'adat Ali Khan and Mirza Jangli, who were under the supervision of Beni Bahadur's officers.²⁰³ Sometime thereafter, the *faujdārī* was transferred again, this time to the eunuch Anbar Ali Khan, who had been captured and castrated by Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, the former *faujdār*, and then transferred to Shuja-ud-daula's custody when the Awadh ruler asserted his proprietary rights over the boys and raised them in his household.²⁰⁴

Through their increased influence under Shuja-ud-daula, eunuchs became so strongly associated with the Awadh regime that the nawab's grandson, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar (r. 1814-28), commented some forty years later that his family was "remarkable for the number of eunuchs in its service."²⁰⁵ Yet in addition to their role in military and administrative reforms, the expanded presence of eunuchs pointed to other changes in the ruling household and family itself, changes that were similarly interwoven with the dynasty's evolving conception of its own sovereign authority. Foremost among these was the increased "visibility" of Shuja-ud-daula's mother and chief consort within the regime. While these women strictly observed norms of elite female seclusion (which, in turn, underscored the ruling family's rising status) and thus did not become literally more visible, their power, as projected through the enlarged establishment of eunuchs, became much more apparent.

²⁰² *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 81.

²⁰³ *Chahār gulzār-i shujā'ī*, 392-94

²⁰⁴ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, I, 47, 54.

²⁰⁵ NAI, Foreign Department-Political Consultation [FDPC], 27 Feb. 1819, No. 40.

As with other developments in the ruling family, however, this was not a sudden byproduct of the treaty of Allahabad but a trend amplified by the new alliance. As we have seen, Sadr-un-nissa Begum—the eldest daughter of Sa’adat Khan, the wife of Safdar Jang, and the mother of Shuja-ud-daula—was an influential figure during the reigns of her husband and son, and was instrumental in helping to challenge the nawab’s Mughal kinsmen. Similarly, despite a distant and perhaps “unhappy” relationship with her husband during the first decade of his reign, Bahu Begum, Shuja-ud-daula’s chief consort, probably exerted a fair degree of influence through her brothers, who became important courtiers in Awadh after fleeing Delhi in 1754. The prominence and prestige of each woman, as well as the inextricability of familial hierarchies and political power, was further demonstrated in 1764, when Mir Qasim, the ousted nawab of Bengal, arrived in Shuja-ud-daula’s camp. After presenting the nawab with customary gifts, Mir Qasim paid lavish tribute to the begums, solemnly declaring Sadr-un-nissa Begum to be his own mother.²⁰⁶

Nevertheless, Shuja-ud-daula’s alliance with the Company shifted the generational balance of power between the two women, especially after Bahu Begum paid half the indemnity mandated by the treaty in cash and jewels from her personal treasury (see Chapter 3). Subsequently, her influence over the nawab became, in the words of a Company informer, “almost unlimited.”²⁰⁷ More importantly, her increased influence was coupled with expanded economic power, as Shuja-ud-daula awarded her new *jāgīrs* and deposited with her not only treasures seized from Mir Qasim but also surplus revenue collections. She was, moreover, entrusted with his seal (*muhr*), from which she exacted, through the eunuch Jawahir Ali Khan, a

²⁰⁶ *Siyar-ul-muta’ākhīrīn*, I 327.

²⁰⁷ BL, Hastings Papers, Add. 29202, fol. 110b.

lucrative duty (*muhrāna*) for authorizing letters of appointment.²⁰⁸ Having clashed with Shuja-ud-daula over his decision to pursue hostilities against the Company and subsequently refused to assist him in paying the indemnity, Sadr-un-nissa Begum lost her much of her own influence with her son. Nevertheless, she retained considerable power for the remainder of his reign, administering her near-autonomous *jāgīrs* and *tankhwāh* territories in much the same fashion as Bahu Begum would do with her own “estate” well into the nineteenth century.²⁰⁹

The power of both begums was also augmented in relation to the nawab’s expanding and increasingly hierarchical household. In contrast to the number of the nawab’s more distant kin considered to be members of the ruling family and to maintain legitimate claims upon its “hereditary dominions,” the nawab’s immediate family and household grew rapidly after 1765. This was particularly true of the nawab’s offspring. Although he had one son by Bahu Begum and at least three others by different women prior to the battle of Buxar in 1764, the nawab fathered another forty or fifty sons and daughters by the time of his death (which may have been caused by complications from syphilis).²¹⁰ While contemporary sources attribute the nawab’s numerous progeny, as well as his death, to his prodigious (and perhaps compulsive) sexual appetites, his abandonment of his predecessors’ reproductive restraint also signaled a confident assertion of his own dynastic vitality vis-à-vis the Timurid house.²¹¹

The nawab’s liberal attitudes towards reproduction also resulted in the formation of a more hierarchical ruling household. At the top of this hierarchy were Sadr-un-nissa and Bahu

²⁰⁸ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, I, 50; NAI, Foreign Department-Secret Consultation [FDSC], 30 Apr. 1813, No. 2

²⁰⁹ BL, Hastings Papers, Add. 29202, fol. 110a.

²¹⁰ For the nawab’s numerous children, see: *Ibid.*, fols. 110b-113a; *Chahār gulzār-i shujā’ī*, 449-50; and *Tawārikh-i awadh*, 2-5; for the cause of the nawab’s death, see *Siyar-ul-muta’ākhkhirīn*, II, 93.

²¹¹ For a vivid description of the nawab’s seemingly compulsive sexual behavior, see BL, OMS Or. 1716, Khair-ud-din Muhammad, *Ibratnāma*, fol. 26b.

Begum, who were respectively Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-daula's sole *mankūha* wives (i.e., married by the *nikāḥ* rite recognized by both Sunni and Shi'i jurists). As such, they both received the titles of *nawwāb begum* (lit., "madam nawab") and *khāṣṣ maḥal* ("chief consort").²¹² The appellation of *khāṣṣ maḥal*, however, also extended to the begums' residences and to individuals under their authority. Among the latter were wives and children of Muhammad Quli Khan, as well as the daughters of Burhan-ul-mulk and their children, whose stipends from Shuja-ud-daula were initially administered by Sadr-un-nissa Begum and, after her death, by Bahu Begum.²¹³ Below the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums and their subordinate households were the women of the *khord maḥal*. Married to the nawab by the *muta'a*, or "temporary" rite recognized solely by Shi'i jurists, the women of the *khord maḥal* (numbering perhaps several hundred) enjoyed much less prestige within the ruling family, and their children were often declared by Company officials to be "illegitimate."²¹⁴ While this is something of a distortion, their inferior status (as reflected by the less prestigious marriage rite) was nevertheless critical to reifying the position of the *khāṣṣ maḥals* and their sons, and to establishing a household hierarchy suitable for a sovereign ruling family.

The newly circumscribed and increasingly hierarchical ruling family impressed its authority not only upon the military and fiscal administration of Awadh, but also upon the province's built environment as well. As shown above, the construction (or lack thereof) of household and urban spaces in Awadh had been shaped during the reigns of Sa'adat Khan and

²¹² *Tawārikh-i awadh*, 1-2.

²¹³ FDPC, 9 Feb. 1778, Nos. 5-7; Aitchison, II, Part II, No. 51, 126.

²¹⁴ *Chahār gulzār shujā'ī*, 449-50; *Memoirs of Faizabad*, II, 263-64; FDPC, 3 Feb. 1775, No. 1. See also M.H. Fisher, "Women and the Feminine in the Court and Culture of Awadh, 1722-1856," in G. Hambly, ed. *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), esp. pp. 491-3.

Safdar Jang by their preoccupation with imperial politics in Delhi and the demands of powerful *sardārs*, namely the nawabs' Mughal kinsmen. Following his accession, Shuja-ud-daula had made Lucknow his regular capital. After the treaty of Allahabad, however, he returned to Faizabad more permanently, a shift that was attributed apocryphally to advice the nawab received from Ahmad Khan Bangash while the latter sheltered him during the Company's occupation of Awadh. Suggesting the city fit into a larger program of reform and dynastic reassertion, the nawab's frequent adversary advised him that "if he should [re]gain governance of the province (*agar hukūmat-i šūba bi-dast āyad*)," he would be wise to consider his Mughal tribesmen (*qaum-i mughal*) untrustworthy; to place his own slaves and eunuchs over [all] his affairs (*ghulāmān wa khwājasarāyan-i khūd-rā bar rū-yi kār ārand*); and to make Faizabad his [permanent] place of residence (*maḥal-i sukūnat*).²¹⁵

As with his military and administrative reforms, the nawab's relocation to Faizabad was inaugurated by his removal of the Mughals. In the accounts of Indo-Persian chroniclers and Iranian travelers, this was a dramatic event indeed. Not only did the nawab "seize their property and homes and expel them, along with their wives and children, from the city (*māl wa asbāb wa khāna-yi īshān-rā zabt namūd wa bā zanān wa itfāl ikhrāj-ul-baladish*)," he also demolished those same homes to rebuild the city anew around his own reconstructed household and family.²¹⁶ After constructing a new fortress, subsequently known as "the noble abode" (*bayt-ush-sharf*) the nawab built inside new palaces and gardens for himself, his chief consort, and his mother.²¹⁷ At the same time, he had his brothers-in-law, closest confidants and highest-ranking

²¹⁵ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, I, 4; *Tārīkh-i farah bakhsh*, 1b.

²¹⁶ *Mir'āt-i aḥwāl-i jahān-numā*, 229.

²¹⁷ *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 106; *Chahār gulzār-i shujā'ī*, 394; *Memoirs of Faizabad*, I, 6.

eunuchs build their own mansions within the fortress walls, the latter's homes adjoining the Bahu Begum's residence, the Moti Mahal ("the Pearl Palace"). Additionally, much as his father had done previously, Shuja-ud-daula enjoined his other retainers and connections to build houses on a plain outside the fortress. Initially this space was bound by a moat dug two miles from the fortress but it was later enclosed by walls garrisoned by infantry commanded by the nawab's *chēlas*. Beyond the walls, cavalry commanders established their own cantonments (*chhā'onī*), particularly once the rapidly growing city became too confining.²¹⁸

As had the emperor Shah Jahan through his new imperial capital in Delhi, Shuja-ud-daula's reconstructed city of Faizabad signaled dynastic supremacy by arranging the city in concentric rings of power radiating out from the household-fortress complex.²¹⁹ At the same time, by administering the city—and the province—as an extension of his household, the nawab not only perpetuated earlier traditions of Perso-Islamic and Mughal governance, but also signaled his commitment to establishing his family's proprietary sovereignty in and over Awadh.²²⁰ By all accounts, Shuja-ud-daula took an active interest in the growth of the city. According to one historian, he toured the city and its environs everyday with a team of diggers. Anywhere he spied an uneven grade in the road or a shopkeeper's stoop extending into the street, he ordered the diggers to flatten the road or remove the obstruction.²²¹ Indeed, the nawab's readiness to appropriate and raze structures impeding development drew sharp criticism from some contemporaries. In the eyes of Ghulam Hussain Tabataba'i, Shuja-ud-daula "had no

²¹⁸ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, I, 5-7 and II, 180.

²¹⁹ See Blake, *Shahjahanabad*, esp. pp. 31-44.

²²⁰ Blake, *Shahjahanabad*, 17-25; M. Alam, "Sharī'a, Akhlaq, and Governance" in *The Languages of Political Islam in India: 1200-1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); R. O'Hanlon, "Kingdom, Household and Body History, Gender and Imperial Service," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2007): 889-923.

²²¹ *Memoirs of Faizabad*, I, 6.

concern for aggrieving the poor in building where he pleased and in destroying the homes of the people and his servants (*dar sākhtan-i jā-hā-yi khāṭirkhwāh-i khūd dar shikastan-i buyūt-i ra'āyā wa mulāzimān az izā wa azrār-i ghurbā parvā'ī namīnamūd*).” As a result, “many people’s homes and property were ruined, plundered by the diggers and architects of Shuja-ud-daula’s *sarkār* (*khāna-hā-yi bisīyar kasān ma' amwālishān barbād wa bi-tarāj-i baidārān wa arbāb-i 'imārāt-i sarkār-i shujā'ud-daula*).” “The oppressed,” he lamented “were left with no one listening but God.”²²²

Conclusion

For Tabataba'i, Shuja-ud-daula's proprietary attitude toward urban spaces in Faizabad was part of a larger pattern of the nawab's destructive disregard for established rights (*ḥuqūq*), particularly those of property. Listing the “wretched deeds” (*kār dar kamāl-i zishtī*) that left the nawab on his deathbed with “a heart full of regret” (*dil pur az ḥasrat*), Tabataba'i described not only the demolition of homes in Faizabad but also the nawab's resumption of *madad-i ma'āsh* grants and his plunder of the hapless Mir Qasim following the battle of Buxar. However, while he would certainly fault British officials elsewhere, Tabataba'i did not specifically connect Shuja-ud-daula's behavior to his alliance with the Company. Rather, his critique suggested Shuja-ud-daula merely reflected the broader tendency of “modern” rulers to violate established imperial norms and the rights of hereditary service families.²²³

²²² *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, II, 94.

²²³ Ibid., 93-94. Tabataba'i, however, was not above critiquing imperial traditions either, describing escheat (*zabt*) as a “wretched tradition of the Timurid dyansty” (*sunnat-i zishtī-yi khāndān-i bāburīya tīmūrīya*): *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, II, 12. For a thoughtful consideration of Tabataba'i on Mughal governance in “modern times,” see K. Chatterjee, “History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century Eastern India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1998): 913–48.

His British contemporaries, however, were often more than willing to link the nawab's oppressive actions to his relationship with the Company. Writing several years after the treaty of Allahabad, Alexander Dow remarked that, following Buxar, "[the Company had] restored to him his dominions, and, by a mere mockery of terms, called injustice by the name of generosity... [Now] the infamous son of a still more infamous Persian pedlar [i.e., Safdar Jang] enjoys the extensive province of Oud, as a reward for a series of uncommon villainies."²²⁴ Such criticism would grow even more pronounced following the annexation of Rohilkhand, especially following accusations by the commander of the Company's forces that Shuja-ud-daula had engaged in numerous atrocities against the families of defeated Rohilla *sardārs* and had ruthlessly asserted his rights to plunder. More broadly, the "Rohilla War" fueled ongoing debate among Company officials, parliament, and the larger British public about the effects of the Company's territorial expansion in India and in Britain.²²⁵ In the case of Awadh, the nawab's conquest of Rohilkhand would provoke the first, but hardly the last, accusation that the Company was abetting and amplifying the despotic tendencies of Indian rulers.

Setting aside, however, the veracity of their specific accusation, these critiques point to an emerging consensus that, by the time of his death in 1775, Shuja-ud-daula's decade-long relationship with the Company had had a profound effect on the Awadh regime, particularly with regard to the nature of local sovereignty and political authority. When he nawab himself described the Anglo-Awadh alliance as "the cause (*sabab*) of his prosperity (*falāḥ wa bihtarī*) and the stability of his sovereign authority (*qiyām-i riyāsat-i īn jānab*)," this was not mere flattery. As this chapter has illustrated, through negotiations with the Company and the emperor,

²²⁴ Dow, *History of Hindostan*, Appendix, 78. Dow mistakenly believed that Safdar Jang had been a merchant.

²²⁵ Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, 151.

local sovereign authority had come to be starkly defined as hereditary, territorially circumscribed, and rooted in an expansive and increasingly absolute sense of proprietorship over the Awadh dominions. Moreover, the alliance had permitted the nawab to continue consolidating provincial authority around the interwoven households of him and his close relations.

Yet in other ways sovereignty and authority in Awadh remained ill-defined, especially within this cluster of households. As we have seen, “state” formation in Awadh was intimately linked to household and family formation, particularly during the reigns of Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-daula. Building upon his father-in-law’s bundling of provincial offices, Safdar Jang displaced *jāgīrdārs* living outside Awadh and Allahabad in favor of a broad network of Iranian-Turcoma kinsmen, thereby grafting an expansive new ruling family upon his territories. This left Shuja-ud-daula the formidable task of establishing his personal authority and asserting his particular claims against those of his kinsmen, a project that ultimately depended on the assistance of the Company. While Shuja-ud-daula eventually prevailed over his “Mughal” kinsmen and built a new dispensation of proprietary sovereignty around a narrowly defined dynasty and their interconnected households, it was unclear how this circumscribed ruling family would share its sovereign authority and other broadly construed familial properties after the nawab’s death.

Similarly opaque were the sources of this sovereign authority. In the wake of the treaty of Allahabad, both the Company and Shuja-ud-daula strove to erase the imperial roots of local sovereignty over Awadh and Allahabad. Nonetheless, in so doing the two advanced positions that sat in uneasy tension with one another. On the one hand, Company officials preferred to believe that they had restored the provinces to Shuja-ud-daula after having established sovereign claims

over them by force of arms. On the other, the nawab maintained he held his territories by hereditary rights that had been duly acknowledged by the Company through the treaty of Allahabad. These positions could be harmonized only with great difficulty, and the nawab's death would prompt a number of difficult questions: Were sovereign authority and the Awadh dominions indeed forms of "hereditary" property? If so, how were they to be distributed? If not, did sovereignty ultimately reside with the Company, its new "original proprietors"? Or did the begums, as financiers of the Awadh restoration, in fact hold claims as well?

Finally, and most pressingly in light of the nawab's sudden demise: Who was to succeed Shuja-ud-daula? By whom and by what principles, if any, was the succession to be determined? As the next chapter will show, despite decades of contestation and an emerging consensus regarding the exclusive nature of local sovereignty and dynastic proprietorship, easy answers to these questions would prove elusive.

Chapter 2—“The late Nabob’s will”: *Wasīyat*, primogeniture, and succession

Introduction

When Shuja-ud-daula succumbed to an infected wound on January 26, 1775, he left the Awadh regime in a position unlike any it had encountered in the previous fifty years. For the first time, the reigning nawab had left behind multiple, politically mature sons to contest the throne. At the same time, he had also left the regime a powerful ally in the form of the East India Company, which was increasingly eager to intervene in the internal administration of its client regimes. Foremost among its interventions would be regulating political succession in an orderly and predictable fashion. Fearing generally the kinds of violent, open-ended succession that had characterized the Mughal empire in its heyday, as well as particular threats to its current influence, the Company sought to manipulate political transitions in Awadh and other imperial successor states under its control. To do so, it would rely on a novel principle of primogeniture, based on an idiosyncratic synthesis of English political traditions and dubious applications of Islamic inheritance law.

To some extent, the Company’s insistence on primogeniture would greatly empower the Awadh nawabs’ eldest sons, as they became framed as exclusive holders of sovereignty (*riyāsat*), a concept that itself would encompass political and patriarchal authority over their households and dominions, as well as proprietorship (*mālikīyat*) of the Awadh territories and dynastic wealth. As illustrated in the preceding chapter, these reified and increasingly exclusive notions of unitary sovereign authority continued to be constructed in conversation and collaboration between the Awadh rulers and Company officials, with succession events providing opportune moments not

only to restate but also to expand and formalize by treaty mutually acceptable conceptions of sovereignty and dynastic authority.

However, despite the seeming conceptual consensus between the Awadh nawabs and British administrators regarding the nature and extent of sovereign authority, successions also created moments of intense conflict between the rulers of Awadh, the Company, and other members of the ruling dynasty. Here, the rigidity of the Company's primogeniture policy conflicted with less well-recognized imperial practices, i.e., the designation of an heir-apparent, as well as the implicit understanding that, as Awadh's exclusive proprietor, the nawabs could set aside portions of their territory and sovereignty to whomever they chose. Indeed, as this chapter will demonstrate, the Company's insistence on primogeniture as the primary principle of succession ran against broader trends in eighteenth-century political culture, in which the designation of an heir-apparent, often by testamentary designation (*waṣīyat*), had become a more widespread and institutionalized aspect of succession among regional imperial satrapies like Awadh.

Ultimately, while upholding the idea of an expansive portfolio of prerogatives held exclusively by the nawabs, the Company's insistence on primogeniture and its own authority over succession would effectively eradicate as one of the Awadh ruler's sovereign rights personal designation of a successor, by *waṣīyat* or any other means. By the time of accession of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar in 1814, there was little doubt that primogeniture, and the Company, would be the sole arbiters of succession in Awadh. Yet despite the gradual assumption of Company control, the forty years that preceded Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's accession would see remarkable experimentation in succession practices. As the Awadh rulers attempted to assert their

increasingly reified notions of sovereign and dynastic authority, they sought to designate their successors through various forms of institutionalized competition, administrative apprenticeships, and even adoption. While nearly all these attempts would be thwarted by the Company's growing power, the evolution of succession practices demonstrate vividly how conceptual conversation and practical competition over state and sovereignty between the ruling dynasty and the Company continually reshaped political culture in Awadh. It is to the contests over succession in Awadh, and their roots in Mughal imperial practice, that the chapter now turns.

“Dissension from every corner”: Shuja-ud-daula and late-imperial successions

Before the East India Company achieved nearly exclusive power over succession in Awadh, Mughal imperial succession practices loomed large, both in the minds of eighteenth-century British officials and in those of the quasi-autonomous dynasts of the successor states. Unsurprisingly, the image of fierce princely rivals warring for the throne proved a durable and compelling one. While such dramatic succession struggles were largely characteristic only of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their ideal persisted long after the empire itself had become moribund. For regional rulers like the nawabs of Awadh, they offered, perhaps, an aspirational paradigm for how a powerful, expansionist, and self-consciously “imperial” dynasty comported itself. For Company officials, however, they represented an omnipresent danger of fratricidal chaos and political anarchy, one that had to be carefully managed and guarded against at all times. Indeed, this management was one the services Company officials saw themselves providing to their Indian allies. As one resident in Awadh wrote in 1775 to Asaf-ud-daula, Shuja-

ud-daula's eldest son and eventual successor, "It is an ancient custom that after the death of a great chief (*ra'īs-i 'umda*), dissension rises from every corner (*fitna wa fasād az har gūsha mīkhīzad*) However, he consoled, confronted by an English army, "no one has the opportunity to raise a disturbance (*hīchkas-rā mujāl nadārad ki sar-i shūrish bar dārad*)."¹

As we shall see, Asaf-ud-daula certainly sought the Company's assistance in fending off rivals and succeeding his father. Yet the Company's steadfast determination to avoid bloody fraternal struggles prevented it from accepting other imperial succession practices, such as the designation of heirs-apparent or the division of dominions into appanages, both of which Shuja-ud-daula may have intended for the Awadh succession. However, before considering the Company's response to the nawab's death in 1775, a brief discussion of the development of Mughal succession practices over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth century will clarify their modification within the successor states, and perhaps Shuja-ud-daula's obscure agenda for the Awadh succession.

Mughal succession practices in India took the better part of the sixteenth century to develop.² This evolution entailed two primary modifications to the existing practices of the dynasty's Chingizid and Timurid forbearers. The first was the move away from dividing conquered territories into separate appanages for each of the ruler's surviving sons, and towards direct competition for control of an indivisible empire. The second was a systematic delegitimization of collateral branches of the Timurid dynasty in favor of the lineal descendants

¹ National Archives of India [NAI], Foreign Department, Persian Branch [FDPr], Copies of Letters Received [CR], Vol. 5: 1775-77, No. 5.

² Except where indicated, the following section relies primarily upon M. Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and A. Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Vol. IV (forthcoming).

of the emperor Babur. Thus, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, imperial successions had largely become open-ended competitions between the sons of the late ruler for exclusive control of the empire. Losers in these competitions stood not only to lose their claim to the throne but also their lives, as victorious princes frequently imprisoned, blinded, or executed their defeated rivals.

It was this “mature” form of Mughal succession that so captivated seventeenth-century European observers. The dramatic “civil war” between Aurangzeb and his brothers in 1657-58, following so closely after the English civil war and the regicide of Charles I, particularly shaped European ideas about political succession in India, as well as “Oriental despotism” more generally.³ Indeed, such notions have persisted up to the present, as scholars of the empire have regularly portrayed these violent convulsions as disruptive debacles or as a structural defect of the Mughal state. Yet more recent work has demonstrated convincingly that, far from being detrimental to the empire, imperial succession struggles were in fact integral to its success. Since open-ended conflicts among brothers were regularized and predictable, princely rivals spent much of their careers developing networks of allies in anticipation for the eventual struggle. In this regard, princely households became one of the primary sites of imperial state-formation and expansion, as Mughal princes often found their most important supporters among their father’s political opponents or among recently conquered groups. Those princes who developed the most efficiently run households and the most far-flung networks of allies were, more often than not, the eventual successors to the throne.⁴

³ For the relationship between seventeenth-century European politics and contemporary descriptions of the Mughal empire, see S. Subrahmanyam, “European Chroniclers and the Mughals,” in *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005) 138-79.

⁴ Faruqi, *Princes of the Mughal Empire*, 7-13.

But if competition among princely households was not a structural defect in and of itself, the empire's dependence upon it was. As the pace of conquest waned and the empire faced increasingly widespread and intensified resistance in the late seventeenth century, princes lost the ability to fund their massive households adequately and to nurture their expansive patronage networks effectively. Moreover, the long-lived emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) exacerbated this growing crisis by meddling in the composition of princely households and privileging his own retainers over his restive and increasingly desperate sons and grandsons. As a result, following the emperor's death in 1707, the loci of state formation shifted from the households of the princes to those of the empire's most powerful nobles, a transfer which would culminate in the creation of successor regimes in Bengal, Awadh, and Hyderabad.⁵

Nevertheless, despite seizing the mantle of state formation from the princely households, the increasingly autonomous *ṣūbadārs* did not directly emulate these open-ended imperial succession practices. This departure was influenced by a number of factors. First and foremost, compared to seventeenth-century Mughal princes, the *de facto* autonomous *ṣūbadārs* of the eighteenth century lacked the established dynastic legitimacy of their Timurid predecessors. Although they were eventually able to resist removal by the imperial court and to establish hereditary claims to their governorships and dominions, the rulers of the successor states remained, at least until the mid-eighteenth century, dependent on the emperor for their titles and legitimacy. As suggested by the conflicts between the sons of Nizam-ul-mulk Asaf Jah in Hyderabad, or, in the previous chapter, between Shuja-ud-daula and his cousin Muhammad Quli Khan in Awadh and Allahabad, protracted struggles among multiple claimants could threaten

⁵ Ibid., 309-26, and M. Faruqi, "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad, and Eighteenth-Century India," *Modern Asian Studies*, 43, no. 1 (2009): 5-43.

incipient regional dynasties and their tenuous provincial claims altogether. Additionally, unlike the Mughal empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the fate of the successor states was contingent less on continued external expansion and more upon conciliating powerful local groups *within* the provinces. In Awadh, the *madad-i ma'āsh* holders, Shaikhzadas, and Rajput chieftains were the very groups that had challenged the supremacy of the empire since the late seventeenth century and accommodating them had been critical to establishing provincial autonomy in the first place.⁶ Within the relatively stable frontiers of the imperial provinces, centralizing regional authority within the household of the *ṣūbadār* was more effective and more tenable than diffusing it among multiple “princely” *sarkārs*. Lastly, the gradual shift from the predominantly cavalry-based forces of the Mughals to standing armies built around infantries and field artillery encouraged the development of military-fiscalist regimes and further centralization of the province’s economic resources in hands of the ruler.⁷

Thus, rather than promote open-ended struggles among multiple, well-capitalized princely households, the rulers of the nascent successor states preferred to adopt a different Mughal practice: designation of an heir-apparent. Although imperial succession was ultimately determined by the battle between fraternal rivals, emperors were often able to shape succession conflicts by nominating an heir-apparent (*walī 'ahad*; lit., “the willed heir” or “the promised ruler”). Typically, emperors designated their eldest sons, though they also sometimes chose favored grandsons, whom the emperor Akbar claimed to love “more than sons.”⁸ The title of

⁶ M. Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-1748* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 112-125.

⁷ For a discussion of military-fiscalism in the context of eighteenth-century India, see B. Stein, “State Formation Reconsidered: Part One,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, no. 3 (1985): 387-413.

⁸ Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, cited in Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire*, 31.

heir-apparent was hardly a permanent or binding one, but it did confer certain advantages, as the *walī 'ahad* often received greater stipends from the imperial treasury, more lucrative *jāgīrs*, and better administrative postings—all of which could be used to build a successful coalition against his brothers. The designation, however, could also be detrimental, as it incurred for the heir-apparent the enmity of his princely rivals and their supporters. Paradoxically, it could also earn him the suspicion of his father the emperor, who sometimes sought to limit the power (and potential for rebellion) of the heir-apparent by keeping him at court, rather than in the field.

From the reign of Akbar (r. 1556-1605) into the eighteenth century, the emperor typically designated an heir-apparent well before his death. These designations, however, could also take the form of a death-bed testament (*waṣīyat, waṣāya*), as when the dying emperor Babur (r. 1526-30) nominated his son Humayun as his successor in 1530. Babur's "will," however, was not restricted solely to designating Humayun (r. 1530-40, 1555-56) as *walī 'ahad*; he also told Humayun that "the substance of [his] final wishes" (*khulāṣa-yi waṣāya-yi mā*) was that he not harm his brothers, no matter how much they might deserve it.⁹ Over a century and a half later, having renominated his second eldest son, Mu'azzam, as heir-apparent in 1695, the emperor Aurangzeb—in the rare instance of an emperor's will being written down—said nothing about a single successor. In one version of the will, he suggested partitioning the empire among his surviving sons. In another, he offered minute instructions for his burial and general administrative advice.¹⁰ Similarly, in the well-known *waṣīyatnāma* of Nizam-ul-mulk Asaf Jah, the nizam said almost nothing about succession, offering instead detailed guidance for

⁹ Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, ed. by Abd-ur-rahim, Vol. I (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1877), 117, cited in Wink, *Al-Hind*, Vol. IV.

¹⁰ *Aḥkhām-i 'ālamgīrī*, ed. and tr. by J. Sarkar in *Anecdotes of Aurangzeb and Historical Essays* (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1917), 51-55.

administering the Deccan. Perhaps assuming the inevitable succession of his son Nasir Jang (to whom he supposedly dictated the will), he instructed him only “to raise his younger brothers like his own sons, to strive for their advancement... and to consider them all as sources of military strength and [familial] honor.”¹¹

In other successor states, however, the association between *waṣīyat* and *walī ‘ahadī* became more pronounced. In Bengal, for instance, when Nawab Murshid Quli Khan died in 1727, his grandson Sarfaraz Khan, “in accordance with [the late *nāẓim*’s] will (*bi-maujab-i waṣīyat-i ū*),” “became his successor to the throne of the *nizāmat* (*khūd bar masnad-i nizāmat jānīshīn-i ū shud*).”¹² Although Shuja-ud-din Khan, Murshid Quli Khan’s son-in-law and Sarfaraz Khan’s father, displaced his son soon after the aforementioned accession, he too designated Sarfaraz Khan as *walī ‘ahad* shortly before his own death in 1739. At the same time, he “willed” (*waṣīyat namūda*) that his close advisors remain in control of government affairs.¹³ Nawab Alivardi Khan nominated his grandson, Siraj-ud-daula, to succeed him “some time before” (*az pīshdar*) he died in 1756.¹⁴ Like Nizam-ul-mulk, however, he also saw fit to give his successor specific administrative guidance from his death bed, Siraj-ud-daula’s negligence of which, some sources claim, led to his downfall at the hands of Mir Ja’afar and the East India Company.¹⁵

¹¹ *barādarān-i saghīr-i khūd-rā bi-jā-yi farzandān-i khūd dānista parwarish numāyand wa dar tarbiyat-i ānhā sa’ī-yi bāligh farmāyand...az dil dānand ki ānhā hama quwwat-i bāzū wa taqwīyat-i nāmūs-and*. Tajalli Ali Shah, *Tūzūk-i aṣafīya* (Hyderabad: Matbi-i Asafī, 1893), 41.

¹² Ghulam Hussain Salim Zaidpuri, *Riyāz-us-salāṭīn*, ed. by Abd-ul-Ḥaqq Abid (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1890), 288.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 307-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 362-3.

¹⁵ The Iranian traveller Ahmad Behbahani specifically states that Siraj-ud-daula trusted Mir Ja’afar, “contrary to [Alivardi Khan’s] will” (*bar khilāf-i waṣīyat-i ān mard-i zī-hūsh*). Ahmad Behbahani, *Mir’āt-i jahān-numā*, ed. Shayesta Khan (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1994), 395.

As with seventeenth-century imperial successions, designations of *walī 'ahadī* in the Bengal *nizāmat* were hardly binding. Both Sarfaraz Khan and Siraj-ud-daula were deposed not long after their accessions, the former on two separate occasions. Yet the increasing conflation of *waṣīyat* and *walī 'ahadī* suggest that the successor states were beginning to embrace a more regularized pattern of succession, in which the still-living ruler could play a much greater role in determining his heir than had been the case under the Mughals. Ultimately, the intervention of the Company from the mid-eighteenth century onwards would arrest this process and redirect succession practices towards a hybrid, Anglo-Islamic form of primogeniture mediated by British officials. Nevertheless, prior to the Company's involvement, the trajectory of succession practices was away from open-ended contests among brothers and towards a pattern of formal designation by the ruler, often in the form of *waṣīyat*.

This process in Awadh was more subtle than in Bengal, and descriptions of a late ruler's *waṣīyat* do not appear prior to the death of Shuja-ud-daula in 1775. However, the first quasi-independent *ṣūbadārs* of Awadh, Sa'adat Khan and Safdar Jang, designated their heirs in no less mistakable ways. According to one source, shortly after becoming the *ṣūbadār* of Awadh in 1722, Sa'adat Khan began to contemplate a suitable marriage for his eldest daughter, Sadr-un-nissa Begum. Although he initially favored Sher Jang, his fraternal (*barādarzāda*) nephew, he was eventually persuaded to summon from Iran Mirza Muqim, his sororal (*khwāharzāda*) nephew, to marry her. Mirza Muqim, later titled Safdar Jang, prospered from the marriage and was eventually appointed by Sa'adat Khan to be his *nā'ib* (deputy).¹⁶ When Sa'adat Khan died during Nadir Shah's occupation of Delhi in 1739, both his nephews vied to succeed him. In the

¹⁶ Ghulam Ali Khan, *Imād-us-sa'adat* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore Press, 1877), 8-9.

'*Imād-us-sa'ādat*'s version of the conflict, Sher Jang claimed that, as son of the late nawab's elder brother (*pisar-i barādar-i buzug*), he had greater right (*ḥaqq*) to the succession than Safdar Jang, who was only the son of the nawab's sister (*hamshīrzāda*). However, Lachmi Narayan, Safdar Jang's *wakīl* in Delhi, supposedly highlighted the importance of Sa'adat Khan's own designation and the significance of the marriage to his daughter, countering that Sa'adat Khan had never trusted Sher Jang. "Had he any faith in him," he said of Sher Jang, "Why would he have given a piece of his liver [i.e., his daughter, Sadr-un-nissa Begum] to Safdar Jang [instead]?"¹⁷ Ultimately the matter was decided when Safdar Jang paid Nadir Shah two *karor* (twenty million) rupees in exchange for *sanads* to the Awadh *ṣūbadārī*. Yet the incident indicates that, in the absence of a son, a ruler could also designate a widely accepted heir through certain appointments and, more importantly, by making him his *dāmād*, or son-in-law.

Safdar Jang, unlike his father-in-law, was not troubled with the lack of a son: his wife Sadr-un-nissa Begum gave birth to Jalal-ud-din Haidar (later titled Shuja-ud-daula) several years after their marriage. The nawab, however, was keen to manage the succession in ways similar to Sa'adat Khan. In 1745, with the approval of the emperor Muhammad Shah, he married his son to the daughter of Muhammad Ishaq Khan, another prominent Iranian courtier. After he became *wazīr* in 1748, Safdar Jang had his son distinguished with various appointments in the imperial household of the emperor Ahmad Shah. From 1750 until his death in 1754, Safdar Jang formally designated Shuja-ud-daula as his *nā'ib* whenever he went on campaign.¹⁸ Most significantly, he deliberately limited his offspring to a single son, thereby eliminating potential competitors for the succession. As the '*Imād-us-sa'ādat*' suggests, the decision to have a lone son by a single

¹⁷ Ibid., 30: *agar dil-i ṣāf mīdāsht chirā lakht-i jigar-i khūd-rā bi-ṣafdar jang mīdād.*

¹⁸ A.L. Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, Vol. I (Agra: Shivalal Agarwal & Co., 1961), 5-10.

nikāh wife was intentional and a choice that strengthened his own claims by affirming his ties to Sa'adat Khan through his eldest daughter. While the author frames this choice as a matter of personal propriety, its political significance is not lost: "Apart from Shuja-ud-daula, the nawab had no other son or daughter because his modesty and humanity demanded he have relations with no woman other than that chaste beauty [Sadr-un-nissa Begum]." ¹⁹

As Chapter 1 illustrated, despite Safdar Jang's caution, Shuja-ud-daula still faced a familial rival after his accession in 1754. Muhammad Quli Khan, Safdar Jang's *barādarzāda* nephew and Shuja-ud-daula's cousin, had succeeded his father as *nā'ib ṣūbadār* of the neighboring, dependent province of Allahabad the year prior. When Shuja-ud-daula ran afoul of Safdar Jang's "Mughal" cavalry commanders shortly after his accession, the latter plotted to overthrow him and invited Muhammad Quli Khan to take his place. Although the attempt against the nawab failed, Muhammad Quli Khan remained a potent threat in Allahabad until 1759, when Shuja-ud-daula captured and imprisoned him following his cousin's failed invasion of Bengal. In 1761, bolstered by the battle of Panipat and the promise of hereditary title to the *wizārat* from the recently crowned Shah Alam, the nawab seized the opportunity to execute his troublesome cousin. ²⁰

The battle of Panipat and the renewed claim to the *wizārat* also permitted the nawab to begin grooming Mirza Amani, his eldest son, for succession, much in the same manner as Safdar Jang had for him. Before joining the Afghan-led forces at Panipat, Shuja-ud-daula appointed his son *nā'ib ṣūbadār* of Awadh. ²¹ Following the battle, Shuja-ud-daula encouraged the emperor to

¹⁹ Ibid., 36.

²⁰ *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 66-69, 83-84.

²¹ Ibid., 80.

appoint Mirza Amani as *mīr ātish*, a post which had been held by both Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-daula, as well as to grant him the title “Asaf-ud-daula,” the appellation by which he became most widely known.²² Additionally, after Shuja-ud-daula’s formal receipt of the *wizārat* in 1762, Mirza Amani was given nominal charge of the emperor’s private council chamber, the *dīwān-i khāṣṣ*.²³ In 1770, the nawab negotiated a prestigious marriage for Mirza Amani, wedding him to the grand-daughter of Qamar-ud-din Khan, a former *wazīr* and a prominent figure in the so-called “Turani” faction at the Mughal court during the reign of Muhammad Shah (1719-48).²⁴

While Shuja-ud-daula’s grooming of Mirza Amani neatly followed the pattern established by Safdar Jang, the nawab also diverged from his father in ways that would radically impact the Awadh succession for several generations. Most notably, he abandoned his father’s reproductive restraint, fathering by most accounts nearly fifty children by numerous women.²⁵ Although Mirza Amani remained his only son by his sole *mankūḥa* wife—not an irrelevant distinction—the nawab also sought to elevate several of his other sons born by *mamtū’ā* wives and concubines. This was particularly the case after 1765, when (as illustrated in the preceding chapter) Shuja-ud-daula received hereditary title to both the Awadh *ṣūbadārī* and its dominions through his treaties with Shah Alam and the East India Company. Shortly thereafter, he began granting nominal military and administrative appointments to his next eldest sons, Mirza Mangli (Sa’adat Ali

²² Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, I, 116-17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁴ A.L. Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, Vol. II (Lahore: Minerva Book Shop, 1945), 159-60. For a classic treatment of court factions in eighteenth-century Delhi, see S. Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1709-1740*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1979). For the political and dynastic significance of the wedding, see M. Fisher, “Marriage Alliances at the Shi’i Court of Awadh,” *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, 3, no. 24 (1983): 593-616.

²⁵ For a list of the nawab’s children, see Kamal-ud-din Haidar, *Tawārikh-i awadh* (Lucknow, Nawal Kishore Press, 1879), 2-5.

Khan) and Mirza Jangli, favoring the former in particular.²⁶ In 1769, he appointed Sa'adat Ali Khan as *nā'ib wazīr* at Shah Alam's court in exile in Allahabad and, at the same time, arranged his marriage to the daughter of Mudar-ud-daula, a prominent courtier in the emperor's entourage.²⁷ While the marriage ceremony was not performed until after the nawab's death²⁸—likely at the behest of Shuja-ud-daula's *mankūḥa* wife, Bahu Begum²⁹—the betrothal itself indicates that Sa'adat Ali Khan's parentage was not seen as particularly problematic, later British misgivings notwithstanding. Most importantly, in late 1774, shortly before his death, Shuja-ud-daula left the eighteen-year old Sa'adat Ali Khan at the head of his forces in the recently conquered territories of Rohilkhand.³⁰ As a result, by the time of his death in January 1775, the nawab had left three sons “at the age of maturity and legitimate in the eyes of the public (*bi-sinn-i rushd wa dar nazr-i khilā'iq mu'tabar*).”³¹ Of these, Asaf-ud-daula and Sa'adat Ali Khan were both in positions of strength, with the former in the capital of Faizabad with his influential mother and much of the nobility, and the latter in Rohilkhand with the greater part of the late nawab's army.

What precisely Shuja-ud-daula's intentions were, if any, in creating this dynamic and eschewing his predecessor's more deliberate succession practices has remained uncertain. As discussed in the preceding chapter, after signing the Treaty of Allahabad in 1765, Shuja-ud-daula

²⁶ Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, II, 42-3,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁸ According to Kamal-ud-din Haidar, of Shuja-ud-daula's sons, only Asaf-ud-daula married prior to his father's death. *Tawārikh-i awadh*, 3.

²⁹ British Library [BL], Hastings Papers, Add. 29202: “Observations upon the Family of his Excellency the Nabob Vizier Sujah-ul-Dowlah, and upon the Characters of the Principal People about his Court, and some of his Civil and Military Sirdars,” fol. 114a.

³⁰ *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 118.

³¹ Abu Talib Khan, *Tafzīḥ-ul-ghāfilīn*, ed. by Abid Reza Bedar (Rampur: Institute of Oriental Studies, 1965), 5

confidently embarked on a deliberate project of consolidating regional sovereignty and dynastic authority within his household and those of his widowed mother and chief consort. Abandoning his predecessors' caution with regards to reproduction was likely part of this program of dynastic assertion. Moreover, by the end of Shuja-ud-daula's reign, the Awadh regime was stable and even expanding. Although dependent militarily on his alliance with the Company, the nawab had regained control of Kora and Allahabad and had conquered the Afghan chieftains in neighboring Rohilkhand and Farrukhabad. While it is unlikely, as one wistful chronicler put it, that "had he lived, his dominions would have stretched from the Narbada to Attock,"³² he may well have gained additional territory in future campaigns with the Company against the Marathas. During this brief window of territorial expansion and relative strength, then, it is possible Shuja-ud-daula envisioned adoption of a meritocratic and open-ended form of "imperial" succession as an appropriate declaration of Awadh's dynastic vitality. More probably, however, as the following chapter will show, in light of the immense influence wielded by his chief consort Bahu Begum, the nawab may have presumed Asaf-ud-daula's succession in Faizabad and hoped instead that his favored son would be able to remain in Rohilkhand as the quasi-autonomous ruler of a territorial *ta'alluqa*.

Yet the aftermath of the nawab's death would illustrate that, whatever his intentions, neither the (re)introduction of open-ended succession nor the division of territories among his heirs would be possible, as the nawab's own program of centralization and military-fiscalism obviated the kinds of autonomous princely *sarkārs* that had sustained imperial succession practices in previous centuries. Although Asaf-ud-daula "had a separate household like that of his

³² *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 119: *agar zindagī ū-rā mīsākht az narbada tā atak mīgīrīft.*

father (*sarkār-i ‘alīhada miṣl-i sarkār-i pidar dāsht*),”³³ it was nowhere near the size of seventeenth-century princely households, nor was it capable of carrying out independent military operations. At one-*lakh* rupees, the annual yield of Asaf-ud-daula’s *jāgīr* was less than half the Company brigade’s *monthly* subsidy and may have been insufficient to cover even his most basic expenses.³⁴ Equally important, just as Aurangzeb’s sons had refused to entertain the possibility of partitioning the empire in 1707, the notion of an indivisible patrimony remained thoroughly entrenched among the successor states, a principle which Company policy would only strengthen in conversation with the rulers of Awadh in coming decades.³⁵

But if there was a general consensus about the stakes of succession, the Company and the Awadh nawabs would disagree vehemently about how it would be determined. Although *waṣīyat* itself had been little utilized in Awadh successions prior to 1775, the assumption that underpinned it—that the ruler, as sovereign proprietor and dynastic patriarch, had a right to designate an heir of his choosing—was widely accepted, if not deemed the sole requirement for succession. This convention would contrast sharply with the Company’s closely held notion that, for the sake of its strategic interests as well as its claims to uphold rule of law, successions in its allied states should be ordered, predictable, and based upon a form of primogeniture ostensibly grounded in religious law. As the following section will show, in the case of Asaf-ud-daula’s succession, the respective philosophies of the Company and the Awadh elite temporarily aligned, as Asaf-ud-daula was both Shuja-ud-daula’s eldest son and the beneficiary of the nawab’s alleged death-bed designation. Nevertheless, while the Company would continue to defend and expand

³³ *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, 5.

³⁴ NAI, Foreign Department, Secret Consultation [FDSC], 30 May 1776, No. 3; BL, OMS Or. 1726, Muhammad Reza Tabataba’i, *Akhbārāt-i hind*, fol. 299a.

³⁵ Faruqi, 44.

the nawab's sovereign and patriarchal rights—often in direct contravention of Islamic legal doctrine—subsequent successions would illustrate its determination to eliminate *waṣīyat* as a political prerogative and force the nawabs to submit to the presumed universality of primogeniture.

“Two swords in one scabbard”: Asaf-ud-daula v. Sa’adat Ali Khan, 1775-78

These tensions between *waṣīyat* and primogeniture became evident upon the death of Shuja-ud-daula on the afternoon of January 26, 1775. Shortly thereafter, Colonel Gailliez, the commander of the Company's forces in Awadh, wrote to Governor-General Warren Hastings to inform him of the nawab's death and to seek further instructions. Not long before, Asaf-ud-daula had approached Gailliez to ask for his help and to ensure that he succeed his father. Though Gailliez had assured him that the Company would protect “his just rights,” he nevertheless sought clarification from Hastings and the Company's governing council as to how he should proceed. By the time his letter arrived in Calcutta, however, Hastings and the council members had already made up their minds.³⁶

In a lengthy meeting on February 3, the council had debated its response in the likely event of the nawab's death. Two principal questions lay before them: Firstly, to what extent did the treaty of Allahabad permit or compel the Company to interfere in the Awadh succession? And secondly, was the Company obliged to acknowledge and support Asaf-ud-daula as the nawab's eldest and only “legitimate” son, even if he were to nominate another, more qualified candidate? Both questions hinged on how one interpreted the first article of the treaty, which declared “a

³⁶ FDSC, 6 Feb. 1775, No. 1.

perpetual and universal peace, sincere friendship and firm union shall be established between His Highness Sujah ul Dowlah and his Heirs on one part and...the East India Company on the other.” Philip Francis and his partisans, Gen. Monson and Col. Clavering, saw nothing in this language to justify or oblige Company interference. Governor-General Hastings and his ally George Barwell, however, hoped to preserve the Company’s flexibility in its dealings with the Awadh regime, arguing that the mere possibility of the nawab’s family losing control of the province through an anarchic succession provided sufficient grounds to intervene. Thus, Hastings reasoned “there is an obligation on this Government ...[since]... a firm union between the Company and the heirs of the Nabob Suja Dowlah...must necessarily cease if this Government permits the succession to be alienated from the heirs of the Nabob.”³⁷

Hastings, however, was not merely looking to maximize Company power. Rather, the governor-general hoped the council would resolve that, should Asaf-ud-daula display “an absolute and experienced incapacity to hold the Government,” the Company could permissibly depose him. The issue was hardly speculative, as Hastings’s agent Nathaniel Middleton, who had recently returned from the nawab’s court in Faizabad, testified during the day’s proceedings that, “in the public opinion as well as [his] own,” Asaf-ud-daula was “a weak man much addicted to pleasure and averse to business.” Nevertheless, Francis, Clavering, and Monson denied the legality of removing him, forcing Hastings to pursue a different line of reasoning.³⁸ “Supposing,” he went on, “that the Nabob should have nominated any other of his sons his heir or successor, either by Will or by any other authentic declaration, in prejudice of [Asaf-ud-daula], is it the opinion of the Board that they should regard such person as his lawful heir and support him in

³⁷ FDSC, 3 Feb. 1775, No. 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

his pretensions to the succession?” Clarifying his question, the governor-general stated his long-held understanding that while out of deference to Asaf-ud-daula’s mother, his chief consort Bahu Begum, the nawab had pledged to nominate him as his successor, he in fact loathed Asaf-ud-daula and would have preferred his second-eldest son, Sa’adat Ali Khan, to succeed him.³⁹ With this in mind, the governor-general thought it not impossible that the nawab would make a death-bed declaration in favor of Sa’adat Ali Khan. Consequently, he concluded “whomsoever the Nabob shall constitute as his heir, is his heir and this Government is bound to support him.” Hastings’s rivals, however, did not concur. Francis and Monson thought the question moot, arguing that they would favor whoever was the “legal successor.” Clavering responded more vehemently, condemning any attempt “to defeat the natural line of succession” as “repugnant to [his] idea of the Treaty of Allahabad.” The divided council eventually agreed to send a letter to Gailliez, directing him to support Asaf-ud-daula, as “the Nabob’s eldest and only legitimate son...in his pretensions to the succession of his father’s possessions.”⁴⁰

Yet while the council ultimately resolved to support Asaf-ud-daula, the contentious meeting had left a number of questions unanswered. Whom exactly had Shuja-ud-daula “constituted” as his heir? Who was his “legal successor”? And what precisely was the “natural” line of succession in Awadh? In his testimony to the council, Nathaniel Middleton stated that during his visit to Faizabad at the end of 1774, Shuja-ud-daula had directed him to apply to Asaf-ud-daula for “all public business,” which was subsequently “transacted in [Asaf-ud-daula’s] name during the Vizier’s indisposition.” While he knew of no testamentary document drafted by

³⁹ Hastings had held these opinions since at least 1773, when he collected information about the principal personages at Shuja-ud-daula’s court following his meeting with the nawab in Benares to negotiate a new treaty. BL, Hastings Papers, Add. 29202, fols. 110a-b.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the nawab, Middleton had “heard that [the nawab] declared in the presence of his Mother, his Wife and His Two Brothers in Law that [Asaf-ud-daula] was to be his successor.”⁴¹ This account of the nawab’s dying wish was further supported by the arrival letters from Asaf-ud-daula, his mother Bahu Begum, and his father’s *nā’ib* Muhammad Ilich Khan, all of whom declared the “will of the late blessed nawab” (*waṣīyat-i nawwāb ṣāhib-i maghfūr-i mabrūr*) was to place his eldest son on the throne.⁴² As Asaf-ud-daula wrote to Hastings:

The late blessed nawab has willed (*waṣīyat kardā-and*) that, ‘I, your dear papa (*bābā jān*), entrust you to the governor-general and the English gentlemen. As I have obtained every manner of prosperity from their friendship, I am confident that your independence and the stability of your sovereign authority (*istiqlāl wa qiyām-i riyāsat-i shumā*) will arise from God’s blessing and the intercession of the exalted English gentlemen (*az faḏl-i ilahī wa wāṣṭa-yi sardārān-i ‘ālīshān-i angrēz*).’

Consequently, the young nawab hoped that the will would be implemented “exactly as had been written (*badān qism ki dar ṣadr nawishta shud*).”⁴³ The council having already resolved to support Asaf-ud-daula, Hastings replied that, “As the most perfect Union and sincere Friendship subsisted between the Father of your Excellency and myself and this Government it is my earnest desire to comply with the Will of my deceased Friend, by considering you in his Place, and continuing the same Friendship to you.”⁴⁴

How and why it was necessary to communicate the will to Hastings reveals much about the still-fluid nature of succession in Awadh and the dilemmas created by Shuja-ud-daula before his death. As most contemporary Persian sources suggest, by virtue of his seniority among his

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² NAI, Foreign Department, Persian Branch [FDPr], Copies of Letters Received [CR], Vol. 3: 1775, Nos. 33, 34, and 78.

⁴³ Ibid., No. 33.

⁴⁴ FDPr, Translations of Letters Issued [TI], Vol. 14: Jan.-Dec. 1775, No. 57.

father's sons and, more importantly, his being the only child of his father's chief consort, Asaf-ud-daula had a stronger claim than his brothers.⁴⁵ His status, however, did not establish a "natural line of succession" nor exclusive legitimacy in the manner understood by Clavering. Instead, while Asaf-ud-daula was "the eldest and born of the [Bahu] Begum, and had, from the reign of his father, the designation of heir apparent" (*az hama buzurgtar...az baṭn-i begum wa az 'ahad-i pidar nāmzad-i walī 'ahadī...dāsht*), nevertheless Sa'adat Ali Khan too was "legitimate" (*mu'tabar*) in the eyes of the populace.⁴⁶

The strength of Asaf-ud-daula's claim was thus widely acknowledged but nevertheless insufficient to guarantee his succession. With a prominent challenger in the form of Sa'adat Ali Khan, who had supporters in Faizabad and elsewhere, Asaf-ud-daula and his allies (namely his mother Bahu Begum and his maternal uncles) had to protect his claim. Indeed, they began doing so even as Shuja-ud-daula lay dying. As Company officers noted in their letters to Hastings and the council, the nawab initially requested his wound be treated by British physicians. When it became clear, however, that the nawab would not survive, his wife and brothers-in-law pressured him to abandon the physicians' treatment. As the Swiss mercenary and sometime Company official Antoine Polier sarcastically reported, "[The nawab], at the solicitation of his Begum and brothers in Law, returned again to his own Physicians, who have administered so effectually he has been at his last gasp ever since."⁴⁷ While Polier thought the change in treatment to be

⁴⁵ Ghulam Hussain Tabataba'i, *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, Vol. II, ed. Abd-ul-majid (Calcutta: Dar-ul-Imara, 1834), 95; Harcharan Das, *Chahār gulzār-i shujā'ī* (Rotograph No. 35, Abd-us-Salam Library, Aligarh Muslim University [Noor Microfilm Centre, Delhi, No. 28]), 435.

⁴⁶ *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, 5.

⁴⁷ FDSC, 6 Feb. 1775, No. 2. For Polier's career in India, see S. Subrahmanyam, "The Career of Colonel Polier and Late Eighteenth-Century Orientalism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 10, no. 1 (2000): 43–60 and the introduction by M. Alam and S. Alavi to A. Polier, et al, *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The I'jāz-I Arsalānī (Persian Letters 1773-1779) of Antoine-Louis Henri Polier* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

motivated by ignorance and superstition, the move permitted the begum to isolate Shuja-ud-daula from all contact with familial outsiders, including the Company's resident. Using her prerogative as chief consort to preside over her husband's care, she kept him within the confines of the *zanāna* (female quarters), where only her eunuch retainers, female servants, and male relations (i.e., her brothers and Asaf-ud-daula) could have access to him. As a result, they mediated any and all information regarding Shuja-ud-daula's will for the succession. Tellingly, the nawab's only letter naming Asaf-ud-daula as his successor arrived along with messages from Asaf-ud-daula and Muhammad Ilich Khan describing the already-deceased nawab's will.⁴⁸

Whether or not Shuja-ud-daula in fact intended for his eldest son to succeed him, his wife and her brothers were thus able to ensure that Asaf-ud-daula was placed on the throne, with the Company recognition and support. The succession, however, remained incomplete, as Sa'adat Ali Khan remained in Bareilly with the bulk of Shuja-ud-daula's forces. Without his brother relinquishing control of the troops and publicly submitting to him, Asaf-ud-daula could not consider his accession secure, nor could he claim to control the entirety of his father's dominions. As a result, the new nawab spent the first month of his reign negotiating with his younger brother to appear at court. While there is no contemporary account of the deliberations, the *Imād-us-sa'adat* (1808)—the first Company-sponsored, vernacular chronicle of the Awadh dynasty—provides an intriguing version of events, one that would become widely reproduced in subsequent histories of the regime. According to the text, shortly after the nawab's enthronement, Murtaza Khan, Asaf-ud-daula's *nā'ib*, approached Colonels Gailliez and Polier to ask for their

⁴⁸ FDSC, 6 Feb. 1775, Nos. 4 and 5.

help in dealing with Sa'adat Ali Khan. While the text's description of their conversation is undoubtedly apocryphal, the conflict it highlights is not:

Regarding Bareilly, [Murtaza Khan] told them, "There is no room for two swords in one scabbard (*dū shamshīr dar yak niyām gunjāyish nadārad*). Hence, His Majesty's wish is that Nawab Sa'adat Ali Khan will come to the presence and remain right here, just like his other brothers." The gentlemen answered, "The late nawab gave Bareilly to him; how can we interfere? Also, he was the more beloved of the [nawab's] sons (*īshān ham 'azīz-tar-i farzandān būda-and*)." [Murtaza Khan] replied, "Whenever he comes here, he will be the more beloved of the brothers. But [to be] master of the house and lord of command, there is one better (*mālik-i khāna wa šāhib-i hukm yak kas bihtar ast*). The ancient custom (*ā'in-i qadīm*) is that, after the father, one son sits on the throne and the other brothers submit to him (*dīgar barādarān bi-īṭā'at-i ū kār mīkunand*); Sa'adat Ali Khan remaining in Bareilly, on his own, is manifestly against custom (*dar šurat-i būdan-i nawwāb-i mamdūh dar barēlī bi-ṭaur-i khūd khilāf-i ā'in šurat zuhūr mīgīrad*). And, so long as the people (*ra'āyā*) see that there is someone opposing the sovereign of the kingdom (*muqābil-i ra'īs-i mulk shakhs-i dīgar-rā mībīnand*), they will never obey him...

[After hearing the gentlemen's wish to consult the governor-general, Murtaza Khan replied] "His Majesty is the eldest of the late nawab's sons (*buzurgtarīn-i farzandān*) and more deserving than all the other brothers (*mustahiqq-tar az hama-yi barādarān*) of dynastic proprietorship (*mālikīyat-i khāna*)... If taking Bareilly from [Sa'adat Ali Khan] is against the wishes of the governor-general, the entire country should be divided among the late nawab's descendants (*tamām mulk-rā bar aulād-i nawwāb jannat makān qasmat numāyand*); what error have the others committed? They are also sons of the late nawab. It would be unjust (*ba'īd az inšāf*) for one of two people, equal in rank and with equal claims to the inheritance, to seize it all (*az dū kas masāwi-ur-rutba dur-i istiḥaqaq-i mirāṣ ...bi-taṣarruf dārad*), let alone one among many (*ham barābar yakī 'alūf 'alūf*). If it pleases the governor-general to divide the inheritance in the manner of the poor [and] according to the law (*taqṣīm-i mirāṣ bi-ṭaur-i masākīn muwwāfiq-i shar'-i sharīf*), then the country, along with the cash and all other property (*nuqūd wa imta'a*), must be similarly divided among all the brothers. If, however, it is the case that among the descendants of sovereigns (*dar aulād-i rūsā'*) one becomes proprietor of the country and its wealth (*yak kas mālik-i mulk wa māl mīshawad*), then Sa'adat Ali Khan's remaining in Bareilly is in no way appropriate. He must come here."⁴⁹

Through this conversation, the *Imād-us-sa'adat* points to unresolved questions regarding the nature of sovereignty in Awadh and the other successor states, questions which had been

⁴⁹ *Imād-us-sa'adat*, 119-20.

exacerbated by the regime's new relationship with the Company after 1765. While the idea of unitary imperial kingship and the empire's indivisibility had become integral to Mughal ideology in the seventeenth century, it was not entirely clear that such notions would hold in the quasi-autonomous provinces of the eighteenth century. The impracticality of subdividing well-established provinces and the imperial offices that attended them, as well as the need to preserve the fiction of imperial integrity, certainly discouraged provincial governors from partitioning their territories among their heirs. Nevertheless, the Company's 1765 treaty of "perpetual and universal peace" with "Shuja-ud-daula and his heirs (*aulād*),"⁵⁰ and the attendant reconceptualization of Awadh as the nawab's "hereditary dominions" (*mumālik-i maurūṣī*) seemed to suggest that the regime belonged to a different conceptual category, one in which the laws—or at least the conceptual language—of inheritance (*mirās*) could regulate power and property relations between the nawab's descendants.

Indeed, this is what Sa'adat Ali Khan would suggest later to the resident and to Hastings as he attempted to hold on to Rohilkhand. He would, moreover, couple these claims with an argument that Shuja-ud-daula's alliance with the Company was itself a form of property, one that could not be monopolized by Asaf-ud-daula but instead should be parceled out to ensure his rights to his father's patrimony. As he explained to the resident, "the English are the true friends and firm allies of the inferior part, as well as those of higher rank in my family...[hence] Your friendship is an inheritance which I derive by right of family."⁵¹ Like the late nawab's moveable and immoveable property, "the friendship of the English is not an acquisition of today but,

⁵⁰ C.U. Aitchison, ed., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sunnuds relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. II, (Calcutta: Foreign Office Press, 1876), 67; BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4753/B.

⁵¹ FDSC, 30 May 1776, No. 2.

having been first enjoyed by my blessed Father, has now spread itself into shares, of which I enjoy one.”⁵² Possessing such a share of English friendship, Sa’adat Ali Khan thus understood himself as entitled to the Company’s support of his right to inherit portions of his father’s dominion. As a result, the Company’s failure to provide such hereditary assistance could only invite disgrace. Summarizing his position to Hastings, he wrote that “when I reflect on your power, and the hereditary connection which I have with the Company, I cannot but consider it as a want of...generosity...to suffer me to wander about deprived of my patrimony, which I hoped to obtain thro’ your friendship and to which I had an undoubted hereditary right from my ancestors.”⁵³

Yet as the *‘Imād-us-sa’ādat* suggests, the Company would not allow the Awadh state to be distributed among family members “in the manner of the poor” but would ensure it was passed on whole, according to the “ancient custom” of kings. Indeed, as John Bristow, the new resident put it to Asaf-ud-daula, the British officials considered him “chief of the late nawab’s heirs (*sarghana-yi wurṣa-yi nawwāb ṣāhib-i marḥūm*)” and “the [sole] heir and master of his property and his dominions (*wāriṣ-i qawwī-yi mamlūka wa mumālik-i mutaṣarrifa-yi nawwāb ṣāhib-i marḥūm*).”⁵⁴ The country (*mulk*) and sovereignty (*riyāsat*) would thus remain indivisible and inseparable. More importantly, Company officials would see *riyāsat* joined to an exclusive proprietorship (*mālikīyat*), one that encompassed not only the Awadh dominions but also dynastic property, moveable and immoveable alike. Whatever the ambiguities engendered by “hereditary dominions” formulation, the Company would ensure that Asaf-ud-daula, as *ra’īs-i*

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ FDSC, 2 Jun. 1777, No. 4. Unfortunately, neither the Persian originals nor copies of these letters seem to have been preserved.

⁵⁴ FDP, CR 5, No. 8.

mulk and *mālik-i khāna* remained—insofar as his family was concerned—Awadh’s unchallenged sovereign and the dynasty’s undisputed patriarch.

For the Company, removing Sa’adat Ali Khan as Asaf-ud-daula’s only viable fraternal rival was a straightforward, if lengthy, process. Fearful of the Company’s resolve to support Asaf-ud-daula, Sa’adat Ali Khan’s subordinate commanders in Bareilly persuaded him to attend his brother’s court in March 1775. Although he complained constantly to Bristow about cuts to his stipend and delays in assigning him a *jāgīr*, the resident refused to meet with him, not wanting to “give cause of jealousy to the nabob.”⁵⁵ Critically, in the summer of 1776, after Asaf-ud-daula’s unpopular *nā’ib* Murtaza Khan was assassinated, Sa’adat Ali Khan fled to Delhi before being implicated in the plot. Initially, he was eagerly received there by Najaf Khan, Emperor Shah Alam’s *wazīr* and the *de facto* ruler of Delhi. Najaf Khan, who may have displayed some initial enthusiasm for marching on Awadh and installing Sa’adat Ali Khan, was, however, actively dissuaded from an attempt by Bristow and Hastings, who assured them of the project’s futility. Eventually, after more than a year of negotiations, the governor-general and the resident persuaded Sa’adat Ali Khan to take up residence in Company territories and to live upon an annual stipend of three-*lakh* rupees subsidized by his brother. Following his arrival in Benares in 1778, he would spend the next twenty years of his life in exile.

With Sa’adat Ali Khan residing safely in Company territories, Asaf-ud-daula’s succession was now secure from dynastic threats. Through the Company’s internal deliberations and its officials’ conversations and correspondence with both Asaf-ud-daula and Sa’adat Ali Khan, the notion of hereditary sovereignty constructed in concert with Shuja-ud-daula was further refined

⁵⁵ FDSC, 20 Apr. 1775, No. 1.

to denote the reigning nawab's exclusive authority over the entirety of the Awadh dominions and his sole, patriarchal proprietorship of the ruling dynasty and its collective property. And much like the conceptual revisions of the 1760s, the elaboration of Asaf-ud-daula's sovereign rights in exclusive and increasingly proprietary terms would continue to reshape dynastic politics and the political culture of the Awadh regime. As illustrated in subsequent chapters, assertions of the nawabs' theoretical claims to dynastic wealth, and the legal-financial instruments designed to obfuscate them, repeatedly fractured the Awadh ruling family during the reigns of Asaf-ud-daula and his successors, driving a notional wedge between the dynasty and "the state" and ultimately expanding the reach of the Company.

For a time, it seemed that the nawab's sovereign rights would also include designation of a successor, as Asaf-ud-daula's own succession seemed to validate his prerogative to groom an heir-apparent of his choosing and to designate him by *waṣīyat* or other means. As a result, over the course of his reign, Asaf-ud-daula would "father" a family of adopted heirs from among whom he would designate a successor. The Company, however, despite its vigorous articulation and assertion of the nawab's sovereign authority, had no intention of allowing succession in its most important client state to be determined solely by its ruler or members of his dynasty. Instead, having established the precedent in 1775, Company officials saw the "right" to regulate succession as their own, guarding it fiercely for the remainder of the regime's existence.

"An absolute stranger": Sa'adat Ali Khan v. Vazir Ali Khan, 1797-98

The determination to remain a permanent force in the Awadh succession meant that, from the moment the twenty-six year-old Asaf-ud-daula assumed the throne, Company officials began

contemplating who would succeed him. Their immediate anxiety was prompted by a concern that the morbidly obese nawab was not long for this world. As John Bristow wrote in 1775, “Owing to his amazing Corpulency...we have great Reason to think him liable to a Sudden Death.”⁵⁶ More distressingly, the resident had heard that “by his former mode of Life, [the nawab] is totally debilitated with regards to women,” a condition that, “unless his constitution should take some very extraordinary turn,” precluded “the possibility of heirs.”⁵⁷ Consequently, Bristow would regularly refer to Sa’adat Ali Khan as Asaf-ud-daula’s “heir-apparent,” despite having been previously declared by members of the council illegitimate by virtue of his birth to one of Shuja-ud-daula’s *mamtū’a* wives.⁵⁸ His status as heir-apparent was part of the reason British officials hoped to harbor him in their territory, since, as Bristow explained obliquely, “in Case of Accidents, the Government would also without difficulty be able to conclude their own Terms with him and he be convinced of the Propriety of them.”⁵⁹ Moreover, the promise of succeeding his brother may have been part of Hastings’s negotiations with Sa’adat Ali Khan to persuade him to quit Najaf Khan’s court and settle in Company territory.⁶⁰

Once the “heir-apparent” was in British custody, however, Asaf-ud-daula faced the troubling possibility that, were he to prove uncooperative, the Company could depose him in favor of Sa’adat Ali Khan. As noted above, this was an eventuality Hastings had contemplated

⁵⁶ FDSC, 20 Apr. 1775, No. 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Here, Bristow gestured towards Asaf-ud-daula’s rumored homosexuality, which was thought in both European and Indian medical traditions to induce impotence.

⁵⁸ Ibid. and FDSC, 15 Jul. 1776, No. 3.

⁵⁹ FDSC, 3 Feb. 1777, No. 1.

⁶⁰ The *’Imād-us-sa’adat* states that after Sa’adat Ali Khan returned from Delhi, Hastings promised him that “after the death of the Nawwab Wazīr [Asaf-ud-daula], he should consider whatever of [the nawab’s] country and wealth that remained as his own.” (*ba’ad-i intiqāl-i nawwāb wazīr-ul-mumālīk muqqadam-uz-zīkr az mulk wa māl harchi hast az ān-i khūd-rā taṣawwur farmāyand*), 143.

before he had even learned of Shuja-ud-daula's death. Bristow also suggested it during negotiations with Sa'adat Ali Khan in Delhi.⁶¹ It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that shortly after Sa'adat Ali Khan's arrival in Benares, the supposedly impotent nawab began to announce the births of his children at regular intervals. Although the nawab's first three children died in infancy, subsequent children would survive into adulthood; at the time of his death, the nawab was survived by fifteen children, aged seven to seventeen.⁶²

How the supposedly impotent nawab produced these children, and with whom, proved rather mysterious to Company officials. Although rumors of Asaf-ud-daula's incapacity were widespread, Tahsin Ali Khan, the nawab's chief eunuch and household superintendent (*nāẓir*), would later report that the nawab had in fact sired children of his own but that they had died in childhood. These children, however, were not born by Asaf-ud-daula's chief consort, Shams-un-nissa Begum; the nawab remained estranged from her for the entirety of their marriage, which may not have been physically consummated anyway. Rather, they were born by concubines living in the *khord maḥal* managed by Tahsin Ali Khan. Nevertheless, as detailed by the *nāẓir*, the nawab's surviving children were not his biological offspring but had been purchased from indigent pregnant women, who were brought into the *khord maḥal* or the *nāẓir*'s adjoining house to deliver.⁶³

Once these children were delivered in the *khord maḥal*, however, their biological paternity was ultimately immaterial: The nawab acknowledged them as his own and had them reared accordingly. This was no more the case than with Asaf-ud-daula's eldest adopted son,

⁶¹ FDSC, 12 Jul. 1776, No. 3.

⁶² FDSC, 20 Oct. 1797, No. 6 and 30 Jan. 1798, No. 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Vazir Ali Khan. As the nawab's eldest surviving son, the boy's development was particularly and publicly celebrated. In addition to announcing his birth anniversaries, Asaf-ud-daula commemorated his son's schooling ceremony (*rasm-i maktab*) around the age of four or five and his circumcision, probably at age seven or eight. During this time, Vazir Ali Khan also received a courtly education much like the one that Shuja-ud-daula's sons had received, a program that emphasized languages, literacy, and martial skills.⁶⁴

Most important was Vazir Ali Khan's marriage in 1794, which signaled both his sexual and political maturation. The wedding itself proceeded in lavish style, costing upwards of twenty *lakh* rupees, or roughly the same amount expended by Shuja-ud-daula for the wedding of Asaf-ud-daula.⁶⁵ As important as its cost were the guests in attendance, namely Asaf-ud-daula's mother and grandmother living in Faizabad.⁶⁶ Indeed, although Company officials would later accuse the nawab's mother Bahu Begum of acknowledging Vazir Ali Khan solely from self-interest and a desire to rule in his name, it is clear from contemporary news-reports that both Bahu Begum and her mother-in-law openly treated the boy as the nawab's son, receiving him into their inner quarters, bestowing honorary gifts upon him, and allowing him to serve as their public escort.⁶⁷

After celebrating his marriage, Asaf-ud-daula also gave his son new political responsibilities. Much as Shuja-ud-daula had deputed him and Sa'adat Ali Khan, Asaf-ud-daula charged Vazir Ali Khan with greeting and accompanying visiting notables, including the

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, 133-34.

⁶⁶ The account of Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh, secretary to Bahu Begum is evasive but it seems both women did leave the city to attend the wedding. *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fol. 346b.

⁶⁷ BL, OMS Or. 4609, *Akhbārāt*: 12 and 15 *Rabī'-ul-awwal* 1210 AH; OMS Or. 4608, *Akhbārāt*: 2, 3, and 15 *Rabī'-uṣ-ṣānī* 1210 AH; OMS Add. 16,721, *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*: 12 and 27 *Sha'bān* 1210 AH.

governor-general and the Company's resident, as well as the Faizabad begums. Moreover, in the same manner as his father, he bestowed nominal positions in the *sarkār*, nominating Vazir Ali as *dīwān* and his younger brother Reza Ali as *bakhshī* 1796.⁶⁸ While the boys' involvement in governance was perhaps negligible, news-reports suggest they were charged at least with presenting revenue documents to their father and attending court.⁶⁹

Yet in spite of the similarities between his own princely upbringing and that of his sons, Asaf-ud-daula differed from his predecessors in one substantial respect: He did not permit either Vazir Ali or Reza Ali to develop, even superficially, their own households. Instead, even after both boys were married, they continued to reside together in the ancestral Panchmahalla palace.⁷⁰ Moreover, their father strictly managed the size of their entourages, declaring several years before his death that neither boy was to maintain more than five servants (*naukar*).⁷¹ This close management of their daily lives particularly irked the spirited Vazir Ali Khan. Even after being publicly marked as his father's heir, Vazir Ali Khan frequently lashed out at those his father appointed over him, on one occasion brandishing a dagger at a tutor who had instructed him to recite his lessons.⁷² Consequently, he was frequently banned from court, returning to favor only through the intercession of his grandmother, Bahu Begum.⁷³ The tension between the two was often such that, even though the nawab once banned a favorite *chēla* from his presence after the

⁶⁸ FDSC, 20 Oct. 1797, No. 6.

⁶⁹ Maharashtra State Archives [MSA], Parasnis Daftar, Lucknow *Akhbārāt*: 10, 11, 12, and 14 *Zī'l qa'da* 1208 AH; BL, OMS Add. 16,721, *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*: 5 *Zī'l qa'da* 1210 AH; BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4087, *Akhbārāt*: *Rabī'-ul-awwal* 1212 AH.

⁷⁰ BL, OMS Add. 16,721, *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*: 3 *Zī'l qa'da* 1210 AH.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 25 *Jamādī-us-ṣānī* 1210 AH.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 12 *Muḥarram* 1210 AH.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 6 *Ramzān* 1210 AH.

man abused Vazir Ali Khan as “the son of a *farrāsh* (carpet spreader),”⁷⁴ Asaf-ud-daula allegedly cursed his son in very similar terms.⁷⁵ For his part, Vazir Ali Khan was rumored to perform mock funerals for his father, with pigeons he had strangled standing in for the nawab’s body.⁷⁶

Whatever the truth of the rumors, Asaf-ud-daula, by the time of his death in September 1797, had left Vazir Ali Khan in a similar, and perhaps more delicate, position than he had found himself in 1775. As the nawab’s eldest son and heir-apparent, Vazir Ali Khan was widely assumed to be Asaf-ud-daula’s eventual successor. Yet with little opportunity to develop any independent political relationships, Vazir Ali Khan had few influential supporters and his boon companions consisted primarily of musicians and menial servants.⁷⁷ Although later chroniclers would remark that Vazir Ali Khan, like both his father and grandfather, had a predilection for “low-class” companions, Asaf-ud-daula maintained much more well-established connections with Awadh’s military classes, particularly after he elevated a number of sepoy orderlies from his princely household and awarded them sizable *jāgīrs*.⁷⁸ While Vazir Ali Khan would attempt (not unsuccessfully) to win the support of the army through financial largesse, the Company was far less willing to tolerate such seemingly wasteful extravagance by the end of his father’s reign. As a result, Asaf-ud-daula’s decision to keep him politically isolated would have dramatic repercussions for his son’s brief reign.

⁷⁴ Ibid.: 10 *Jamādī-ul-awwal* 1210 AH.

⁷⁵ *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, 133-34.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *Akhbārāt-i hind*, fols. 313 a-b.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the so-called “Tilinga Rajas” at Asaf-ud-daula’s court, see R. Barnett, *North Indian Between Empires, 1720-1801* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), Chapters 5 and 6. Barnett, however, mischaracterizes them as “merely part of the colorful entourage which served to validate the ruler’s regime in the public eye” (178). As with eunuchs, the Tilinga Rajas provided critical connections between the *nawwābī* household and Awadh’s rural cultivating/soldiering classes. In this regard, it is unsurprising, as Barnett notes, that two of the three most important revenue farmers of Asaf-ud-daula’s reign were the eunuch Almas Ali Khan and the Tilinga Raja Bhawani Singh (184).

Thus, at the time of his accession, Vazir Ali Khan had only two powerful allies: His grandmother, Bahu Begum, and Company officials. Although momentarily united in placing Vazir Ali Khan on the throne, the two would soon be fiercely at odds. As discussed in the following chapter, the Company expected that, after publicly acknowledging Vazir Ali Khan as her son's successor, the begum would fade into the background and allow the resident to dominate the young nawab through the new chief minister, Tafazzul Hussain Khan. The begum, however, believed sharing power with the nawab and acting as his regent to be her right, both as his grandmother and the highest-ranking member of the family. With the begum refusing to relinquish control and actively opposing the efforts of Tafazzul Hussain Khan, the Company decided to remove Vazir Ali Khan and install a ruler free of the begum's influence.

Yet Bahu Begum's determination to share power with Vazir Ali Khan, although the Company's primary concern, was not its stated justification for deposing the nawab. The decision was also bolstered by Company officials' long-held doubts regarding his paternity and, consequently, his legitimacy. This justification, however, required considerable rhetorical contortions on the part of British administrators. Not only had the resident and Governor-General John Shore expressed few reservations about Vazir Ali Khan at the time of his accession, they had also maintained that Asaf-ud-daula's declaration of him as his heir-apparent overruled any doubts about his paternity. As Resident Lumsden wrote to Shore on the day after the coronation, "Altho' it is very generally understood that he is not in reality the son of Asoph ud Dowlah, who had no children of his own, yet he has been adopted and educated as such from his infancy, and was always considered as the presumptive heir." "On the whole," he declared, "I am persuaded

that no other person could have been found equally unobjectionable.”⁷⁹ Shore concurred. In a minute to the council a week later, he foregrounded not only the nawab’s declarations but also the approval of Bahu Begum and the public, maintaining “it would be a dangerous principle for us to assume, to withhold our acknowledgement of his accession on the sole grounds of popular report, in opposition to the repeated declarations and acts of his reputed father for a long series of years.”⁸⁰

While Asaf-ud-daula did not draft a will or make any final declarations, Company officials’ initial recognition of Vazir Ali Khan as heir-apparent seemingly fit within the broader paradigm of political *waṣīyat*. Consequently, later chroniclers described his accession as an execution of the “nawab’s will.”⁸¹ Lumsden and Shore were even ready to endorse Asaf-ud-daula’s *waṣīyat* over the protests of Sa’adat Ali Khan. After hearing of the succession, the late-nawab’s long-exiled brother wrote several letters to Shore in October 1797 in which he made his case plain. While in exile he had continued to argue for the divisibility of sovereign authority and dynastic property, arguing even as late as July 1797 that he was entitled to share in his brother’s “fortune and prosperity, [and] in every affair (*sharīk dar daulat wa taraqqī dar har amr*),”⁸² he now claimed that exclusive succession to the Awadh dominions was his right. “This Government of Right belongs to the Family,” he declared. Succession, thus, naturally “devolves upon the grandsons of the Nawab Sufder Jung, according to their degrees.” First it had gone to Asaf-ud-

⁷⁹ FDSC, 29 Sep. 1797, No. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 3.

⁸¹ For example, in attempting to exonerate Company officials for placing Vazir Ali Khan on the throne, the *‘Imād-us-sa’ādat* relates that: “Some years before his death, Asaf-ud-daula made [Vazir Ali Khan] his heir-apparent (*ū-rā walī ‘ahad sākhṭa būd*) and so, for this reason, Resident Lumsden, together with Tafazzul Hussain Khan and according to the command of the governor-general, (*hisb-i imā-yi gawnar jinral bahādur*)...placed him on the throne, so that the will of the late nawab would not remain unexecuted (*tā waṣīyat-i ān maghfūr bīkār nagardad*)” (164).

⁸² FDP, OR 358, 4 Jul. 1797.

daula; now “he being dead and being absolutely without offspring (which God knows is fact, and is as Notorious to the World as the Sun itself) I am after him the Eldest Survivor of the Family, and the rightful heir to the Government.” If it appeared as if the nawab had children, it was only because it was “indisputably known” that Asaf-ud-daula had “by way of an amusement... nominated an adoptee (*mutabanna*).” Though he pledged to remain ever-loyal to the Company, he could never be satisfied knowing “an absolute stranger should be established in the dominion of this family.”⁸³

Invoking both Vazir Ali Khan’s notorious parentage and specific Islamic legal prohibitions against succession by an adoptee, Sa’adat Ali Khan’s letters put Shore in an awkward position. However, still hoping that the young nawab could be wrested from the control of Bahu Begum and ruled effectively through the minister, Shore constructed a contorted legal and political justification for knowingly retaining Vazir Ali Khan upon the throne. Gesturing towards the inextricability of *riyāsat* and *mālikīyat*, as well as the Company’s right to regulate the Awadh succession, Shore began by framing his dilemma as one “which involves the disposal of a kingdom, the right of inheritance to the property of the deceased Nabob, the political interests of the Company, and the honor, the reputation and the justice of its Government.” He then moved to Sa’adat Ali Khan’s claims. He acknowledged that, “if the right of succession to the children of the deceased Nabob be denied,” it would devolve upon Sa’adat Ali Khan. Nevertheless, he reaffirmed Vazir Ali Khan’s claims, construing Asaf-ud-daula’s repeated acknowledgements of the boy as sufficient evidence. Citing the *Hidāya*, the work of Hanafi jurisprudence that became a mainstay of Company officials’ interpretation of Islamic law, Shore

⁸³ FDSC, 20 Oct. 1797, No. 4.

maintained that since Asaf-ud-daula (in terms of their respective ages) could have fathered Vazir Ali Khan; the nawab had publicly acknowledged him; and the biological father remained unknown, Vazir Ali Khan became “one of the [nawab’s] heirs, in the same manner as any of his other heirs.”⁸⁴ Since Sa’adat Ali Khan’s denial of Vazir Ali Khan’s paternity rested solely on rumor rather than direct evidence, the Company was obligated to treat the boy as Asaf-ud-daula’s legal heir.⁸⁵

Had events unfolded differently in the autumn of 1797, Shore’s minute—unanimously endorsed by the council—might have permitted the Awadh nawabs much greater flexibility in shaping succession. Although he positioned the Company as the final judge of succession, Shore nevertheless acknowledged the prevalence and legitimacy of various forms of adoption within Indian ruling households. Owing to the perceived indelicacy of investigating royal paternity, the governor-general was willing to recognize and perhaps institutionalize a certain amount of ambiguity in the biological origins of the nawabs’ children. So long as the chief consorts and “the public” recognized an heir who appeared to conform to norms of primogeniture—and so long as no contravening evidence appeared—Shore was content to let the nawab constitute an heir of his choosing. However, as we shall see in the following chapter, the chief consorts increasingly considered the right to determine succession as prerogative they shared with the Company itself. Had the ruling stood and the nawabs’ right to enforce their “will” for succession remained bundled with *riyāsat* and *mālikīyat*, Shore’s judgement might have provoked far different patterns of conflict between the nawabs and the chief consorts in the nineteenth century.

⁸⁴ For the role of the *Hidāya* in Company-era legal interpretation and subsequent constructions of Anglo-Muhammadan law, see R. Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13-16.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 6.

As it happened, the possibility of contravening evidence provided Shore a critical loophole to retreat from his radical position. Conveniently, such evidence appeared just as Shore and Resident Lumsden became convinced that Bahu Begum would not relinquish her claims to share power with Vazir Ali Khan. Additionally, by December of 1797, the young nawab himself had “attracted many partizans amongst the Soldiery” and was becoming increasingly menacing to Tafazzul Hussain Khan, the Company-backed minister.⁸⁶ Despairing the loss of influence over the nawab and the possibility of restructuring the Awadh administration through the minister, Shore determined to proceed to Lucknow, hoping either to set Vazir Ali Khan on a more agreeable course or to find sufficient justification for his removal. He found the latter in the detailed disclosures of Tahsin Ali Khan, Asaf-ud-daula’s chief eunuch and *nāzīr*, who had fled the young nawab’s household after being threatened with violence. With Tahsin Ali Khan’s identification of Vazir Ali Khan’s biological father as indeed a *farrāsh*, or menial carpet spreader, the nawab thus became by Shore’s interpretation of the *Hidāya* an illegitimate product of adultery (*walad-uz-zinā*) and thus ineligible to succeed Asaf-ud-daula.⁸⁷

Yet even with such a legal rationale for removing the uncooperative nawab, the governor-general found himself momentarily hamstrung by the conceptual consensus between the Company and the Awadh regime regarding the nature of local sovereignty. In particular, he was uncertain of whether Islamic law actually applied to sovereign rulers like the Awadh nawabs. “With respect to a sovereign prince,” he noted, “the law would *not* be allowed any operation, and the [father’s] acknowledgement of the prince would silence all objections.” However, he

⁸⁶ FDSC, 30 Jan. 1798, No. 5

⁸⁷ FDSC, 24 Nov. 1797, No. 1. For Tahsin Ali Khan’s role in Vazir Ali Khan’s deposition, see also C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 94-96.

continued, “If I had reason to believe that a reluctance to acknowledge the title of Vizier Ali ... were the prevailing and unalterable sentiments of the principal inhabitants of Owde, and that it has been silenced only by the avowed support and declaration of this Government in his favor, I should certainly feel an equal repugnance to the admission of his title.”⁸⁸ Having resolved to remove the nawab in favor of Sa’adat Ali—whom Shore now determined to be “the representative of Shuja-ud-daula’s family” and whose “whole dependence and support is solely on the English Company”⁸⁹—the governor-general arrived in Lucknow on December 23 and quickly assembled a coalition of Awadh’s “principal inhabitants” against Vazir Ali Khan. Foremost among these would be Bahu Begum, in whose name Shore would issue a proclamation following his removal of Vazir Ali Khan and installation of Sa’adat Ali Khan upon the throne.⁹⁰

Although his proclamation emphasized Sa’adat Ali Khan’s “right” and “title” (*ḥaqq, istiḥqāq*) to rule, the governor-general’s other pronouncements reaffirmed the new nawab as both sovereign (*ra’īs*) and domestic proprietor (*mālik*). In his joint letter to Vazir Ali Khan’s supporters in the army, Shore wrote, “it will doubtless be a source of gratification to the servants of this state...to learn that the guardianship of the honor of the late Nabob Shudjah ud Dowlah, the patronage of the army and the protection of the subjects have devolved upon his true and genuine offspring.” Furthermore, “the property, the dignity, and the honor and the females of the family of the late Nabobs ... are secured from the hands of a stranger.” Sa’adat Ali Khan, he concluded “is the rightful sovereign and [his] claim supercedes all others.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ FDSC, 30 Jan. 1798, No. 5

⁹⁰ FDSC, 20 Feb. 1798, No. 13.

⁹¹ FDSC, 20 Feb. 1798, No. 15.

The explicit bundling of sovereignty and dynastic proprietorship first recognized for Asaf-ud-daula was thus expanded to encompass “guardianship” of familial honor and female bodies as well. Critically, this expansion of sovereign and dynastic authority was formally enshrined in a new Anglo-Awadh treaty, the final article of which stipulated that “the said Nabob shall possess full authority over his household affairs,” as well as “his hereditary dominions, his troops and his subjects (*ikhtiyār wa iqtidār-i nawwāb-i mauṣūf dar amūr-i khānagī wa mulk-i maurūṣī wa fauj wa ra‘aiyat khwāhad būd*).”⁹² Perhaps unsurprisingly, although Sa’adat Ali Khan had spent much of the previous twenty years contesting the idea of unitary sovereign authority and exclusive dynastic proprietorship, once on the throne and in a position to benefit from them he eagerly embraced the principles he had once opposed. Indeed, as will be evident from each of the remaining chapters, perhaps none of Awadh’s rulers would be as zealous as Sa’adat Ali Khan in enforcing their sovereign and proprietary pretensions over their dominions and their dynasty.

As it would with power and property relations, the on-going conceptual dialogue between the Awadh rulers and Company officials would continue not only to transform the dynasty’s political culture, but also to open new fissures and points of contention, particularly with regard to succession. Like his elder brother, Sa’adat Ali Khan also experimented with ways to designate heirs apparent, favoring, as shown below, apprenticeships in the *sarkār*, special duties for favored younger sons and perhaps *waṣīyat* as well. More importantly, despite benefitting directly from the Company’s commitment to primogeniture, Sa’adat Ali Khan had no interest in institutionalizing it, preferring to see designation of an heir, by means of his choosing, as one of

⁹² Aitchison, II, 98; FDP, OR 440, May 1801.

his many exclusive, sovereign rights. British officials, however, having first committed to regular intervention in succession and then to legitimating its interference through the quasi-legalistic logic of primogeniture, were unwilling to abandon either their role as regulators of succession or the principle that promised orderly, predictable transfers of power in its most important ally. Thus, a profound contradiction would soon emerge, as Company officials sought to limit an absolute sovereignty that notionally transcended the law—a conception it had fashioned in conversation with its supposedly exclusive proprietors—with a fusion of English political tradition and an idiosyncratic interpretation of Islamic inheritance law.

“Established rules of succession”: Ghazi-ud-din Haidar v. Shams-ud-daula, 1814

In the immediate aftermath of Vazir Ali Khan’s deposition, however, these looming conflicts were not readily apparent. More pressing was Sa’adat Ali Khan’s deep unpopularity among Asaf-ud-daula’s courtiers and revenue farmers in Awadh and his inability to meet growing debts to the Company. Soon a vicious cycle emerged, as the nawab demanded the Company enforce claims upon his revenue farmers in order to meet his fiduciary obligations, only to be told that the Company could not do so until the nawab curtailed his expenses by dismissing his army, thereby furthering his dependence upon British military power. The conflict came to a sudden head in November 1799, when Sa’adat Ali Khan, frustrated by the Company’s refusal to reign in the revenue farmers, offered to abdicate in favor of one of his sons.

Although he soon withdrew the offer, the subsequent negotiations reveal the continued willingness of the Company to manipulate the opposing “rights” of primogeniture and *waṣīyat* in

contradictory and opportunistic ways. Describing an initial meeting on the subject, the resident reported to Governor-General Richard Wellesley that:

To remove every hope and expectation on which a condition might subsequently be grounded of the selection of a successor, I called to his Excellency's recollection the right attached by our Government to primogeniture, so strongly exemplified in his own person.

While the resident found Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, the nawab's eldest son, to be "a young man who would readily submit to...the advice and instruction of the British Government," he thought Sa'adat Ali Khan's well-known dislike of the boy and an insistence on primogeniture might convince him to forfeit his dominions to the Company rather than to an heir not of his choosing.⁹³

For his part, Wellesley jumped at the possibility. "The proposition of the Vizier is pregnant with such immense benefit," wrote his secretary, that "there are no circumstances which should be allowed to impede the accomplishment of the grand object which it leads to... [i.e.], the acquisition by the Company of the exclusive authority, civil and military, over the dominions of Oude." The governor-general suggested that it was better to avoid the nawab's abdication altogether, as "that step (by necessarily raising a question with regard to the succession,) would involve us in some embarrassment." Instead, he proposed to draw up a secret treaty, by which the nawab would transfer control of Awadh to the Company after a certain period of time. Concurrently, Wellesley ordered the resident to tell Sa'adat Ali Khan that, if he insisted upon leaving his dominions to one of his sons, it could only be the eldest, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar. This

⁹³ FDSC, 12 Jun. 1800, No. 89.

insistence, Wellesley believed, would “conduce powerfully to reconcile His Excellency to [the governor-general’s] plan” of outright annexation.⁹⁴

Significantly, the governor-general was well aware that the Company was cynically insisting on an artificial principle purely to further its strategic aims. As his secretary instructed the resident, “if His Excellency should persist in his determination to place one of his Sons on the Musnud, he must be informed that the British Government cannot consent to the establishment of any of his younger Sons...*whatever latitude the practice and Laws of Hindostan may admit on the question of succession to sovereign power.*”⁹⁵ Yet at the same time, relying on expanded notions of the nawab’s exclusive proprietary rights to his dominions, he was perfectly willing to allow Sa’adat Ali Khan devise what was essentially a testamentary transfer that would, in the words of one Wellesley’s later critics, “disinherit his children to bestow his Kingdom upon the British Government.”⁹⁶ In other words, for Wellesley, the nawab, as the unchallenged holder of *riyāsat* and *mālikīyat*, could wield exclusive authority over his property and alienate it by will—but only so long as the Company was the sole beneficiary.

The governor-general’s plans, however, and their attendant rationalizations were for naught. When informed of Wellesley’s proposal, Sa’adat Ali Khan called it “repugnant” and refused to step down if he could not nominate a son of his choosing to replace him. Infuriated at the nawab’s retraction, Wellesley proceeded to force his hand with a more dramatic confrontation. Against the nawab’s pleas, he ordered additional Company forces into Awadh,

⁹⁴ Ibid., No. 64.

⁹⁵ Ibid., No. 68. Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ NAI, FD-Misc., Vol. 7: “An Abstract of the British Intercourse between The British Gov’t and the Kingdom of Oude, From their first Contact in 1764 up to 1836, by Captain Paton, Assistant to the Resident, Lucknow,” Chapter 6.

dramatically increasing his financial liability. Unable to contest Wellesley, Sa'adat Ali Khan agreed to dismiss his own armed forces and, ultimately, to cede half his territories to the Company as a permanent payment for British military aid.⁹⁷ Stripping him of a ring of territory that included Rohilkhand, the Doab, Allahabad and Gorakhpur, the Company left Sa'adat Ali Khan with the rump of the original imperial *ṣūba* of Awadh, or what the Company determined to be his true "hereditary dominions."⁹⁸

Ironically, however, the treaty of 1801 and the partial annexation actually strengthened Sa'adat Ali Khan's once-tenuous hold over the province. Obligated to defend the nawab from all enemies, "foreign and domestic," Company forces now replaced the tax farmers' private armies as enforcers of provincial revenue collection.⁹⁹ Although the farming system remained essentially in place, the farmers themselves were in a much weaker position relative to the nawab. Moreover, despite its angst at the persistence of tax farming and the frequent deployment of Company forces, British officials relaxed their stance towards Sa'adat Ali Khan. Much like the period following Hastings's recall, the two decades following Wellesley's expansionist tenure were characterized by the wariness of subsequent governors-general to engage in overt interference in their client states' internal administration. While the new treaty stipulated that the nawab and his successors would institute administrative reforms and "advise with and act in conformity to the council of the officers of the said Honorable Company,"¹⁰⁰ governors in the post-Wellesley period remained reluctant to act decisively against the nawab, even as he proved

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Aitchison, II, 101; Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰ Aitchison, II, 102.

hostile to reform throughout his reign. Indeed, it would be more than thirty years before the Company would again contemplate taking direct control of Awadh.

Capitalizing on the Company's reticence to interfere, Sa'adat Ali Khan now sought to empower his sons and the close-knit household he had formed during his exile in Benares at the expense of his deceased brother's courtiers and the extended ruling family. After the deaths of Asaf-ud-daula's ministers Tikayt Rai and Hasan Reza Khan in 1800 and 1801, the nawab secured Wellesley's approval to appoint Shams-ud-daula, his second-eldest and favorite son, to the *niyābat*.¹⁰¹ At the same time, he placed his third-eldest, Nasir-ud-daula, over the financial records of the *dīwānī*. Additionally, he appointed slaves and other trusted advisors from the Benares household, as well as individuals from newly patronized service families, to supervise both boys in their duties.¹⁰² As we shall see in subsequent chapters, these appointments inaugurated what would become a larger program by Sa'adat Ali Khan and his successors to assert their patriarchal and proprietary authority over the Awadh ruling family, an agenda that would be bolstered by the Company's ostensible commitment to enforcing the nawab's exclusive rights over his "domestic affairs" (*amur-i khānagī*).

Yet as supportive as they were of the Awadh ruler's prerogatives, nineteenth-century Company officials refused to acknowledge *waṣīyat*, or any other mode of shaping succession, as one of them. As noted previously, Wellesley had preempted in 1799 Sa'adat Ali Khan's attempts to devolve his dominions upon any but his eldest son, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar. Following the treaty of 1801, however, Sa'adat Ali Khan continued to maneuver in favor of his second-eldest son, Shams-ud-daula. After the governor-general confirmed the Shams-ud-daula's

¹⁰¹ Aitchison, II, 108.

¹⁰² Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, 107-12.

appointment as minister in February 1802, Sa'adat Ali Khan proposed to go on pilgrimage and leave his son as regent during his absence. Wellesley, however, rejected the proposal, believing that the nomination was a plot to have the Company recognize Shams-ud-daula as heir-apparent. The following year, Sa'adat Ali Khan's near-fatal illness prompted the Company to plan for the succession. Although the governor-general still harbored a desire to take control of the remainder of Awadh, he regretted that the new treaty and "public faith" required him to transfer sovereignty to the nawab's "legitimate heir." Since Wellesley first refused his proposal to appoint Shams-ud-daula as regent during his pilgrimage, the nawab had tried to discredit his eldest son, regularly telling Company officials that Ghazi-ud-din Haidar was an "imbecile." Because the accusations remained unsubstantiated, however, the governor-general saw nothing to prevent Ghazi-ud-din Haidar from eventually succeeding his father. Ignoring his previous admission that Indo-Islamic political successions did not strictly adhere to rules of seniority, the governor-general declared that he would not deprive Ghazi-ud-din Haidar of "rights attached to his birth under the established rules of Succession in India." Instead, in secret instructions to the resident, he ordered that Ghazi-ud-din Haidar should be placed on the throne immediately upon Sa'adat Ali Khan's demise. Moreover, he ordered that any attempt by Sa'adat Ali Khan to declare Shams-ud-daula his heir should be met not with silence but with the resident's forceful objection. Finally, the resident was to station Company sepoy's at the home of Shams-ud-daula, and any of the nawab's other sons, if it appeared they might challenge their eldest brother's accession.¹⁰³

It would be another decade, however, before the governor-general's instructions were put into action. After the rapid deterioration of his health in the summer of 1814, Sa'adat Ali Khan

¹⁰³ FDSC, 7 Jun. 1804, No. 196.

died suddenly on the night of July 11. Informed of the nawab's demise, Resident John Baillie summoned Company troops from the nearby cantonment and stationed them to protect the "public treasury and private property of the Vizier." He then met with Ghazi-ud-din Haidar to notify him of his imminent accession. Shortly thereafter, he summoned Shams-ud-daula and Nasir-ud-daula and, in front of their elder brother, warned them against trying to subvert the succession of "their elder brother and natural heir." Although both agreed to support their brother, Shams-ud-daula, clearly displeased, used "improper and indecorous" language before returning home. In the morning, after Ghazi-ud-din Haidar sat upon the throne in his father's palace, "the whole of his younger brothers, and other numerous relations, [along] with the public officers of the government and principal inhabitants of the city were presented and offered their *nuzurs* [*nazr*, symbolic tribute] to him according to Asiatick etiquette."¹⁰⁴ In a decidedly unsubtle gesture, Baillie insisted that Shams-ud-daula should be the first to present his tribute.¹⁰⁵ Following the coronation, Shams-ud-daula resigned the posts he had held under his father and ceased attending his brother's court. Despite this dissension, the relative ease of the succession led Baillie to report, in typically self-congratulatory fashion, that "no event of such importance has ever occurred in Hindoostan producing so little commotion and affording such universal satisfaction as the recent change in this Government."¹⁰⁶

Other sources, however, suggest the satisfaction was not as universal as the resident represented. Notably, Persian-language accounts—which, by the nineteenth century, were authored almost exclusively by employees or partisans of the Company—describe much greater

¹⁰⁴ NAI, Foreign Department, Political Consultation [FDPC], 26 Jul. 1814, No. 51.

¹⁰⁵ Kamal-ud-din Haidar, *Tawārikh-i awadh*, 207.

¹⁰⁶ FDPC, 26 Jul. 1814, No. 58.

debate surrounding the night of the Sa'adat Ali Khan's death. In a representative example, Qasim Ali Nishapuri writes that "after [the nawab's death] a dispute (*ikhtilāf*) arose among [the nawab's] counsellors (*ahl-i mushwira*) as to who would succeed to the *riyāsat*." Sa'adat Ali Khan had wanted Shams-ud-daula, "whom his father's eye favored far more than all the other sons."¹⁰⁷ However, "this was contrary to the ways of the people of Islam (*khilāf-i tarīqa-yi ahl-i islām*), and also against the laws of the Christian religion (*wa ham ghair qānūn-i mazhab-i masīhī*), according to which the younger heir(s), [however] equal in authority, must give way to the elder (*dar muqābil-i khalf-i akbar kihtar-i barābar sanad jā dihand*)." Consequently, Baillie declared that it was "a just course of action (*rā'ī-yi šuwwāb*)" to put Ghazi-ud-din Haidar on the throne. Although "the opinion of most of the servants (*qail wa qāl-i akṣar mardumān*)" favored Shams-ud-daula, the resident did not concur and, "in accordance with his own law and also according to the *sharī'a* (*muwwāfiq-i qānūn-i khūd wa ham bi-ḥisb-i shar'*)," sat Ghazi-ud-din Haidar upon the throne.¹⁰⁸

Nishapuri's account is fascinating not only in his attempts to harmonize Islamic and Anglo-Christian legal doctrines, but also his depiction of British officials' determination to regulate Indian political succession through a legally enshrined principle of primogeniture. Indeed, as shown by the *Imād-us-sa'adat*'s justification of Asaf-ud-daula's succession and his exclusive pretensions to *riyāsat* and *mālikīyat*, nineteenth-century texts often reinterpreted earlier

¹⁰⁷ Qasim Ali Nishapuri, *Tārīkh-i shahīya-yi nishāpurīya*, ed. by Shah Abd-us-salam (Rampur: Rampur Reza Library, 1998), 65-66: *chashm-i ināyat-i janāb-i ālī bar nawwāb shams-ud-daula bahādur az jamī'-i farzandān bīshar az bīshar būda*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Awadh successions as demonstrating universal laws of primogeniture.¹⁰⁹ As Nishapuri himself illustrates, however, the justness of the principle had hardly been accepted by the Awadh aristocracy, who saw Sa'adat Ali Khan's quasi-official designation of Shams-ud-daula as heir-apparent to be far more binding than the seemingly arbitrary selection of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar.

The reluctance of the Awadh dynasty itself to accept a legal-textual foundation for primogeniture was further illustrated by the continued conflict between Shams-ud-daula and Ghazi-ud-din Haidar. Although Bailie claimed to have effected a reconciliation between the two, it was soon apparent that neither party had been appeased. Exemplifying how routine the exile of politically troublesome brothers had become, Baillie broached the subject of removing Shams-ud-daula from Awadh little more than two weeks after the enthronement.¹¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, the new nawab readily agreed to the proposal. His brother, on the other hand, tentatively accepted the offer but argued endlessly about the terms of his departure. At the same time, he repeatedly petitioned the British government in Calcutta to overturn the succession in his favor. Receiving no reply, he travelled to Kanpur in October to intercept the governor-general, who had arranged to meet with Ghazi-ud-din Haidar there. Once in Kanpur, Shams-ud-daula delivered a final plea for British intercession.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ At the same time, the persistence of *waṣīyat* is also demonstrated in Bahadur Singh Harnam's curiously revisionist account of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's succession. Attempting to reconcile *waṣīyat* and primogeniture, he writes that moments before his death, Sa'adat Ali Khan sent Ramzan Ali Khan to bring the resident and Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, "the eldest son" (*mirzā 'ī-yi kālān*), "so that [he] could will something to him" (*tā chīzī waṣīyat kunam*). However, once the resident heard of the nawab's death, he sealed off the palace and tried to summon Shams-ud-daula. Alerted by a well-wisher, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar armed himself and forced his way into the palace. "Fearing for his life" (*bar jān-i khūd tarsīda*), the resident acquiesced and gave the order for Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's coronation. *Yadgar-i bahādurī*, fol. 518b. Intriguingly, in another recension of the same text, Bahadur Singh claims that Shuja-ud-daula had in fact willed Sa'adat Ali Khan as his successor, only to be thwarted by the late nawab's brothers-in-law in favor of their sister's son, Asaf-ud-daula. Uttar Pradesh State Archives (Allahabad), Acc. 255, fol. 1192.

¹¹⁰ In addition to Sa'adat Ali Khan, Mirza Jangli and several of Asaf-ud-daula's other brothers spent much of the nawab's reign in temporary exile. In 1807 and 1808, Sa'adat Ali Khan successfully convinced the British government to allow his brothers Mirza Jangli and Mirza Mendu to reside in Patna, after both were implicated in separate plots against his life. BL, India Office Records [IOR], F/4/216 and F/4/248; FDPC, 26 Jul. 1814, No. 59.

¹¹¹ FDPC, 7 Mar. 1815, No. 15.

The soon-to-be exiled prince began his letter by detailing the innumerable “marks of distinction” that indicated Sa’adat Ali Khan had “selected [him] from amongst his other sons.” Many of these were the same honors by which Asaf-ud-daula and, later, Vazir Ali Khan had been designated heir-apparent. With Wellesley’s approval, Shams-ud-daula had been made *nā’ib* and *qā’im muqām* (translated here as “representative”), at which time he alleged the former governor-general himself had ordered him to receive *nazr* from “all his brothers.” Afterwards, throughout his father’s life, he received “richer and superior *khil’ats* [robes of honor]” and represented his father at the ‘Id ceremonies, “when [he] was attended by all [his] brothers and went in the same state as if [his] father himself were present.”¹¹² However, he also elaborated the various ways he had participated in the administration and assumed shares of sovereignty, which neither Asaf-ud-daula nor Vazir Ali Khan had been permitted to do prior to their accessions. Thus, he had issued *shuqqas* (“mandates”) under his own seal; awarded revenue collectors their *khil’ats* and made frequent suggestions for their appointments; held the keys to the treasuries; counter-signed official papers; and entertained Company officials at his own residence. “The British Government is fully apprized of all these circumstances,” he insisted. “They are as generally known as the sun in his meridian splendour.”¹¹³

From there, he related his father’s dying wishes. Much as Asaf-ud-daula had reported being entrusted to Warren Hastings by Shuja-ud-daula’s “will,” Shams-ud-daula claimed that his dying father had told him, “As soon as my kind friend the Governor-General Lord Moira....shall

¹¹² *Khil’ats*, a robe briefly worn by the bestower and meant to convey a transference of the power and favor to the recipient, were commonly used at South Asian courts to demonstrate the changing rankings of courtiers and the oft-fluctuating favor they found with the ruler. For a useful discussion of *khil’ats*, see the collection of essays in, S. Gordon, ed., *Robes of Honour: Khil’at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹³ FDPC, 7 Mar. 1815, No. 15.

come here, the regulation of all the affairs of this Government and what will tend to our Interest and advantage, both now and hereafter, will be accomplished by his Lordship's favor." However, because the nawab had died before the governor-general's arrival, he and Lord Moira had not been able to adjust the succession in Shams-ud-daula's favor. Now, owing to dynasty's hereditary loyalty to the Company and his personal fidelity to his late father and the British government, he "had taken shelter under the shade of [Lord Moira's] favor and justice from the scorching rays of the sun of calamity...[hoping] to experience whatever is worthy of [his] infinite kindness and distinguished favor."¹¹⁴

As Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's younger brother, it is unsurprising that Shams-ud-daula would prefer to highlight his designation as heir-apparent by established rituals, rather than engage with legal doctrines of primogeniture. The reigning nawab, however, also justified his accession in customary, as opposed to legal, terms. Anticipating his brother's attempts, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar sent Lord Moira his own lengthy letter two days after Shams-ud-daula delivered his petition. He began by thanking the governor-general for ensuring his "establishment on the hereditary musnud [throne] of the Vizirut and in the Government of my ancestors." He did not claim, however, that the succession proceeded according to the tenets of Islamic law. As will be shown in later chapters, doing so would have undermined the project of Sa'adat Ali Khan and Ghazi-ud-din Haidar to set themselves as sovereign rulers above the law. Instead, the nawab maintained that "agreeably to the custom of Kings and Viziers, both past and present, and especially to the custom of this family, I possessed the right to the hereditary Government, and the musnud of the Vizaurut of my ancestors belonged to me."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., No. 16.

As he moved on to address his brother's claims, he continued to invoke royal and familial custom. Perhaps unaware of Sa'adat Ali Khan's actions following his elder brother's accession, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar maintained, "After the demise of my grandfather, when my uncle the Nabob Asoph oo Dowlah ascended the Musnud of the Vizaurut, all his brothers ... remained submissive and obedient to him." Shams-ud-daula, however, had brought up "certain matters which are contrary to the usages of this house." Consequently, he hoped that Lord Moira would not let him "object to or excuse himself from conforming to my orders on any matters, a compliance with which is agreeable to the special usages of this Government." Finally, he requested that since the exiled Sa'adat Ali Khan had never met with a governor-general except with his elder brother's permission, he should continue to receive the same customary courtesy with regards to his own brothers.¹¹⁶

For his part, Lord Moira needed no convincing of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's rights. In response to Shams-ud-daula's letter, the governor-general informed him in no uncertain terms that his conduct following Sa'adat Ali Khan's death did not merit the British government's favor. Nevertheless, since the removal of Shams-ud-daula seemed to be a matter of "state" and "public expediency," he persuaded Ghazi-ud-din Haidar to grant his brother an annual stipend of two *lakhs* and their late father's house in Benares for his residence.¹¹⁷ By December 1814, Shams-ud-daula had left Awadh to spend the remainder of his life in exile. At the same time, in his correspondence with the nawab, the governor-general repeatedly reaffirmed his rights as "sovereign" (*ra'īs*) to absolute authority (*ikhṭiyār wa iqtidār*), particularly over his domestic affairs (*amur-i khānagī*) and his extended family (*khāndān*), relatives (*aqrabā*), and brothers

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., No. 24.

(*barādarān*). “The relations of the Nabob Vizier,” he wrote, “must owe to him that obedience and submission which is due to the sovereign from his family in all Mahomedan Governments.”¹¹⁸

Yet if Lord Moira readily affirmed Ghazi-ud-din’s exclusive and extensive rights to hereditary *riyāsat* and *mālikīyat*, as well as the importance of customary dynastic practices (*rasm wa ā’in-i ān khāndān-i ‘azīm-ush-shān*) in limiting his relatives’ relationship with British officials, he nevertheless laid down the Company’s unwavering policy with regards to succession. However inapplicable Islamic law (or the Company’s interpretation thereof) might be to the Awadh sovereign in the context of familial authority or property inheritance, it would remain the sole arbiter of succession. “The British Government,” he declared, “is perfectly disposed to render the succession to the Musnud of Oude in the family of the present Nabob Vizier, secure and unquestionable,” so long as “the line of that succession as defined by the Law and recognized in principle by the Country be certified to the Governor General.” Although Lord Moira’s original English letter was vague as to which “laws” and “principles” would guide succession, the Persian translation sent to the nawab left no doubt: Company officials would “investigate” (*taḥqīq-i iṭlā’ khwāhand namūd*) the “line of succession” (*sar rishta-yi jānishīnī*) and determine it “according to the noble *sharī’a* and every written rule of this country” (*muwwāfiq-i shar’-i sharīf wa har rasm wa zābiṭa-yi marqūma-yi īn mulk*).¹¹⁹ Having no formal constitution or any other written corpus of laws, Awadh’s political succession was thus to be governed solely by Anglo-Islamic principles of primogeniture. More importantly, with Lord

¹¹⁸ For the English letters: FDPC 7 Mar. 1815, Nos. 46 and 47; For the Persian: University of Edinburgh Library, Center for Research Collections, Baillie Collection, Or. 135, *Naql-i khuṭūṭ*. I am indebted to William Pinch for bringing this collection to my attention.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Moir's insistence that the line of succession be "certified," the stage was now set for the Company to conduct a series of increasingly intrusive investigations into the dynamics of dynastic reproduction in the coming decades.

Conclusion

Succession events reflected not only the Awadh regime's changing self-perception throughout the eighteenth century but also its evolving relationship with the Company into the nineteenth. During the first half of the eighteenth century, with their particular claims to hereditary control of the Awadh *ṣūbadārī* still tenuous and contingent, Sa'adat Khan and Safdar Jang engaged in cautious reproduction practices and made concerted efforts to clearly identify their intended successors. By the third quarter of the century, however, Shuja-ud-daula had taken steps to assert the regime's dynastic prestige through, perhaps, a more open-ended form of succession. As illustrated in Chapter 1, such ambitions fit into a larger project to reimagine the Awadh regime and its relationship to the Mughal empire following the battle of Buxar and the formation of a defensive alliance with the Company. Emboldened by the treaty of Allahabad, which underscored his hereditary and proprietary rights to the Awadh *ṣūba* independent of the emperor's authority, as well as the increasing ability to expand his territories without imperial authorization, Shuja-ud-daula established by the end of the Rohilla War in 1774 a dynamic by which his eldest sons would either compete for the entirety of his dominions or divide the conquered and hereditary territories amongst themselves. Yet whatever the nawab's intentions may have been for his successor(s), they likely remained unrealized, as the Rohilla War and the nawab's death marked the beginning of a new era in Anglo-Awadh relations. Dependent on

Awadh as a strategic buffer, a reservoir of cash, a source of military recruitment, and—increasingly—a symbol of its system of virtuous alliances with Indian states, the Company would now strive to preserve its influence, in part, by ensuring that successions in its dependent client were orderly, predictable, and guided by an emergent principle of “legally” defined primogeniture.

Successions, however, provided the Company the means not only to perpetuate and expand its influence, but also to continue to define, often in concert and conflict with its rulers, the nature and extent of state and sovereignty in Awadh. Indeed, such episodes were invariably accompanied by declarations of the Company’s commitment to preserving the new nawab’s exclusive rights to sovereignty (*riyāsat* and, after the imperial coronation of 1819, *salṭanat*), a concept understood by British officials to consist of unchallenged patriarchal authority over his family, sole proprietorship (*mālikīyat*) of dynastic property, and unitary political authority over his dominions. Such constructions furthered the process by which Mughal imperial offices, territorial revenue grants, and regional political authority itself had been recast as forms of heritable property (*milkīyat*), informally in the first half of the eighteenth century and later by treaty in 1765. Nevertheless, despite describing the Awadh rulers’ dynastic authority and territorial sovereignty in starkly proprietary and exclusive terms, the Company consistently denied their right to designate successors by will, thus explicitly limiting the full extent to which the nawabs could treat the regime as their personal property.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the nawabs’ family members were even more eager to contest this vision of the ruler as patriarchal and proprietary sovereign (*raʿīs wa mālik*). As we have seen, the nawab’s brothers often attempted, if unsuccessfully, to secure shares of their father’s

broadly conceived patrimony, which encompassed not only moveable and immoveable wealth and political authority, but also access to and favor from the Company. More aggressive still were their widowed mothers and senior female relatives, who challenged not only the nawabs' claims to exclusive sovereignty and patriarchal proprietorship but also the Company's pretensions to regulate independently political succession in Awadh. For, as the next chapter illustrates, the nawabs were not they only members of the Awadh dynasty in conversation with the Company about state and sovereignty in Awadh. Like their husbands and sons, chief consorts of the Awadh dynasty would draw upon the same language of proprietary sovereignty to defend their rights to personal wealth, familial authority, and political power. More importantly, like Company officials, they would also employ similar forms of quasi-legalistic reasoning, framing themselves as co-proprietors of the regime and local partners of the Company in Awadh.

Chapter 3—Power, property, and the *khāṣṣ mahal*

Introduction

By the winter of 1834, Badshah Begum, the dowager queen of Awadh, had lost her patience. Earlier that fall, her son—the young king, Nasir-ud-din Haidar—had laid siege to her palace, hoping to evict her from the city of Lucknow. After weeks of standoff, the king ordered his soldiers to hurl bricks, refuse, and obscenities down into her courtyard. Outraged, the begum sought the intervention of the East India Company, even going so far as to demand her son’s immediate overthrow.¹ Company officials, however, refused to grant the request. While they had regularly contemplated ousting the “imbecile” Nasir-ud-din Haidar for his inattention to administrative reform, they had no intention of allowing a member of the king’s family, much less his mother, to exercise such authority. Forswearing any involvement in the king’s “domestic affairs,”—a notion that, as Chapter 4 illustrates, gradually encompassed anything pertaining to women of the ruling dynasty—the resident and the governor-general declined to support the begum or even answer her letters.² In the spring of 1835, with no threat of British intervention, the king’s forces expelled the begum from the palace and sent her to a deserted country house outside the city.³

Although she would return to Lucknow for a final, bloody confrontation with the British resident in 1837, Badshah Begum had already lost her battle with her son and the Company. Despite her refusal to be shunted into a gendered dichotomy between state and domestic affairs,

¹ National Archives of India [NAI], Foreign Department-Persian Branch [FDPr], 12 Nov. 1834, Original Letters Received [OR] 426 and 427.

² NAI, Foreign Department, Political Consultation [FDPC], 16 Oct. 1834, No. 31.

³ FDPC, 15 May 1835, Nos. 69 and 74.

the distinction had become well entrenched in Anglo-Awadh diplomatic discourse by the 1830s. Underpinning a broader project to isolate the Awadh “state” from the *sarkārs* (household establishments) that constituted it, this binary between the political and the domestic served as a pretext to eliminate royal women as co-sharers of local sovereignty and inscribe them within an artificially apolitical space, subject to the patriarchal authority of the king. Like the related process of streamlining succession and delegitimizing fraternal rivals detailed in Chapter 2, this undertaking aimed at consolidating the Awadh dominions under the nominal authority of a single male ruler, and—in practice—under the influence of the Company.

Yet even more so than its removal of rival princes, the Company’s attempts to delegitimize royal women were halting and haphazard. Though committed to the idea of unitary sovereignty, British officials were often forced to acknowledge that the male rulers of Awadh in fact shared political authority with their female relatives, particularly their senior wives and widowed mothers. Moreover, unsure of the limits of their own power, Company officers regularly relied on widowed chief consorts (*khāṣṣ mahāl* begums) like Badshah Begum to engineer controversial acts of succession and to legitimate unpopular claimants to the throne. In conjunction with this reluctant dependence upon their authority, the begums’ own physical and discursive resistance also helped forestall the Company’s agenda. While in the long term they were unable to prevent the erosion of their authority, several chief consorts successfully maneuvered the Company into recognizing, protecting, and even expanding their property rights and familial perquisites for the rest of their lives.

In this regard, like conflicts over succession, the begums’ simultaneous defiance of and collaboration with British officials illustrate how the on-going conceptual conversations between

the Company and the ruling dynasty continually reshaped the political culture of the Awadh regime, as the begums used points of notional consensus to challenge familial rivals and the Company. The begums' independent interactions with the Company, however, also demonstrate the multiplicity of views within the dynasty regarding the nature of state and sovereignty in Awadh. While the *khāṣṣ maḥals* also embraced the increasingly reified notion of proprietary sovereignty put forth by the nawabs and the Company, they saw it not as the exclusive right of their husbands and sons but rather as shared within the ruling "family" (*khāndān*), a term used variably to describe the dominant individuals and households of the *Shujā'ī* dispensation or the dynasty more broadly. Similarly, although the nawabs gestured somewhat mutedly towards the Anglo-Awadh alliance as the foundation of their authority, the begums framed themselves explicitly as linchpins of local sovereignty, arguing that they maintained political and financial partnerships with both the nawabs and the Company, and were thus entitled to both independent property rights and shares of dynastic authority.

How the widowed *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums articulated their respective visions of state and sovereignty, and how they fought their sons and Company officials for rights to power and property, is the subject of the current chapter. Beginning with an examination of the interwoven bonds of politics, finance, marriage, and reproduction that underpinned eighteenth-century state formation and the *Shujā'ī* dispensation, the chapter then turns to specific episodes of conflict between the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums, the nawabs, and the Company. It looks first at Bahu Begum, the widowed chief consort of Shuja-ud-daula. In examining her efforts to lay claim to her late husband's treasury and to assert her authority, the chapter shows how the begum posited herself as a dynastic financier, a co-proprietor of local sovereignty, and a practical partner to the

Company. It then considers similar disputes in the 1830s between Badshah Begum, her son Nasir-ud-din Haidar, and the Company, focusing particularly on the ways in which Badshah Begum adopted and adapted arguments made by her predecessor, as well as her attempts to grapple with the new discursive divide between “political” and “domestic” affairs (*amūr-i riyāsat*, *amūr-i khānagī*). In so doing, the chapter argues that although the Company rejected the substance of the begums’ arguments, it supported many of them in practice, exchanging for the begums’ support the legal and financial guarantees that would remake the regime in the nineteenth century.

Power, property, and women’s authority in eighteenth-century Awadh

Before considering the specifics of the begums’ arguments, however, it will be necessary to consider the range of practices that underpinned their influence in the mid-eighteenth century and that would serve as a critical reference point in future disputes. As discussed in Chapter 1, the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums occupied a privileged position within the Awadh *sarkār*(s) and the *nawwābī* ruling family. As the reigning nawab’s sole *mankūḥa* wife (i.e., married by the *nikāḥ* rite recognized in both Sunni and Shi’i legal schools), the chief consorts enjoyed far greater prestige than either the nawab’s *mamtū’a* wives (i.e., married by the *mut’a*, or “temporary,” rite accepted only by Shi’i jurists) or his concubines.⁴ Consequently, the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums were able to exercise considerable control over the bodies of other women, a power they used not only to regulate daily life in the households under their control but also to direct dynastic reproduction

⁴ For distinctions between the two marriage rites in the context of the Awadh ruling family, see M. H. Fisher, “Women and the Feminine in the Court and High Culture of Awadh, 1722-1856,” in G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 489-511, and esp. pp. 491-93.

and political succession. By giving birth to—or appropriating—the nawab’s eldest living son, and by ensuring that, at the time of the nawab’s death, that child was the late ruler’s only politically mature heir, the chief consort could virtually guarantee her son would succeed to the throne. This tremendous power only grew during her subsequent widowhood, when her “post-sexual” status and influence over her son permitted her to entertain political and diplomatic contact with individuals outside the family and to exert greater control over administrative appointments within her son’s *sarkār*.⁵

Nevertheless, despite the expansiveness of their power, the authority of the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums remained nebulously defined and subject to constant negotiation throughout the eighteenth century. Although associated with particular titles, the chief consorts’ power and privileges were, unlike other those of other office-holders within the *sarkār*, not initially tied to a particular administrative position. Instead, they were, in a sense, purchased with the begum’s accumulated personal property and augmented through her management of the household’s collective assets. While nineteenth-century *khāṣṣ maḥals* like Badshah Begum would view their authority as derived less from material contributions and more from marital status and established precedent, chief consorts in the eighteenth century identified their wealth—and its role in financing local state formation and the restoration of sovereignty—as the basis of their power. As a result, it is necessary to locate the sources of this wealth.

Perhaps no single event shaped the personal fortunes of a chief consort in Awadh more than her marriage to the soon-to-be ruler. In this regard, the union of Bahu Begum and Shuja-ud-

⁵ I use the term “post-sexual,” and its relationship to the political and economic power of widows in early modern India, following Indrani Chatterjee, “Introduction,” in I. Chatterjee, ed., *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (Permanent Black: Delhi, 2004), 25-26.

daula (r. 1754-1775) is especially illustrative. The most expensive wedding in the history of the Mughal empire—exceeding even that of Shah Jahan’s favorite son, Prince Dara Shukoh, at the empire’s height a century earlier—Bahu Begum’s marriage to Shuja-ud-daula in the summer of 1745 soon became proverbial for its lavishness. Over the course of several days, immense quantities of cash, jewels, and other precious gifts flowed between the mansions of Muhammad Ishaq Khan and Safdar Jang (the fathers of the bride and groom, respectively), eventually totaling over forty-six *lakh* rupees, or four hundred and sixty thousand pounds sterling.⁶ Such opulent gift-giving not only advertised the rank of both families but also served to build the young bride’s personal assets and to capitalize her new household. As with other imperial weddings, much of the money expended in 1745 went to assembling the *sāchāq* (the groom’s gifts to the bride) and *jahīz* (the bridal trousseau).⁷ Consequently, most of the aggregate wealth ended up in the household of the groom, in the custody—and as the ostensible personal property—of the bride. With so much liquid wealth at their disposal, new brides like Bahu Begum often became the single richest member of their husband’s households.

The new bride’s wealth was further increased through prebendal grants of land revenue (*jāgīr*). Theoretically, the Mughal emperors awarded such grants to imperial cavalry commanders to raise and maintain contingents of troopers. While elite women like Bahu Begum also retained groups of soldiers in their personal service, they received prebends instead to support the expense of their households and to encourage capital accumulation. Unlike similar awards to Mughal princesses in the seventeenth century—who often remained unmarried for lack of

⁶ K.S. Santha, *Begums of Awadh* (Varanasi: Bharati Prakashan, 1980), 62. One *lakh* equals 100,000. The silver rupee was at this time commonly valued at ten rupees to the pound sterling.

⁷ *Ibid.*

suitable marriage partners—*jāgīr* grants in eighteenth-century Awadh seem to have been considered a perquisite of marriage to the reigning nawab, probably constituting part of the bride's *mahr*, or marriage settlement. In land-revenue rolls (*kaiḥyats*) for Awadh during the reign of Muhammad Shah (1719-45), the name of only one female *jāgīrdār* appears: Sadr-un-nissa Begum, the wife of Safdar Jang.⁸ Although the *kaiḥyats* do not explicitly gloss the *jāgīr* as *mahr*, the distinct categorization of the *jāgīr* as an irrevocable, lifetime grant (*altamghā*) suggests it may have been considered as such. At the very least, since the grant could not be resumed after her husband's death, it would have fulfilled the function of *mahr* anyway by providing residual support for the widow.⁹ This reading of the *jāgīr* is also supported by Bahu Begum's negotiations with the British resident in 1813 over the terms of her trust, when the begum insisted that her *jāgīr* be included as part of her heritable assets, arguing that Safdar Jang had given it as part of her "dower," the resident's likely translation of the word "*mahr*."¹⁰

Thus, between the initial exchange of gifts and the subsequent grants of revenue, the chief consorts became exceptionally wealthy, often holding far greater reserves of ready money and moveable property than their husbands. However, while the begums' assets were nominally their personal property and, as such, subject to their exclusive control, in times of household crisis they were regularly appropriated by their husbands. Although later Indo-Persian chroniclers typically portray these seizures as the voluntary donations of devoted wives, it is clear that the demands of elite propriety and the coercive power of their husbands left the begums little choice.

⁸ British Library [BL], OMS IO Isl. 4506: *Kaiḥyat-i jāgīrdāran-i šūba-i awadh bi-qaid-i dāmī wa ḥāṣil marqūma dar 'ahad-i firdaus ārāmgāh 'urf muḥammad shāh*, fol. 29b and 31a, and OMS IO Isl. 4508: *Kaiḥyat-i tavajjuhāt-i umrā'yān-i 'āzam*, fol. 7a.

⁹ For a definition and explanation of the legal function of *mahr*, see "*Mahr*," in *Encyclopedia of Islam [EI]*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1960).

¹⁰ FDPC, 27 Aug. 1813, No. 1.

Yet if the normative expectations of elite womanhood demanded the ready forfeiture of the begum's personal property to her husband, it was similarly assumed that, upon such displays of devotion, her husband would not only entrust later income to his wife but that he would also recognize her as a co-sharer of his political authority.

In dynastic histories of the Awadh regime, this relationship between property and political authority is most evident during episodes of military defeat. For Indo-Persian chroniclers, the relationship between Sadr-un-nissa Begum and Safdar Jang epitomized this dynamic. According to one historian, when Safdar Jang returned to Delhi in 1750 after a crushing defeat by the Bangash Afghans of Farrukhabad, his wife Sadr-un-nissa Begum selflessly “sacrificed her own treasury to him” (*khizāna-yi khūd-rā fidā-yi ū karda*) and bestowed upon his servants clothes, cash, and weaponry.¹¹ Another chronicler apocryphally embellished this same episode, characterizing Sadr-un-nissa as not only a devoted wife but as a kind of companionate creditor. In his version, the begum catches her husband asleep after the defeat and chides him for napping. Safdar Jang makes excuses but Sadr-un-nissa responds sharply, questioning his manliness and explicating their respective obligations:

Previously, too, men have accepted defeat and [then] struck back at the enemy. A man mustn't wish to hide his face like women do. The task of a man of action is the destruction of the opposition. If you want, I have eleven-*lakh* rupees and four-*lakh ashrafis* [a large gold coin]. Take it whenever you want but get up and do something.¹²

According to the account, upon hearing this wife's “life-restoring news (*nuvīd-i jān bakhsh*),”

¹¹ Abu Talib Khan, *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, ed. Abid Reza Bedar (Rampur: Institute of Oriental Studies, 1965), 149.

¹² Ghulam Ali Khan, *Imād-us-sa'adat* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1897), 53: *pīsh-tar ham mardān hazīmat khurda-and wa bāz 'adū-rā zada-and mard-rā namībāyad ki miṣl-i zanān rū pūshīda bikhwāhad kār-i mard-i tadbīr istiṣāl-i mukhallif ast agar zar mīkhwāhand yāzda lak rupīya naqd wa chahār lak ashrafī pīsh-i khūd dāram har waqt ki khwāsta bāshīd bigīrīd laikin dast wa pā bijunbānīd wa kārī bikunīd.*

Safdar Jang went at once to his public audience hall to plan his vengeance against the Bangash.¹³

It would be tempting to dismiss such accounts as part of a larger gendered critique that has defined much of the vernacular and colonial historiography of the Awadh regime.¹⁴ Yet other sources confirm not only the begum's financial contributions but also her direct participation in the campaign. According to one chronicler, Safdar Jang, "owing to her majesty's wise counsel," allied with a group of Maratha *sardārs* to defeat the Afghans.¹⁵ Indeed, the same author goes on to note that "whenever such difficult knots appeared in the thread of administration, that Mary-like woman loosened them easily with the talons of her wisdom."¹⁶ Maratha records corroborate these accounts and indicate that the *sardārs*' relationship with Sadr-un-nissa Begum was a durable one, the widowed begum remaining their principal conduit for negotiations during the reign of her son, Shuja-ud-daula.¹⁷ Describing her continued influence after the death of Safdar Jang, a turn-of-the-century Iranian traveller remarked of Sadr-un-nissa Begum that "all the nobles and chieftains had long held the thread of submission round their necks and they moved not a hair on their heads in opposition to her commands."¹⁸

Male commentators were not the only ones to describe the norms of companionate co-sharing; the begums too spoke of their husbands' deference. In a letter to her son Asaf-ud-daula,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ For a recent discussion of this critique, see R. Vanita, *Gender, Sex and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry in India, 1780-1870* (Orient Blackswan: New Delhi, 2012), 1-42.

¹⁵ Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, MS Salam 486/7 (Noor Microfilm Centre, No. 513): Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh, *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fols. 345 a-b.

¹⁶ Ibid.: *har gāh īn chūnīn 'aqda-yi mushkil dar rishta-yi tadbīr mīuftād bi-nākhun-i firāsāt ān maryam ā'īn bi-āsānī mīkīshūd.*

¹⁷ A.L. Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, Vol. I (Calcutta: Midland Press, 1939), 80.

¹⁸ Ahmad Behbahani, *Mir'at-i aḥwāl-i jahān-numā*, ed. Shayesta Khan (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1992), 230: *tamām a'yān wa umrā' wa rā'īyān wa zamīndāran rishta-yi iṭā'at-i wai-rā dar gardan-i khūd az qadīm dāshtand wa bi-qadrī sar mū'ī az ḥukm-i wai takhalluf namīkardand.*

Bahu Begum reminded him of his late father's devotion, writing that, "despite the fact that Shuja-ud-daula had thousands of women in his household...you know well the obedience, fidelity, consideration and comfort he showed to me. It is renowned throughout his domains."¹⁹

Reflecting on the reign of *her* late husband (the same Asaf-ud-daula) and the relationship between marital affect and political power, Sadr-un-nissa Begum wrote in 1812:

After the late blessed nawab became *wazīr*, the respect shown to me increased daily. Owing to the unity [*waḥdatī*] that subsisted between us, I saw him as my essence [*‘ain*] and myself, his...There was no department [*kārkhāna*] whose staff [*ahlkārān*] failed to obey my orders.²⁰

Bound by these norms of political and financial intimacy, Shuja-ud-daula responded in a predictable manner to his own defeat by the East India Company in 1764. Following the battle of Buxar and the expulsion of Shuja-ud-daula from Awadh, the commanders of the victorious Company forces demanded, in exchange for restoring the province, a fifty-*lakh* indemnity, half of which was to be paid in cash. According to one well known account, after Shuja-ud-daula's relatives balked at his request for assistance, Bahu Begum immediately forfeited the entirety of her and her servants' wealth, including that crucial marker of married womanhood, her pearled nose-ring. Predictably, this incident is treated as another example of wifely devotion. However, customary obligations and the expectation of immediate reciprocation do not go unnoticed, as the author adds: "After this trial, whatever [Shuja-ud-daula] obtained, he gave [the begum] the remainder, after expenses, and in truth, *he had to do so*. 'Who was this man who was less than a

¹⁹ *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fol. 287a: *ū ki hazār chand zan...dar sarā-yi khūd mīdāsh t bā waṣf-i ān iṭā‘at wa inqiyād wa khāṭirdārī wa diljā‘ī-yi mā-rā ki mīkard tū khūb mīdānī dar qalamrū-yi ū shuhrat ast.*

²⁰ FDPC, 2 Jul. 1813, No. 59; FDP, Copies Received [CR] 38, No. 92.

woman?''²¹

Again, despite the attendant mockery of the nawab's masculinity, Shuja-ud-daula's relationship with the begum was no narrative invention. Inquiries by Company officials attest that, in addition to repaying her through the above-mentioned deposits of land revenue, Shuja-ud-daula also enlarged the begum's *jāgīrs* and awarded her the receipts of additional duties and excise taxes, intending for her to accumulate additional wealth and to manage the treasury from an independent household.²² Equally important, he also placed his seals (*muhr*) in her custody, powerfully symbolizing both his personal trust and her practical role in authorizing official correspondence and administering the affairs of the interlocking *sarkārs* that formed the *Shujā'ī* dispensation.²³ Until the end of his life, Shuja-ud-daula regularly brought the begum on campaign with him and—much to the vexation of Company military officers—refused to march if she was unwell.²⁴

Critically, this pattern of forfeiture and co-sharing persisted into the reign of the consort's son. Here, too, the new nawab could expect financial and political assistance in exchange for perpetuating—and perhaps expanding—the influence of his widowed mother. As noted in Chapter 1, this certainly was the case after the accession of Shuja-ud-daula in 1754, when Sadr-un-nissa Begum used her wealth and influence to consolidate a ruling coalition around her son. In return, her *jāgīrs* were confirmed and expanded, and she was given almost exclusive control

²¹ Ghulam Hussain Tabataba'i, *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, Vol. I, ed. by Abd-ul-Majid (Calcutta: Dar-ul-Imara, 1834), 351: *ba 'ad-i īn imtīhān harchi bi-dast-ish mīāmad wa az muṣārīf-i lā-badīya bāqī mīmānd bi-zan-i khūd mīdād wa al-ḥaqq īnchūnīn mībāyist: chī mardī būd ki'z zanī kam būd*. Emphasis added.

²² Foreign Department, Secret Consultation [FDSC], 25 Jan. 1776, No. 5.

²³ FDSC, 3 Feb. 1775, No. 1.

²⁴ NAI, Select Committee Proceedings, 2 Jan.-6 Dec. 1771, Vol. 18: Harper to Cartier, 24 Dec. 1770.

of the regime until the mid-1760s.²⁵ Bahu Begum, as observed in Chapter 2, similarly guaranteed the succession of Asaf-ud-daula in 1775. Using her influence with her husband, she arranged a prestigious marriage for her son; prevented the nawab's other sons from marrying and developing independent households; and secured the favorable intercession of the Company shortly after the nawab's death. As will be shown in the next section, she too anticipated her authority would be recognized in exchange for her political and financial assistance.

Yet far more so than that between the nawab and the chief consort, the relationship between mother and son was a fraught one. Although undercut, perhaps, by gendered norms of propriety dictating submission to her husband, the chief consorts perceived their relationship with their husbands as at least a notional partnership (if not one of equals). Such was not the case with the nawabs' mothers, who saw their sons as fundamentally inferior. As Bahu Begum explained to Asaf-ud-daula, the essence of their relationship was filial subordination: "I, who am your *qibla* [i.e., the direction of prayer] and mother [and] you, who have been born of my womb and are a piece of my liver, submission and obedience to me are incumbent upon you a thousand times over."²⁶ In practical terms, conflicts between nawabs and their mothers occurred principally over the property of the late nawab's *sarkār* and the composition of the new nawab's household. As the previous nawab's counselor and co-sharer—who had helped build his *sarkār* with her personal wealth and political guidance—the now-widowed chief consort was understandably reluctant to see the networks of patronage established by her and her late husband altered or destroyed by her son. Yet the establishment of the new nawab's authority

²⁵ Jean Law de Lauriston, *Mémoire sur quelques affaires de l'Empire mogol, 1757-61*, tr. by G.S. Cheema as *A Memoir of the Mughal Empire: Events of 1757-61* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2014), 128.

²⁶ *Tārīkh-i farah bakhsh*, fol. 287a: *mā bi-daulat ki qibla-yi tū wa mādar ...tū ki az batn-i man paidā shuda wa lakht-i jigar-i manī bar tū iṭā'at wa farmānburdārī-yi man hazār chandān wājib ast.*

necessarily entailed ousting at least some individuals from his parents' retinue and elevating senior members of his own "princely" establishment at their expense—a process that required time and acumen to accomplish successfully.²⁷ Indeed, Shuja-ud-daula was only able to fully reconstruct his own *sarkār* after the battle of Buxar in 1764, when his mother and her kinship-client network proved unable (or unwilling) to pay the nawab's indemnity, allowing him to displace them in favor of a coalition formed around "new men," enslaved eunuchs, and the family of Bahu Begum. Nevertheless, despite the formation of a new *sarkār*, Sadr-un-nissa Begum retained control of her *jāgīrs* and remained a prominent (albeit lesser) voice among the nawab's principal advisors.²⁸

Thus, at the time of Shuja-ud-daula's death in 1775, a number of practices underpinned the power and status of the chief consorts. Lavish bridal gift-giving and the awarding of *jāgīrs* as a *de facto* form of *mahr* left the begums well capitalized and well positioned to assert themselves as family financiers and companionate creditors. The nawabs' hunger for cash—and willingness to exchange political power for it—provided the begums with ample opportunities to extend their influence over their husbands and throughout the *sarkār*. Finally, as subsequent sections will show, the begums' ability to use this influence to regulate dynastic reproduction and succession permitted them to reproduce and amplify their power across multiple generations. Yet while this pattern of relations allowed the *khāṣṣ mahāl* begums to wield considerable authority, it rested upon blurred distinctions between the "public" resources of "the state," the shared assets of the

²⁷ For an examination the politics of succession and household formation in the Mughal empire, see M. Faruqi, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁸ BL, Hastings Papers, Add. 29202: "Observations upon the Family of his Excellency the Nabob Vizier Sujah-ul-Dowlah, and upon the Characters of the Principal People about his Court, and some of his Civil and Military Sirdars," fols. 110a-b.

ruling *sarkār(s)*, and the personal property of individual members of the royal family. While such indeterminacy ultimately furthered the construction of Awadh as the *nawwābī* royal family's hereditary dominions (*mumālik-i maurūṣī*), it also left the begums' rights to power and property within the *Shujā'ī* dispensation ill-defined and subject to negotiation. So long as the begums were able to retain their fortunes without obstruction, the ambiguity of their rights presented no insurmountable challenges, and their legitimacy and authority remained widely acknowledged. However, following Shuja-ud-daula's death in 1775, the nawab's widowed mother and his chief consort both found their wealth and power under attack. With the Company's decisive entrance into Awadh politics upon the nawab's death, Shuja-ud-daula's successors and their advisors envisioned new constellations of power that could potentially exclude the begums. Moreover, as the Company became increasingly involved in the internal administration of Awadh in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, British officials began to insist that the ruling nawab possessed exclusive authority over his dominions and could accommodate no co-sharers in his sovereignty. With only customary practice to substantiate their claims to property and power, the begums were forced to find new means to define and protect their authority.

“A gift from the late blessed nawab”: Bahu Begum and the “public” treasury

While it would eventually take control of the project to reduce their power, it was the Company that first furnished the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums the forum to defend their authority and the legal instruments to demarcate and protect it. In January 1775, shortly after the late Shuja-ud-daula's demise, his eldest son, Asaf-ud-daula, was seated upon the Awadh throne. While the

transfer of power—facilitated by Asaf-ud-daula’s mother Bahu Begum and her brothers—was uneventful, the young nawab confronted numerous obstacles soon after his coronation. Foremost among these was the Company’s demand for immediate payment of the military-subsidy debt that had accumulated under his father, as well as growing agitation for backpay owed to his own troops. Consequently, Asaf-ud-daula appealed to Bahu Begum for assistance, receiving twenty *lakh* (two million) rupees from her over the next two months.²⁹ As illustrated above, such demands were not unusual and Shuja-ud-daula had likely deposited his treasury with Bahu Begum for this very reason, a point the begum made clear to her son in subsequent correspondence.³⁰

Asaf-ud-daula and his advisors, however, had a more ambitious goal in mind than stabilizing the new regime and eliminating its debts. Persuaded by Murtaza Khan, the nawab’s erstwhile chief steward (*khānsāmān*) and now “chief minister” (*nā’ib*; lit., “deputy”), Asaf-ud-daula sought to end the Company’s extortionate military subsidy and to oust his father’s principal retainers and household officials as quickly as possible. To this end, Murtaza Khan had many of the late Shuja-ud-daula’s commanders and confidants killed or exiled over the next few months and replaced with his own sons, nephews, and other close relatives. Additionally, he disbanded many of the late nawab’s forces, particularly those units whose salaries were in arrears. Lastly, and most significantly, he persuaded Asaf-ud-daula to cede the wealthy, subject kingdom of Benares to the Company as payment for the subsidy balance.³¹

All these measures offended the begums. Sadr-un-nissa Begum, the nawab’s grandmother,

²⁹ The following account of Asaf-ud-daula’s accession and its aftermath relies on Richard Barnett’s detailed treatment in *North India between Empires, 1720-1801* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 96-126.

³⁰ *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fols. 318b-319b.

³¹ Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 107.

entertained the idea of having Murtaza Khan assassinated and Asaf-ud-daula replaced by his younger brother, Sa'adat Ali Khan, whom the begum had favored to succeed Shuja-ud-daula in the first place. Bahu Begum, though exasperated herself, hoped to keep her son in power and attempted to negotiate with him. However, after Asaf-ud-daula's refusal to dismiss Murtaza Khan, his cession of Benares, and his relocation of his court from Faizabad to Lucknow, she informed the nawab that she would withhold any further assistance until he accepted her counsel. Her defiance provoked Asaf-ud-daula, through Murtaza Khan, to threaten her and her household with violence.³²

Although possessed of not inconsiderable military resources with which to defend herself, Bahu Begum instead sought the Company's intercession. Having begun writing to Governor-General Warren Hastings upon the death of Shuja-ud-daula, she initiated a second correspondence with John Bristow, the Company's new resident, upon his arrival in Awadh in March 1775.³³ Initially she requested only the resident's assistance in undertaking a pilgrimage to Karbala, presumably to threaten Asaf-ud-daula with her escape from Awadh along with her accumulated treasure.³⁴ However, as the demands from Asaf-ud-daula and Murtaza Khan grew more menacing, Bahu Begum sought more direct forms of protection from the Company. Writing to Bristow in September, she informed him that "[her] suckling child, the light of [her] eye (*bar khordār, nūr-i chashm*)" Asaf-ud-daula was coming to Faizabad with "violent intentions." Accordingly, she requested the resident to accompany the nawab on his journey and to supervise his visit. Such mediation was necessary, she maintained, because certain "servants" (*mardumān*)

³² Ibid.

³³ FDPr, CR 3, No. 78.

³⁴ FDPC, 25 Sep. 1775, No. 2

wanted “to destroy this family” (*īn khāndān-rā barbād dihand*).” Gesturing unsubtly towards the Murtaza Khan’s growing influence within Asaf-ud-daula’s *sarkār*, the begum used the notion of “family” (*khāndān*) to represent both the dynasty itself—as opposed to its “servants”—and the *Shujā’ī* dispensation the *nā’ib* was determined to upend.³⁵

In response, the resident, hoping to access the begum’s wealth himself, urged her to stay in Awadh. To keep her from departing, he conceded the widowed begum’s importance to the regime, writing that her absence “would give great affliction to the inhabitants of the country and her son, who might expect much assistance in his government from her good advice.”³⁶ However, frustrated by her continued insistence on the pilgrimage and her refusal to aid the indebted nawab with “[the] immense sum laying uselessly in her hands,” Bristow brokered a more binding contract between the begum and her son.³⁷ In a formal written agreement (*qaulnāma*) authored by the resident, Asaf-ud-daula swore that, in exchange for an additional thirty *lakh* rupees, he would withdraw his claims to his father’s patrimony (*warṣa*); leave the begum as the exclusive and permanent proprietor of her *jāgīrs* and all other perquisites bestowed by her late husband; and forbid harassment of her servants while they administered her estate. In addition, the document stipulated that she would be free to go on pilgrimage whenever she chose, taking with her whatever property she saw fit, and that her *jāgīrs* would be managed in her absence by her servants, without interference. Most critically, the *qaulnāma* pledged the Company to stand as guarantors between her and her son.³⁸

³⁵ FDP, CR 5, No. 57.

³⁶ FDSC, 20 Mar. 1775, No. 5.

³⁷ FDP, 25 Sep. 1775, No. 2

³⁸ For copies of the Persian documents, see FDP, CR 5, Nos. 65, 66, and 78; for the English, see C.U. Aitchison, ed., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sunnuds relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. II, (Calcutta: Foreign Office Press, 1876), 78-80.

While Governor-General Hastings accurately predicted that complications would arise from the *qaulnāma* and chastised Bristow accordingly, no one within the Company's upper echelons realized how dramatically this document would shape the future of Anglo-Awadh relations. By guaranteeing the safety of the begum's person and property from her son, the Company ensured that, despite their avowed distaste for interfering in the "domestic affairs" of Indian rulers, British officials would be compelled to intervene by the demands of the engagement. Moreover, the *qaulnāma* not only failed to address the fundamental ambiguities of property and sovereignty at the heart of the conflict but in fact amplified them. In construing the treasure and goods in the begum's possession as the heritable "patrimony" (*warṣa*) of Shuja-ud-daula, the *qaulnāma* rejected the begum's own understanding of the wealth, which she identified as a gift (*'aṭā*) from her husband and therefore not subject to division under Islamic inheritance law.³⁹ Instead, the document recognized Asaf-ud-daula's dubious claim to the wealth as his father's sole heir. Yet by guaranteeing the nawab's pledge to abandon further demands upon his inheritance, the Company promised to protect the begum in retaining the treasure, despite finding it illegitimate for her to do so. More importantly, by permitting the begum to retain her *jāgīrs* for the rest of her life and under the exclusive management of her servants, the *qaulnāma* did not eradicate the begum's pretensions to or the reality of shared sovereignty but rather compartmentalized them territorially, dividing dominion in Awadh between the nawab's court in Lucknow and the begum's household in Faizabad.

These ambiguities and contradictions made enforcing the *qaulnāma* nearly impossible.

³⁹ For the Islamic-legal categories of inheritance and gifts, and juridical distinctions between the two, see "Mirath," in *EI*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1960) and "Gifts," in *EI*, 3d ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), as well as W. Hallaq, *Shari'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 268-9 and 289-95.

Particularly onerous was ascertaining which *sarkār* owned previously shared property, as was the case when Asaf-ud-daula and Murtaza Khan refused to accept, as part of the promised thirty *lakh*, certain goods and animals they claimed already belonged to “the [nawab’s] *sarkār*.” Frustrated by their prevarication and by Bristow’s insistence that she needed to pay the full amount before the Company could protect her, the begum sent a eunuch in her service to deliver a letter personally to Governor-General Hastings in Calcutta. In it, the first of many such letters sent by Bahu Begum and other chief consorts, she explained at length the nature of political authority in Awadh, the relationship between her property and her power, and her rights in her own *sarkār* and in that of her son. She began by juxtaposing the precedent of shared sovereignty under the *Shujā’ī* dispensation—again represented collectively as the “family”—with Murtaza Khan’s recent usurpation of absolute power. “Murtezza Cawn,” she wrote, “is striving with all his might for the ruin of this Ancient Family, which he wishes utterly to destroy.”

[He] possesses the sole authority in the Nabob’s Family and his Brethren are Foujedars [*faujdar*s, i.e., local governors] over all the Provinces...[He] is so far from wishing well to this Family that he is desirous of its destruction that he may raise himself on its ruin.⁴⁰

Pivoting from Murtaza Khan’s illicit seizure of power, she then asserted her nominal authority of Asaf-ud-daula while underscoring her own rights to determine the composition of her son’s *sarkār* and to manage his affairs. Because the nawab was “entirely inexperienced in the Affairs of the World and ignorant of what is good or bad,” Murtaza Khan had taken advantage of him and was accordingly “the author of all the Evil.” Consequently, she had “no displeasure against the Nabob” and desired he would be “the Master of his own Affairs.” Instead, she hoped that Hastings would “exert [himself] so effectually...that Murtezza Cawn may be displaced” and

⁴⁰ FDSC, 21 Dec. 1775, No. 2. I have been unable to trace the original or a Persian copy of this letter. Based on the begum’s other letters, however, she likely used the term “*khāndān*,” which was later translated as “family.”

that Shuja-ud-daula's former ministers would "be restored to the Offices they held in this Soubah in the lifetime of the late blessed Nabob." In exchange, she promised that, "Whatever sums are due to the English Chiefs, I will cause to be paid out of the Revenues," thus reiterating that her wealth could be exchanged for a recognition of her authority.⁴¹

In addition to defining and defending her political authority, Bahu Begum also addressed the Company's central concern: legal title to the treasure and goods in her custody, which Shuja-ud-daula had regularly entrusted with her since 1765. Owing to the fact that a conceptual distinction between *sarkār* as household and as "state" was at best ill-defined (see Chapters 1 and 4) Asaf-ud-daula, in his conversations with Bristow, had consistently referred to the accumulated wealth not as "state property" but as his "patrimony" (*irṣ, warṣa*) or as the residual property (*tarka*) of his father.⁴² Defining the treasure in this manner, the nawab maintained he was only seeking to reclaim from his mother his "rightful share" of the inheritance, although, as noted in the preceding chapter, he had little intention of disbursing the remainder among his numerous siblings or any of Shuja-ud-daula's other legal heirs. Bahu Begum, however, refused to countenance the definition of the treasure as inheritance, construing it instead as a gift from her late husband and thus her exclusive property. "All that I possess is by the bounty of the late blessed Nabob," she told Bristow. "Nobody will pay attention to this."⁴³

Bahu Begum's letter to Hastings and the enforcement of the *qaulnāma* provoked a mixed response among the members of the Company's hopelessly divided governing council.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Cf. Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 102, and "Embattled Begams: Women as Power Brokers in Early modern India," in G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Piety and Patronage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 524.

⁴³ FDSC, 21 Dec. 1775, No. 2.

Governor-General Hastings, more sensitive to the nuances of Indian dynastic politics than his recently-arrived colleagues, saw an imminent danger to the Company's reputation from "the Exercise, or even the public Appearance of Oppression on a Person of the Begum's Rank, Character, and Sex." Although he regretted that the *qaulnāma* necessarily involved the Company, he resigned himself to the fact that, "We have a Right to interfere, and Justice demands it, if it shall appear that those Engagements have been violated, and an Injury afforded to the Begum." Accordingly, he argued that Bristow should be ordered to "remonstrate to the Nabob against the Seizure of the Goods as *his own original property*" and "to insist on the Nabob's receiving them in Payment."⁴⁴ Moreover, seeing potential economic benefit for the Company, he recommended that Bristow obtain permission from Asaf-ud-daula for his mother to settle—along with her vast treasure—in the Company's territories to the east.

Predictably, Hastings's rivals disagreed. George Monson reasoned that since the begum was in possession of "all the [late] Nabob's Wealth," much of which had been attained with as-yet-unpaid-for British military assistance to Shuja-ud-daula, "it is just she should discharge the Demands due for those Services by which she is the principal Gainer." Furthermore, noting that "the late Vizier's Estate has not been divided according to the usual Custom of Mahomedan Princes," he added, "I do not conceive that, according to strict Justice, these Effects to be the Begum's Property, as I understand Women can claim a Right only to what is within the Janana [*sic (zanāna, i.e., a household's female quarters)*]." Phillip Francis, the leader of the opposition faction, took Monson's arguments still further. "With respect to the property of the Effects in question," he began, "I am inclined to think with Colonel Monson that Women can claim a Right

⁴⁴ FDSC, 3 Jan. 1776, No. 4. Emphasis added.

only to what is within the Jenana [*sic*].” After limiting her property rights, he moved to circumscribe the begum’s political authority as well, invoking widely held European beliefs regarding the servile condition of “Asiatic” women.⁴⁵ “I cannot conceive that she has the least right to interfere in the Nabob’s Government,” he declared. “In a Country where Women are not allowed a free Agency in the most trifling domestic Affairs, it seems extraordinary that this Lady should presume to talk of appointing Ministers and governing Kingdoms.” He concluded by stating that while he did not necessarily oppose the begum’s relocation to the Company’s territories, she would have to get permission from the nawab herself, for “without that, she can have no right to remove the immense Wealth she possesses, or even her own Person out of his Dominions.”⁴⁶

Although the initial dispute among the council members was driven, like so many other issues during this period, by the personal clash between Francis and Hastings, it also reflected a fundamental debate among Company officials regarding shared sovereignty in polities like Awadh. Those sympathetic to Hastings’s position recognized a number of fundamental ambiguities at play within the Awadh regime, between “domestic” and “political” affairs, “public” and “private” spheres, sovereign and personal legal regimes. Consequently, they understood that to delimit or dismiss the begum’s claims to property or political authority was hardly straightforward. However, in what would increasingly become the Company’s official stance, Francis and others maintained that the rampant “corruption” of Indian states—particularly those like Awadh, whose rulers had “illicitly” usurped authority from the Mughal

⁴⁵ For the role of Muslim women’s assumed servile status in intra-Company disputes, see R. Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 191-200.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

emperor—was a necessary outcome of their divided authority. Eliminating corruption, a task essential to the Company’s own attempts to legitimate its burgeoning Indian empire, thus required protecting the unitary sovereignty of its Indian allies guaranteed by treaty.⁴⁷ In Awadh, this entailed containing and constricting the begums’ authority by relegating their affairs to the realm of the “domestic,” an arena to be regulated through an increasingly textual and formalized regime of Islamic personal law and ruled by the nawab’s exclusive patriarchal authority.⁴⁸ As demonstrated below and in subsequent chapters, this was a project that often met with enthusiastic support from the nawabs themselves.

The council’s subsequent letters to Bristow and Bahu Begum and the finalizing of the *qaulnāma* reflected these tensions. On the one hand, the council recommended that independent appraisers be appointed to value the goods and ordered the resident, upon the receipt of any outstanding balances, to enforce the *qaulnāma*, to protect the begum “from any further demands, or molestations, of the Nabob, her son,” and—if permitted by the nawab—to assist her in retiring to Company territories. On the other hand, it clearly circumscribed the begum’s political authority in the manner deemed appropriate by Francis and his supporters. “We have also told her in reply to her recommendation of Mahomed Elich Cawn and Busheer Cawn to be replaced in their former offices, that the nabob is Master in his own Gov’t and that we cannot with

⁴⁷ For recent studies of Company ideology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see R. Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, and P. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also T.R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴⁸ For similar processes in the *niḡāmat* of Murshidabad, see I. Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Colonial Law* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); For the role of colonial law in creating a public-private binary and in reinforcing patriarchal authority during the Company era, see R. Singha, “Making the Domestic More Domestic: Criminal Law and ‘head of the household’, 1772-1843,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 33 (Jul.-Sep. 1996): 309-343; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); and D. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

propriety interfere.”⁴⁹ Despite the acknowledgement of his exclusive authority, Asaf-ud-daula continued to hope for a more direct confrontation between his mother and the Company, pleading that “two rulers were too much for one country.” Hastings, however, had no intention of being drawn into further conflict.⁵⁰ In a second letter to Bristow, he forbade the resident from becoming “the instrument of asserting [the nawab’s] pretensions on any of his Subjects, *not in open Rebellion against him*, and more particularly in enforcing disputed claims against Mother.”⁵¹ Ultimately Bristow’s repeated threats of withdrawing Company protection coerced Bahu Begum into forfeiting another five *lakh* rupees, thereby settling the debt and fulfilling the conditions of the *qaulnāma*.

Nevertheless, the document, despite its veneer of legal inviolability, proved to be a palliative and ultimately untenable solution to the conflict between Bahu Begum and Asaf-ud-daula. Although the minister Murtaza Khan was assassinated in the summer of 1776—at the instigation, some sources suggest, of the nawab’s grandmother⁵²—Asaf-ud-daula continued to press his mother for more money and to harass her servants when she refused to relent. His actions, however, were not motivated solely by spite: The nawab himself faced increasing British pressure as his debt exploded with the arrival an additional, “temporary” brigade of Company sepoy. With British officers increasingly supervising local revenue collection and with few additional sources of income in Awadh remaining, Company officials, fearing their own financial

⁴⁹ FDSC, 3 Jan. 1776, No. 6.

⁵⁰ FDSC, 25 Jan. 1776, No. 6

⁵¹ FDSC, 13 May 1776, No. 3. Emphasis added.

⁵² Maharashtra State Archives (Mumbai), Parasnis Daftar, Bundle No. 12: Sheet of News from Delhi, Regnal Year 12 (*fard-i akhbārāt-i dār-ul-khilāfat, sana-yi davāzda*): “... The aforementioned eunuch [Basant Ali Khan], at the instigation (*bi-ishārat*) of the wife of Mansur Ali Khan [Safdar Jang], killed Murtaza Khan, the *dīwān* of Asaf-ud-daula.”

embarrassments, grew progressively more frustrated with the nawab. In this tense atmosphere, Anglo-Awadh relations would be suddenly upended in the following decade, ironically by Hastings's own requirement that the begum be engaged in "open rebellion" before he could authorize British action against her. Not only did such a demonstration in 1780 permanently alter the governor-general's view of the begum and provide the necessary pretext for the Company's attempted seizure of her property; it also led Asaf-ud-daula to re-embrace the co-sharing of political authority he had once sought to destroy.

The "plunder" of the begums and a return to shared sovereignty, 1780-97

Surprisingly, however, the incident that provoked this dramatic reconfiguration occurred in an unexpected quarter now outside the Awadh dominions. In 1780, the governor-general travelled to the recently ceded territory of Benares to place a new ruler on the tributary kingdom's throne. While in the city, Hastings was nearly killed when partisans of Chait Singh, the recently deposed king, led a brief but violent rebellion against Company forces.⁵³ Hearing of the uprising's early success and rumors of Hastings' death, *zamīndārs* and local officials throughout eastern Awadh rose against British troops and revenue farmers, attempting to expel them from the region. Among those said to have participated in the "insurrection" were several of the begum's eunuch administrators, as well as the begum herself. Although it was difficult to ascertain how involved she was in the uprising, Company officials later reported that the begum had offered direct financial support to rebellious *zamīndārs* and had directed her own forces to combat British officers commanding the nawab's soldiers—accusations she vehemently denied.

⁵³ For the following summary of Chait Singh's rebellion and the resumption of the *jāgīrs*, I have relied on Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 198-212, except where noted.

In any case, the uprising was quelled largely through the nawab's timely relief of Hastings and other Company officers besieged in Benares.

Despite having been a vocal, if reluctant, ally of the begum, Hastings renounced his support for her after the Benares uprising. Hoping to eliminate in one stroke the begum's authority and the nawab's still-ballooning debt, Hastings concluded an agreement with Asaf-ud-daula that permitted him to resume all *jāgīrs* in his dominions and to demobilize private troops retained for revenue collection. This permission extended to *jāgīrdārs* like those of Bahu Begum, whose holdings had been formally guaranteed by the Company. In exchange for their seized estates, the nawab would pay such individuals a cash stipend worth the stated annual yield (*jama*) of their *jāgīrs*. As most large *jāgīrs* were significantly under-assessed, the nawab stood to increase his revenue receipts and Hastings was determined to see the entire increase go to paying his debts to the Company.

For his part, Asaf-ud-daula intended to take additional advantage of the situation by pressing his mother to forfeit the remainder of her treasure. Encouraged by successive British residents, the nawab continued to couch his claim to the wealth in terms of personal inheritance. Hastings, however, remained dubious. Instead, he encouraged the measure as a defense of the nawab's right to enjoy unchallenged sovereignty within his dominions—with the hope that the Company would ultimately reap any and all financial benefits. As he wrote later to justify his actions against Bahu Begum, “The Nabob had declared his Resolution of reclaiming all the Treasures of his Family which were in [the begums'] Possession, and to which by the Mahomedan Laws he was entitled this Resolution.” This decision “was strenuously encouraged and supported, *not so much for the Reasons assigned by the Nabob,*” but because the governor-

general found it “equally unjust and impossible that the begum should be allowed to retain the means of which [she had] already made so pernicious a use by exciting...a Revolt against the Nabob, their Sovereign.”⁵⁴ More importantly, Asaf-ud-daula had promised “that whatever acquisitions shall be obtained [would be] principally applied to the Discharge of the Balance to the Company.”⁵⁵

The construction of the nawab as Awadh’s sole sovereign and the begum’s treasure as an existential threat to his authority were also central to Hastings’ broader plans to reconstruct the Awadh regime after the Benares uprising. As discussed in the following chapter, this restructuring was to be effected principally by dividing the *sarkār*’s assets and establishing a separate “public” treasury, which was to be overseen by the Company and dedicated to payment of the nawab’s debt. However, the neutralization of Bahu Begum and the seizure of her assets were to play a role as well. By acceding to the nawab’s claim to the treasure under the pretext of defending his authority, Hastings hoped to de-legitimize co-sharers in local sovereignty, to consolidate the administration of the regime around the person of the nawab, and, ultimately, to re-shape the state to allow the Company greater access to Awadh’s resources.

Bahu Begum, however, had no intention of abandoning her authority or forfeiting her treasure. In addition to physically resisting the seizure of her *jāgīrs* and the later occupation of Faizabad (actions which have been frequently noticed by modern historians) the begum also relied upon written argumentation to defend herself, her property and her authority. Although her arguments ultimately failed to persuade Hastings and other Company officials, they illuminate not only how the begum conceived of the Awadh regime following the death of her husband but

⁵⁴ FDSC, 5 Feb. 1782, No. 1A. Emphasis added.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

also how she contested the encroachments of Asaf-ud-daula and the Company conceptually. Her arguments consisted of two primary assertions. First, engaging with the nawab's quasi-legalistic claims, she denied his right either to inherit the treasure or to resume her *jāgīrs*. For the begum, the revenues of the province had been the property of Shuja-ud-daula, who had transferred portions—in the form of her *jāgīrs* and the treasury's cash receipts—as irrevocable gifts (*ʿatā*). Thus, as private property that had been alienated by the late nawab prior to his death, neither the *jāgīrs* nor the treasure were subject to inheritance law or sovereign right; they could only be understood as her private fortune. “All that I have,” she explained in a letter to her son, “in cash, goods, districts, and *jāgīrs*, is from the fortune of the late nawab (*bi-daulat-i ān marḥūm*). I have not been stained by a single *dām* of yours.”⁵⁶ Thus, she commanded him to abandon his “ill-founded notion” (*īn khayāl-i khām*) and restore her *jāgīrs*.⁵⁷ In a letter to the new resident, Nathaniel Middleton, she stated the matter more simply: “The Jagheer is not the Grant of the Nabob that he should resume it. Let those who granted it resume it. The Nabob has nothing to do with me.”⁵⁸

Although he affirmed to Hastings that Asaf-ud-daula was “prosecuting his legal Claims upon her for the Publick Treasure and effects belonging to his inheritance from his Father”—proving that distinguishing “public” from “private” was no simple task even for the Company—Middleton, in his response to the begum, construed her as a threat to the nawab's rightful and absolute authority. “His Excellency declared, and I have seen myself too many Proofs to doubt it, that the Authority and Dominions exercised by the Jagheerdars is extremely prejudicial to his

⁵⁶ *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fol. 287a. A *dām* was a copper coin of little value, commonly used in revenue assessments.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ FDSP, 12-30 Jun.1783, No. 20A.

Revenue and Government.” “The Nabob is master,” he informed her, “and I cannot oppose his pleasure.” Such responses prompted the begum to counter with her second line of argument, maintaining that through the *qaulnāma* the Company itself had territorially enshrined her dominions and was obliged by treaty to protect them. Playing upon the insistence of British officers that they would zealously enforce contracts, treaties, and the rule of law, she reminded Middleton that “the rules and regulations of the English kings and their servants are such that they never retreat from their oaths and deeds; whatever they say or write remains in effect. I have with me the papers sealed by Bristow and others that neither the Company nor Asaf-ud-daula have claims upon my property or my servants.”⁵⁹

For Middleton and Hastings, however, the matter of the *qaulnāma* was immaterial. While they insisted that the substance of the agreement was being upheld by guaranteeing a cash subsidy as compensation for the *jāgīrs*, elsewhere they indicated that the begum’s actions in supporting Chait Singh, and the Company’s own aims and exigencies of enforcing Asaf-ud-daula’s authority, had effectively nullified the agreement. Justifying his plans to Hastings, Middleton determined that “the Conduct of the Begums on the late disturbances at Benares...has forfeited any Claim they might originally have had to the protection and mediation of the Company.” “Further,” he noted, “it might not be political, or yet perfectly safe to trust them any longer with such Powerful means of promoting an opposition to our Interests.”⁶⁰

This rationale enjoined Middleton to proceed to Faizabad with the nawab and several companies of British sepoy to occupy the begum’s *jāgīrs*, dissolve her forces, and seize her treasure. Yet despite the resident’s determination and the threat of force, he could not compel

⁵⁹ *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fols. 286b-287a.

⁶⁰ FDSP, 12-30 Jun.1783, 8A.

Bahu Begum to forfeit her assets. Taking refuge in the residence of her mother-in-law, Sadr-un-nissa Begum, Bahu Begum swore she had no more money in her possession and dared Middleton and Asaf-ud-daula to send their forces into the *ḥaram* and prove otherwise. Neither the resident nor the nawab desired to be seen as degrading the familial honor embodied by the begums and a prolonged stalemate ensued. In the end, an exaction of fifty-five *lakh* from the begum's chief eunuchs, who had been sent to surrender themselves early in the siege, allowed Middleton to declare victory and withdraw.

For the nawab, however, the confrontation in Faizabad—and the governor-general's immediate call to send the seized cash to Calcutta—demonstrated definitively the futility of siding with the Company against his mother. No sooner than agreeing to resume her *jāgīrs* and seize her treasure did Asaf-ud-daula realize that Hastings and the Company had no intention of letting him enjoy his newly acquired wealth or his supposed sovereignty. By 1783, the nawab had become thoroughly convinced of the inexhaustibility of the Company's fiscal demands, and was increasingly incensed at the resident's aggressive measures to establish a separate "public" treasury and assume direct control over the nawab's revenue administration. Consequently, in an abrupt about-face, the nawab sought a rapprochement with his mother, a restoration of shared sovereignty and a common front against British demands.

Indeed, so eager was the nawab to reconcile with his mother that he began his overtures to her even during the occupation of Faizabad in 1782. Hoping to persuade the begum to forfeit a greater portion of the treasure, Asaf-ud-daula began negotiating with her over the size of the stipend to be provided in lieu of her *jāgīrs*. These tentative discussions resulted in a stern letter from Hastings. "When the Influence and Authority of the Begums shall be Crushed, their

Treasure in your Highness's possession, and your Authority Established in their Jagheers, then and not till then will it be the Time for your Majesty to Show your Friendship and Benevolence."⁶¹ Initially, the nawab complied and withdrew from Faizabad. Back in Lucknow, however, he soon began to press the resident to restore the *jāgīrs*. Again, Hastings vehemently rejected the request, highlighting his personal offense at the request in his instructions to the resident. Finding the actions taken against the begums "most justly merited by the advantage which they took of the Trouble in which I was personally involved the last year," he told the resident that, "If [Asaf-ud-daula] shall ever offer to restore their Jagheers to them...you must not permit such an act to take Place until this Government shall have received Information of it, and shall have had Time to interpose its Influence for the Prevention of it."⁶² So adamant was Hastings's refusal that only repeated orders from the Company's Court of Directors in London and the looming threat of his impeachment compelled the governor-general to accede to the nawab's requests.

After finally receiving the governor-general's permission for the restoration in 1784, Asaf-ud-daula then formally reconciled with his mother and grandmother, traveling to Faizabad to arrange the marriage of his daughter to his mother's grand-nephew. Once in the city, he entreated his mother and grandmother to come to Lucknow for the celebration. Along the way, the nawab hosted them in lavish style, feeding them "all manner of dishes" from the kitchen of his *sarkār* and distributing large sums of cash among their numerous servants. Upon reaching the capital, he issued a proclamation that:

I, Asaf-ud-daula, am *nā`ib* [deputy/minister] to my august mother and grandmother.

⁶¹ FDPr, English Translations of Persian Letters Issued [TI], Jan.-Dec. 1782, Vol. 25, No. 5.

⁶² FDSC, 21 Apr. 1783, No. 14. Emphasis added.

[My] country and [my] wealth all come from them (*mulk wa māl az ānhā-st*) and the populace of the city is subject to them (*ra'āyā-yi shahar maḥkūm-i ānhā-st*). If any of their servants should alter this (*bid'at kunad*), he should not expect sympathy from me.⁶³

Although we are dependent on Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh—Bahu Begum’s secretary—for this account of Asaf-ud-daula’s reconciliation with his mother, the language of the declaration nevertheless reflects many of the chief consorts’ assumptions about the nature of the state and sovereignty. Construing the nawab as their *nā'ib*—the highest officer in the “public” administration of the state, known to the Company as “the minister”—not only placed the nawab in a subordinate position to the begums but also emphasized the fundamental inextricability of the dynasty and “the state.” Moreover, the supremacy of the begums within this dynastic dispensation was not derived solely from their generational seniority and parental authority but also from their specific capacity as companionate creditors and familial financiers. Construing the nawab’s “country and wealth” (*mulk wa māl*)—a phrase denoting both property and political dominion—as having been acquired from the begums, the declaration gestured towards the begums’ particular role in creating and perpetuating the regime through their frequent capital contributions, as well as their concomitant expectation that the Awadh dominions remain “theirs” and subject to their authority. Indeed, the use of the term *bid'at*, with its connotations of religious heresy, to describe deviation from the norms of shared sovereignty indicates how inviolable the begums and their partisans considered this relationship.

Apart from his public declarations, Asaf-ud-daula also adhered in practice to the financial and political compact with his mother. In contrast to the first decade of his reign, the nawab regularly sought the advice of both his mother and grandmother, often forwarding them

⁶³ *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fols. 329b-330a.

intelligence reports from across the subcontinent and soliciting their advice for administrative appointments throughout Awadh.⁶⁴ So great was Bahu Begum's particular influence with Asaf-ud-daula after 1785 that one chronicler asserted even high-ranking Company officials paid tribute to her in the hopes of finding favor with the nawab.⁶⁵ Perhaps more revealingly, despite the previous dispute over the treasury of Shuja-ud-daula, Asaf-ud-daula began to treat his mother as a financier and fiscal manager in the much the same fashion as had his father. For example, in 1794, before campaigning against the Rohilla Afghans, he deposited the bulk of his own treasury with her in Faizabad, fearing that it would be vulnerable in Lucknow during his absence.⁶⁶ Furthermore, although the nawab continued to borrow large amounts of cash from Bahu Begum, these were far from the unreciprocated demands that had characterized their earlier relationship. Not only did the nawab adhere to her commands concerning local appointments, he also regularly deposited with her property seized from deceased eunuchs and members of the royal family (a process detailed in Chapter 5). Most importantly, as noted in the preceding chapter, by inviting his mother to solemnize the wedding of Vazir Ali Khan, his adopted son, Asaf-ud-daula both legitimated the boy as his presumed heir and underscored his mother's status as the reigning "head" of the Awadh ruling family (*ra'īsa-i khāndān*) and the rightful arbiter of dynastic legitimacy.

Yet critically the reconciliation between Asaf-ud-daula and Bahu Begum, and the attendant restoration of earlier patterns of proprietary and political co-sharing, had not been

⁶⁴ See, for example BL, OMS Or. 4608 *Akhbārāt* (26 *Rabī'-ul-avval* 1210/Oct 1795-17 *Rajab*/Feb. 1796); Or. 4609 *Akhbārāt* (18 *Šafar* 1210/Aug 1795-26 *Rabī'-ul-avval*/Oct. 1795); and OMS Add. 16721 *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*.

⁶⁵ *Tafẓīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, 133.

⁶⁶ C. Martin, *A Man of the Enlightenment in Eighteenth-century India: The Letters of Claude Martin, 1766-1800*, ed. by R. Llewellyn-Jones (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 249-50.

brought about solely by the actions of the nawab and his mother. Rather, it had also been facilitated by a brief but pivotal change in the Company's policy towards the Awadh regime. Following the recall and impeachment of Warren Hastings in 1785—an episode provoked, in part, by the notoriety of actions taken against Bahu Begum—subsequent governors-general took a more conciliatory stance towards Asaf-ud-daula and the Awadh regime, eliminating much of the nawab's debt, reducing his military subsidy, and ending the most overt forms of British interference in his administration. This political and financial reprieve, which lasted more than a decade, allowed the nawab to regain control of revenue collection in Awadh and to rebuild his relationship with his mother. By the time of his death in 1797, however, Company officials had once again grown disillusioned with Asaf-ud-daula, whose government appeared increasingly corrupt and whose subsidy payments arrived increasingly late. Already contemplating a renewal of more aggressive measures, Governor-General John Shore anticipated that the accession of the seventeen year-old Vazir Ali Khan would provide an ideal opportunity to reassert the Company's influence and to continue refashioning the Awadh regime. Foremost on his agenda would be to eliminate Bahu Begum as a co-sharer of political sovereignty.

“It all comes from me”: Delimiting the power and property of Bahu Begum, 1797-1801

Before attempting to contain her power, however, Shore and his new resident, Frederick Lumsden, were compelled to acknowledge the begum's authority and to solicit her assistance in elevating Vazir Ali Khan to the throne. As discussed in Chapter 2, Lumsden's principal concern at the time of Asaf-ud-daula's death was the questionable legitimacy of the late nawab's presumptive heir and the possibility of his succession being challenged by Shuja-ud-daula's

surviving sons. While Asaf-ud-daula had publicly declared Vazir Ali Khan to be his son and heir, it was widely rumored that he was not the nawab's child by birth but rather had been purchased from a servant in his household. Wary of provoking a backlash by placing an illegitimate child on the throne, the resident initially resolved that, until he had received instructions from Shore, he would "issue all orders ... in the name of the late Nabob's Mother."⁶⁷ However, the presence of Asaf-ud-daula's younger brothers in the capital and the fear of "a general insurrection throughout the Country" soon provoked him to place Vazir Ali Khan on the throne without further delay. Even so, Lumsden sought a final confirmation from Bahu Begum, who had arrived in Lucknow during the final stages of Asaf-ud-daula's fatal illness. The begum gave "her entire approbation," telling Lumsden that "her only wish was that the succession should go in the line of the late Nabob, and not in that of ... Shuja ud Dowlah," thereby excluding Asaf-ud-daula's brothers. With her concurrence, Vazir Ali Khan was given a *khil'at* (robe of investiture), and his enthronement was proclaimed throughout the city in her name.⁶⁸

Yet as eager as Lumsden and other Company officers were to appropriate Bahu Begum's authority in securing Vazir Ali Khan's succession, they were loathe to permit anything but its symbolic exercise. The youth and inexperience of the new ruler, coupled with the appointment of Tafazzul Hussain Khan, an ostensibly pro-British minister (*nā'ib*), seemed to offer the Company a means to shape the administration of Awadh more directly, particularly, as described in the following chapter, with regard to the division between "state" and household finances. As Lumsden explained to Governor-General John Shore, "The executive department will remain entirely in the hands of the Minister and may be regulated as you shall hereafter suggest." The

⁶⁷ FDSC, 29 Sep. 1797, No. 2

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

new nawab himself, the resident hoped, although “very young and unqualified for taking any part in the administration of affairs...will be easily advised, at least for the present.”⁶⁹ Almost immediately, however, Bahu Begum threatened to upset Lumsden’s plans. The day after Vazir Ali Khan’s accession, Tafazzul Hussain Khan informed the resident that he expected the begum “to claim a Participation in the Management of the Country,” and, over the next few weeks, Lumsden grew increasingly concerned as the begum blocked the minister from implementing any of the Company-sponsored reforms.⁷⁰ He wrote frequently to Shore, complaining of the begum’s determination “to interfere in every Department of the administration,” and warned that, “unless her pretensions are firmly and successfully resisted, the authority which she seems disposed to usurp will I fear prove greatly prejudicial to the united Interests of the Company and of these Provinces.”⁷¹

As they had during the begum’s earlier conflicts with Asaf-ud-daula, Company officials vacillated between a principled defense of unitary sovereignty and a pragmatic concern with their own influence. In fall of 1797, they were particularly preoccupied with threats to that influence emanating from the begum and her ally Almas Ali Khan, a powerful eunuch of the *Shujā’ī* dispensation, the regime’s most important revenue farmer and the *de facto* ruler of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Informed that, unless Tafazzul Hussain Khan acknowledged Bahu Begum as “the fountain of all authority,” Almas Ali Khan had threatened to “retire” with his large private army to his fort in Khassganj, Governor-General Shore felt compelled to act.⁷² He ordered

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ FDSC, 2 Oct. 1797, No. 2.

⁷¹ Ibid., No. 8.

⁷² Ibid., No. 7.

Lumsden to persuade the begum to return to Faizabad, and he wrote to both Bahu Begum and Almas Ali Khan to inform them of the Company's determination to enforce the inviolable and exclusive sovereignty of Vazir Ali Khan. As he told the begum, "It must be evident to you, who have had so much experience of the affairs of this World, that no Government can be Conducted where more than one Authority exists [and] great disorders prevail in the Administration of Oude in consequence of a deviation from this Known and Established Principle."⁷³

In response, the begum sent Shore a succinct rebuttal. Building upon the arguments she had made to Asaf-ud-daula and Warren Hastings, in which her political and financial support of the Awadh regime to administer jointly its proprietary dominions, she maintained that not only was she the young Vazir Ali Khan's rightful regent but also the very source of his sovereign authority. "The fact of the matter," she replied, "is that, after the decease of my Son...I most cordially acquiesced in vesting [Vazir Ali Khan] with the authority, rule, and dignity." As a result of this formal investiture—without which Vazir Ali Khan could not have acceded—she concluded that, "There is no distinction whatever between his authority and mine." More prosaically, as regent and rightful co-sharer of the nawab's authority, she could not return to Faizabad, "lest, as he is very young, he should commit any irregularity."⁷⁴

Shore, who had already set out for Lucknow in November 1797 to ensure the young nawab would place "himself entirely under the guidance of the Minister," was alarmed by the begum's defiance and her refusal to return to Faizabad. Bolstered by testimony from Tahsin Ali Khan, Asaf-ud-daula's *nāẓir* (chief household eunuch), that Vazir Ali Khan was in fact illegitimate, Shore resolved to depose him in favor of Asaf-ud-daula's long-exiled younger

⁷³ FDSC, 23 Oct. 1797, No. 5.

⁷⁴ FDSC, 11 Dec. 1797, No. 4.

brother, Sa'adat Ali Khan. Although he justified his actions principally with reference to Vazir Ali Khan's illegitimacy, it is clear that Bahu Begum's claims to shared sovereignty and the threat of her influence over the young nawab loomed foremost in his mind. In a lengthy letter dated December 4, 1797, Shore explained to the council in Calcutta his reasoning for opposing the begum. In so doing, he paralleled her own arguments, maintaining that, as the architect of Vazir Ali Khan's accession, the Company had an inherent right to hold exclusive sway over him. "The Company by their exertions in establishing and supporting his Title, by the interest which they have in the due administration of the Government, and the still stronger obligation of not suffering it to fall into the possession of those who are hostile to them, have a decided right...to maintain their influence and interference."⁷⁵ Identifying the begum as the Company's principal competitor for control of the nawab and the Awadh administration, Shore concluded, "The influence of the Begum, considering the Nabob as her instrument, is to be opposed, at all extremity."⁷⁶

Yet if in the governor-general's estimation the begum had "neither by law or Custom" any right "to interfere in the administration," the politics of effecting a sudden regime change were to prove otherwise.⁷⁷ While Sa'adat Ali Khan—as Shuja-ud-daula's eldest surviving son—was for Shore the ideal candidate to replace Vazir Ali Khan, the governor-general acknowledged that his long residence in exile and known "parsimony" left him with few supporters in Lucknow. Moreover, Bahu Begum and Almas Ali Khan, realizing that the Company was determined to depose Vazir Ali Khan, had moved quickly to form a coalition around Mirza Jangli, the second

⁷⁵ FDSP, 11 Dec. 1797, No. 1.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

eldest of Shuja-ud-daula's surviving sons living in Lucknow. Convinced of the need to eliminate the begum's support for Mirza Jangli and install Sa'adat Ali Khan as soon as possible, Shore sent his agent to wait upon Sa'adat Ali Khan in Benares and to obtain his unconditional agreement to a list of provisos. Among these was the stipulation that "the Bho [*sic*] Begum shall retain her present Jageer and all her property unmolested during her life and that she shall be treated with every mark of distinction."⁷⁸ Two weeks later, following a series of rapid negotiations, a proclamation was issued that "Her Highness the Begum" had found Vazir Ali Khan illegitimate and had ordered the Company to depose him.⁷⁹ Not long after, in early January 1798, Sa'adat Ali Khan received a robe of investiture from the begum's hands and assumed the throne.

Thus, in order to appropriate her symbolic authority and legitimate Sa'adat Ali Khan, the Company renewed its previous agreement with the begum, despite a long-held belief that her guaranteed *jāgīrs* effectively created "imperium in imperio" and divided sovereignty. Shore, however, was cautious in constructing the new agreement, hoping to attenuate the begum's authority as much as possible. As he told the council, "Under any other Circumstances than those in which I was placed in Owde, I should have objected to any Concessions on the part of the Nawaub in favor of the Begum."⁸⁰ Her initial proposals, which Shore found "preposterous and arrogant in the highest degree," reflected her continued self-perception as a legitimate co-sovereign, as well as the supreme authority within the ruling dynasty. They included specific protections for particular members of her immediate family and household, an expansion of her *jāgīrs*, and a recognition of her exclusive control over the families of late husband and son, as

⁷⁸ FDSC, 30 Jan. 1798, No. 28.

⁷⁹ FDSC, 20 Feb. 1798, No. 13.

⁸⁰ FDSC, 5 Mar. 1798, Nos. 1 and 2.

well as a stipulation that Sa'adat Ali Khan would “do nothing against her Consent and Commands but in all affairs act as she shall direct.”⁸¹ Unsurprisingly, the governor-general categorically rejected her proposals. Instead, after assuring the new nawab that he “never would recommend to him resign any part of his Sovereignty, nor allow any participation in it by the Begum,” he drafted a far more limited agreement. In it, the nawab pledged that, “fully relying on [the begum’s] friendship and assistance in his affairs, *whenever requisite*, [he] promises to show her every degree of respect and attention and do everything to promote her Convenience and Comfort.”⁸² As a demonstration of this commitment, the nawab would consolidate her *jāgīrs* around Faizabad into a geographically contiguous estate, adding to it the wealthy district of Gonda north of the Ghaghra.

Despite Shore’s assurances, however, Bahu Begum was shown neither respect nor attention by Sa'adat Ali Khan. Satisfied “he was the Sovereign of Owde, and as such should be supported by the Company,” the new nawab moved quickly to assert the exclusive authority promised in his treaty with the Company by degrading the begum’s status publicly and by curtailing her customary privileges.⁸³ The first of these to come under attack was the begum’s daily food allowance, which she had regularly received from Asaf-ud-daula’s household whenever she resided in Lucknow. Although the begum protested the diminution as an affront to her prerogatives as the nawab’s guest in the capital, her primary objection concerned her rights to the money itself. While she had seized much of Asaf-ud-daula’s moveable property soon after his death, the principal treasury—considered by the Company to belong to the “state”—had been

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., Nos. 1 and 3. Emphasis added.

⁸³ Ibid., No. 1.

transferred to the custody of Sa'adat Ali Khan. Renewing her claims to have financed her late husband's *sarkār* since the battle of Buxar, she complained, "This son of mine is a low sort (*danī ut-ṭaba'*). All this wealth (*amwāl*) comes from Shuja-ud-daula, and after him, from Asaf-ud-daula, and, *in reality, it all comes from me (dar ḥaqīqat az mā bi-daulat ast)*."⁸⁴ Cutting her off from the allowance was thus to deprive her of wealth she had herself created and sustained for the ruling dynasty.

Still more egregious was Sa'adat Ali Khan's attempt to elevate his own biological mother to the same dynastic status held by Bahu Begum. As discussed in Chapter 1, under the *Shujā'ī* dispensation, the status of the *mankūḥa* chief consort (the *khāṣṣ maḥal* or the "greater" wife and her residential establishment) had been defined in clear opposition to the nawab's other wives, referred to collectively as the *khord maḥal* (the "lesser" wives and their residence). The hierarchy of the *khāṣṣ* and *khord maḥals* shaped not only the lives of the women themselves but also those of their offspring as well. Indeed, the Company had initially considered Sa'adat Ali Khan, as a child born to a woman of the *khord maḥal*, to be illegitimate and therefore ineligible to succeed in 1775.⁸⁵ After his accession in 1798, however, Sa'adat Ali Khan hoped to recast his own status by refashioning his mother as a *khāṣṣ maḥal*. Summoning her from Faizabad and outfitting her with an lavish entourage replete with numerous horsemen and camel-mounted drummers, he paraded her regularly in front of the begum's residence in Lucknow. More importantly, he bestowed upon her the titles not only of *khāṣṣ maḥal* but also of *nawwāb-i 'ālīya* ("her exalted majesty"), a mode of address typically reserved for the chief consorts. Furious at the affronts to her dignity and authority, Bahu Begum left Lucknow at the end of 1798 and finally returned to

⁸⁴ *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fols. 355a-b.

⁸⁵ See Chapter 2 for details.

Faizabad.⁸⁶

Sa'adat Ali Khan might have successfully marginalized her there had his relationship with the Company not soured so quickly. Facing a newly increased military subsidy and concerted pressure for rapid administrative reform, the nawab struggled to meet the Company's demands and assert control over hostile courtiers and rival members of the ruling dynasty. As discussed in the preceding chapter, at the end of 1799, Sa'adat Ali Khan proposed to abdicate and forfeit control of Awadh to the Company as delaying tactic. This unexpected move offered the begum an opportunity to make a radical proposal of her own: In exchange for the Company's guaranteed protection of her household and its complete independence from the nawab, she would bequeath to the Company the entirety of her residual estate, including the long-contested treasure of Shuja-ud-daula. Coinciding as it did with the possibility of assuming direct control over Awadh, the resident wrote delightedly to Shore's successor, Governor-General Richard Wellesley. While he acknowledged "the proposition of a Jagheerदार to be rendered independent of the Sovereign... militates so strongly against every maxim of good Government," he thought "it furnishe[d] a very substantial and satisfactory proof of her Highness's ready submission to the fundamental Principle of the proposed arrangement," i.e., the Company's planned annexation of Awadh following the nawab's abdication.⁸⁷

As had been the case with the initial elevation of Sa'adat Ali Khan, the Company's practical commitment to the principle of indivisible sovereignty thus extended only as far as its strategic interests would allow. Although it would mean recognizing, at least to some degree her local authority, the possibility of leveraging the begum's prestige to annex Awadh, as well as of

⁸⁶ *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, fols. 355a-b.

⁸⁷ FDSC, 12 Jun. 1800, No. 99.

acquiring her immense wealth, proved very tempting. Indeed, only looming threats elsewhere in India, Sa'adat Ali Khan's sudden withdrawal from his proposal, and the conclusion of a new treaty in 1801—which demobilized most of the nawab's armed forces and ceded half of his territories as a permanent payment for the subsidy—prevented the Company's complete seizure of the Awadh dominions.

However, while the new treaty obviated the need for Bahu Begum's support, her proposed bequest permanently altered her relationship with the Company. Although her will was not finalized until 1813, it was discussed regularly from 1799 onward and created an important incentive for protecting the begum, her household, and her estate from Sa'adat Ali Khan's physical and notional encroachments. Her influence in administrative appointments outside her *jāgīr* was effectively curtailed but she and her eunuch courtiers retained, until her death in 1815, almost exclusive control over her territories and—critically for her supremacy within the ruling dynasty—over the persons and pensions of the women of the *khord maḥal*. In conjunction with her seniority and imperial affiliations, this prestige rendered her in the eyes of nineteenth-century Company officials not an illegitimate usurper of the nawab's power but rather the ranking head of the ruling family. And while her authority remained compartmentalized within the physical bounds of her *jāgīr*, its potency nevertheless compelled the resident to insist, once again, that Ghazi-ud-din Haidar—Sa'adat Ali Khan's eldest son and the soon-to-be “king” of Awadh—request a *khil'at* from the eighty-three year-old begum upon his own accession in 1814.⁸⁸

“An integral part of the state”: Badshah Begum's vision of the *khāṣṣ maḥal*

Yet if turn-of-the-century Company officials saw Bahu Begum's authority as a useful tool

⁸⁸ FDPC, 9 Aug. 1814, No. 58.

for facilitating regime change and legitimating territorial annexation, their successors had no desire to see it institutionalized or perpetuated beyond her lifetime. Support for the begum, from Hastings's tenure to that of Shore and Wellesley, had always been begrudging and conditional, with most officials considering it, at best, a necessary evil for fulfilling the Company's larger financial and strategic goals. However, with British military power in India virtually unchallenged after 1818, few exigencies remained to justify the regrettable indulgence shown to Bahu Begum. Moreover, convinced that Sa'adat Ali Khan's recalcitrance towards administrative reform had stemmed from the Company's support of Bahu Begum and an insufficient deference to the nawab's rights as a sovereign patriarch, a new generation of governors-general in the 1810s and 1820s committed themselves to achieving lasting reform in Awadh by guarding the dignity and familial authority of the nawab's successors.⁸⁹ Preventing them from exercising the same kinds influence as Bahu Begum would be central to their efforts, and often those of the Awadh rulers as well.

This new policy would be executed in dramatic fashion against Badshah Begum, the first chief consort to lay claim to Bahu Begum's power and status following the begum's death in 1815. Badshah Begum, the *khāṣṣ maḥal* of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar (r. 1814-28) came to the attention of successive British residents first through her rancorous public disputes with her husband and later through her notorious influence over ministerial appointments during the reign of her son, Nasir-ud-din Haidar (r. 1828-37). As first her son and then the Company sought to curb her power, Badshah Begum defended herself through rhetorical strategies similar to those employed by her powerful predecessor, frequently arguing that her identity as chief consort, and

⁸⁹ For a useful account of Sa'adat Ali Khan's resistance to Company reforms, see M.H. Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals* (Riverdale, MD: The Riverdale Co., 1987), 104-7.

later as dowager queen, rendered her a legitimate co-sharer in the ruler's authority. However, lacking the vast wealth and lofty imperial pedigree of Bahu Begum, Badshah Begum modified her claims as well. Rather than maintaining that she had created and perpetuated the regime through direct financial support, and was therefore entitled to a share in its governance, Badshah Begum insisted that Bahu Begum's decades-long debates with the nawabs and the Company had in fact defined a discrete "office" for the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begum, both within the family and the emergent category of the sovereign "state" (*riyāsat/salṭanat*). In so doing, she made the far more radical assertion that political authority and co-sovereignty—at least for the *khāṣṣ maḥal*—was not a privilege to be earned solely through personal investment and customary practice but was in fact a guaranteed and hereditary right.

Nearly twenty years, however, would elapse between her husband's coronation in 1819 as "king" (*bādshāh*) of Awadh—the event from which she derived her own title—and Badshah Begum's assertion of her claims to the Company. Despite her tense relationship with Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, his very public seizure of princes living in her custody in 1822, and the Company's constant concern at her pervasive political influence, Badshah Begum had no contact with British officials until long after her husband's death in 1828, when her widowhood permitted her to begin independent correspondence outside the family. Nevertheless, in spite of her changed status, it would take an additional four years and a profound "domestic" crisis to provoke the widowed Badshah Begum into employing her political prerogative and contacting the Company.

The crisis, like that of the 1770s and 1780s, was precipitated by an abrupt rupture between the begum and her son, Nasir-ud-din Haidar. Although the two had enjoyed a close relationship during the king's childhood and the early years of his reign, their bond had begun to fray in 1832.

That year, under pressure from Resident John Low to reduce the power and expenditure of royal women living in Lucknow, the king entertained resuming, along with those of his wives, the begum's *jāgīr* and removing her to Faizabad. He eventually backed away from the measure when his wives protested, but discord persisted between the king and his mother. These growing tensions finally came to a head in 1834 when, outraged by Badshah Begum's callous reaction to the death of a favorite wife and her untimely demand to recognize Munna Jan—the king's purported son then living with the begum—as heir apparent, the king ordered the begum to leave her palace and forfeit her *jāgīr* immediately. When she refused, he ordered his troops to surround the palace and cut off supplies of food and water. Regretting that the begum—"a violent and intriguing woman, constantly aiming at more political power than she ought to possess"—had not been removed in 1832, Low encouraged Nasir-ud-din Haidar to continue his efforts, informing him that the Company would neither oppose her eviction nor protect her.⁹⁰ Finally, on April 19, 1835, the king's troops and Badshah Begum's bodyguards exchanged fire, killing several persons on both sides. By the end of the day, with the king's forces erecting ladders to breach the palace, the begum agreed to depart for Almas Bagh, a crumbling country house outside Lucknow.⁹¹

The begum's withdrawal, however, did not signal her submission to Nasir-ud-din Haidar. On the contrary, once at Almas Bagh she began to recruit troops to seize control of her *jāgīr* by force. When the king ordered his forces to disband the begum's soldiers, many mustered only reluctantly, swearing they would not fight against the dowager queen. The king and his minister pleaded with the resident to intervene, citing the Company's treaty obligations to defend the

⁹⁰ FDPC, 25 Sep. 1834, No. 30 and 18 May 1835, No. 69.

⁹¹ FDPC, 18 May 1835, No. 74.

Awadh sovereign from all enemies, “foreign and domestic.” In September 1836, Low agreed and sent his personal secretary to negotiate. By the end of their conversation, the begum had agreed to disband most of her forces, in exchange for an annual stipend and an additional sum to pay the troops’ arrears. Her request for the restoration of her *jāgīr*, however, was refused.⁹²

The begum was still slowly dismissing her forces on the night of July 7, 1837 when word of Nasir-ud-din Haidar’s sudden death arrived. Upon hearing the news, she rushed with Munna Jan and a few hundred soldiers to the king’s palace in Lucknow, where her forces battered down the gates with elephants, seized control of the royal court, and placed the boy on the throne. The resident, who had anticipated an attempt to enforce Munna Jan’s contested claim, summoned several companies of sepoy from the nearby cantonment and surrounded the palace. After several hours of discussion, in which Badshah Begum refused to quit the palace, assuring the resident that she was in “[her] right place,” Low ordered his artillerymen to open fire. Following a barrage of grape shot that left scores dead or dying on the throne room floor, Company sepoy occupied the palace, capturing Badshah Begum and Munna Jan alive and unharmed. Less than a week later, upon the request of the new king, Low sent the begum and her grandson to be imprisoned deep in the Company’s territory.⁹³

From Nasir-ud-din Haidar’s first assault upon her residence in 1834 until her fateful march back to Lucknow in 1837, Badshah Begum maintained regular contact with the governor-general in Calcutta and the resident in Awadh. Consequently, as with Bahu Begum, a clear picture can be reconstructed of how the begum perceived the Awadh regime and her place therein. Like Bahu Begum, Badshah Begum conceptualized the Awadh dominions as a familial

⁹² FDPC, 24 Oct. 1836, Nos. 30-32.

⁹³ Santha, *Begums of Awadh*, 160-65.

patrimony that could be parceled out into gifts by the reigning sovereign, gifts that could not be revoked after the death of the ruler who granted them. In her letters and conversations, the begum consistently construed her *jāgīrs* in Salon and Gonda—the same estates occupied by Bahu Begum until her death—and her palace in Lucknow as both “my [personal] property” (*mamlūka-yi man, tamlik-i man*) and the “gift of my husband” (*‘aṭā karda-yi shūhar-am*).⁹⁴ As she purportedly explained to Nasir-ud-din Haidar following his order to leave her palace: “This is the gift of my husband: Had it been a gift from you, I would have vacated it.”⁹⁵ Additionally, to emphasize the legitimacy of her claims, she drew explicit, if sometimes dubious, parallels between her relationship with Nasir-ud-din Haidar and that of Bahu Begum and Asaf-ud-daula. “The late Nawab Asoph oo dowlah,” she told Low’s secretary, “was always at enmity with [Bahu Begum]...Still during his life time he never took possession of her Jagheer, or house, or in any way disgraced her.”⁹⁶

Indeed, for Badshah Begum, possessing the same status of *khāṣṣ mahal* and the same consolidated estate conferred privileges and protections equal to those enjoyed by the late begum. Badshah Begum, however, conceived these more abstractly and expansively as hereditary and transferrable rights. In contrast to Bahu Begum, who claimed a share of sovereignty based upon having financed the *sarkārs* of her husband and son, Badshah Begum preferred to think of her property and political authority as a perquisite of office. While she hardly eschewed her status as the late king’s widow and the reigning king’s mother, she argued that her property and her influence in the state was part of a bundle of inheritable rights, one that

⁹⁴ FDPr, OR 288 and 289, 15 Jul. 1835

⁹⁵ Kamal-ud-din Haidar, *Tawārikh-i awadh* 326: *yih ‘aṭīya mērē shauhar kā hai agar tumhārā ‘aṭīya hōtā tō maiñ khālī kar dētī.*

⁹⁶ FDPC, 24 Oct. 1836, No. 32.

through exile Nasir-ud-din Haidar was trying to deny her. “That tyrant,” she wrote, “has seized my *jāgīr*, which has been bestowed upon me under the seal of the Company-state (*sarkār-i kampanī*) since the reign of the late king, and now wants to deprive me of my hereditary right to the Lucknow state (*mā-rā az wirāṣat-i salṭanat-i lakhna’ū khārij namūda*) and exile me from the city.”⁹⁷

These rights within the state principally concerned—as they had with Sadr-un-nissa Begum and Bahu Begum before her—the begum’s prerogative to confer legitimacy upon the ruler and regulate succession. Unlike Bahu Begum, however, who argued that her legitimization of and matriarchal authority over Asaf-ud-daula, Vazir Ali Khan, and Sa’adat Ali Khan was derived from her relationship with her late husband and her status as mother to all his descendants, Badshah Begum gestured more abstractly to her designation as *khāṣṣ maḥal*, rather than her personal bond with Ghazi-ud-din Haidar. “My late husband also entertained a large female Establishment [...] It is well known to everybody that all kings and Viziers keep up the same Establishments, but they never allow any disgrace or dishonor to be reflected upon their Khāṣṣ Muhuls.”⁹⁸ And whereas Bahu Begum frequently alluded through the term “family” *khāndān* to the particular *Shujā’ī* dispensation constructed around the *sarkārs* of her and her husband, Badshah Begum found that occupying the “office” of *khāṣṣ maḥal* rendered her the embodiment of royal family’s long-term dynastic prestige, a status she signaled by designating herself the honor (*nang wa nāmūs*) of both her late husband and Safdar Jang, progenitor and namesake of the Awadh dynasty (the *khāndān-i mansūrīya*).⁹⁹

⁹⁷ FDP, OR 500, 24 Dec. 1834.

⁹⁸ FDPC, 24 Oct. 1836, No. 33.

⁹⁹ FDP, OR 289, 15 Jul. 1835.

This more abstract notion of the *khāṣṣ maḥal*'s authority also conferred for Badshah Begum an enhanced power of legitimation. As such, she could confidently disavow her parentage of Nasir-ud-din Haidar—and, by extension, disregard the contested origins of Munna Jan—and still place either on the throne to command their obedience. Writing to the governor-general, she disclosed casually that, despite Nasir-ud-din Haidar not being her biological son but the offspring of a slave girl (*kanīz*), she had nevertheless reared him (*parwarish sākhta*) and protected him from her husband's enmity. Following the death of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar—and with the “assistance” (*i'ānat*) of the Company—she had placed Nasir-ud-din Haidar upon the throne in her capacity as his “benefactor and master” (*parwarish kunanda wa mālika*). Thus, from her expansive understanding of the *khāṣṣ maḥal*'s prerogatives, the begum was not only free to disregard the commands of her husband, the king, but also permitted to elevate whomever she chose—regardless of paternity.¹⁰⁰

Following from her construal of the *khāṣṣ maḥal* as a regularized office, replete with expanded rights and privileges, the begum also placed herself within the more concretized vision of the state promulgated by Company officials and belatedly embraced by male rulers of Awadh (Chapter 4). In several letters, she juxtaposed her current treatment with the Company's protection of former ministers Agha Mir and Hakim Mehdi Ali Khan following their dismissals. Rather than invoke the Company's protection of other royal women, she compared herself to the disgraced ministers, implying that not only did she merit British favor but that she deserved such protection from a comparable status within the state. “It is astonishing,” she wrote to the governor-general, “that the Resident does not pay the same attentions to [my] hard case as he

¹⁰⁰ FDP, OR 427, 12 Nov. 1834.

used to evince towards the servants and connections of this Government.” Denying the resident’s repeated assertion that she inhabited only the sphere of her son’s “domestic affairs,” she complained, “It cannot be considered but as at variance with [my] expectations from the British Government [...] because protection was afforded by it both to Aghameer and Hukeem Mehdee Ali Khan.”¹⁰¹ She made the point more explicitly still in one of her last letters to the governor-general. Declaring herself “an integral part of this *riyāsat*” (*juz-i lā-yunfakk-i hamīn riyāsat*), the begum played with the shifting meanings of the term *riyāsat*, framing herself as both a co-sharer of sovereign authority and an essential member of an institutionally and conceptually distinct “state.”¹⁰²

Through her statements to the Company, Badshah Begum thus articulated a vision of sovereignty that not only built upon that of her predecessors but also claimed expanded forms of authority and regularized political and proprietary rights. These modifications reflected not only the Awadh regime’s new imperial pretensions following the coronation of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar but also the begum’s engagement with the Company’s attempts to invest exclusive sovereignty within an institutionally separate “government” headed by the male ruler. By claiming regularized perquisites and privileges for the *khāṣṣ maḥal*, Badshah Begum competed with the *sarkār* of Nasir-ud-din Haidar for influence in Lucknow and demonstrated the reality of shared sovereignty; by equating herself with dismissed ministers and expounding upon her hereditary right to participate in governance, she asserted her legitimate place in the state, regardless of whether it was divided into distinct “political” and “domestic” spheres or not.

Ultimately, however, as had been the case with Bahu Begum, Company officials refused

¹⁰¹ FDPC, 5 Feb. 1835, No. 112.

¹⁰² FDP, OR 502, 22 Dec. 1834.

to engage with or even acknowledge the particulars of Badshah Begum’s arguments. For Resident Low, the begum—as a woman—could never exercise legitimate authority outside the narrowly conceived confines of the household, regardless of her generational seniority or status within the royal family. Moreover, as he assured her in his replies, the Company, despite its refusal to interfere in domestic affairs, would always support her son, as Awadh’s sole sovereign and dynastic patriarch, in exclusive dominion over his family and country. Any attempt by the begum to challenge the king would be considered a criminal act—morally and constitutionally. As depicted by the *Tārīkh-i shāhīya-yi nīshāpūrīya* (1838-40), the Indo-Persian chronicle commissioned by Low to commemorate his rescue of Awadh’s “Nishapuri” dynasty from Badshah Begum and Munna Jan, the resident framed his objections with the same legalistic justifications and language of exclusive, proprietary sovereignty that had animated the Company’s conversations with the Awadh nawabs during previous succession episodes. Writing prior to Nasir-ud-din Haidar’s death, as the begum amassed her army at Almas Bagh, he informed her that “if the king should [choose to] obey you, I have no objection.” “However,” he warned, “the reigning king is sovereign and master of the country (*ra’īs wa mālik-i mulk*).” “Your disobedience is illegal (*khilāf-i shar’*) and a cause for disgrace among all of creation (*maujab-i badnāmī dar khalq*).”¹⁰³

Conclusion

In contrast to the Company’s protracted debates and stand-offs with Bahu Begum in the late-eighteenth century, Resident Low’s summary dismissal of Badshah Begum’s claims, and the

¹⁰³ Qasim Ali Nishapuri, *Tārīkh-i shāhīya-yi nīshāpūrīya*, ed. by Shah Abd-us-samad (Rampur: Rampur Reza Library, 1998), 87.

relative ease with which he defeated her “coup,” illustrate how radically the balance of power had shifted between the Company and the Awadh regime in the nineteenth century. Following the annexation in 1801 of territories considered outside the Awadh dynasty’s original “hereditary dominions,” and the demobilization of much of its armed forces, there was little doubt that the Company would be able to exert considerable control over the regime. What remained in question was where, and to what degree, the Company would deploy its influence. As the preceding and present chapters have illustrated, the Awadh succession was one area where the Company would continually interpose its authority and, as evidenced by Low’s response to Badshah Begum, even with intense violence if deemed necessary.

Yet despite demonstrating the Company’s clear dominance over its ally, Badshah Begum’s exchanges with British officials and her eventual ouster revealed lingering contradictions in the Awadh regime’s relationship with and the Company and within the ruling dynasty itself. Foremost among these concerned the notion of exclusive, proprietary sovereignty that had been formed in concert between Company administrators and the Awadh rulers. While this conception of hereditary sovereignty held exclusively by the reigning nawab had been refined during episodes of succession, encompassing explicitly territorial dominion, patriarchal authority, and proprietorship of dynastic property, these very episodes demonstrated that, in practice, sovereignty in Awadh was far from unitary. Rather, as both Bahu Begum and Badshah Begum maintained, it was, in fact, shared, triangulated through intersecting partnerships between the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums, their sons and grandsons, and the Company. As illustrated by the controversial successions of Vazir Ali Khan and Sa’adat Ali Khan in 1797-98, and even by the relatively uneventful accession of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar in 1814, the Company could place

candidates of its choosing on the throne, but it was only the *khil'at* from Bahu Begum that fully legitimated the generational transfer of dynastic authority. Moreover, as illustrated above for Asaf-ud-daula, and as will be seen in the following chapter for Sa'adat Ali Khan, effective assertion of the nawab's authority throughout his dominions depended fundamentally on the begum's cooperation.

The reality that sovereignty was shared in practice with the *khāṣṣ maḥals* of the *Shujā'ī* dispensations did not elude either Company officials or the Awadh nawabs, particularly during the tumultuous decades of the late eighteenth century. By the turn of the century, however, neither group wished to see the begums' power formalized institutionally or perpetuated indefinitely. This was particularly true of Company administrators, who objected most pointedly to Badshah Begum's contention that agreements made with Bahu Begum decades earlier had enshrined in perpetuity a discrete set of political and economic prerogatives for the *khāṣṣ maḥal*. Instead, they viewed their engagements with Bahu Begum as a series of necessary but temporary compromises with an overly influential, and otherwise intractable, figure in the Awadh regime.

For her part, however, Badshah Begum was not attempting merely to perpetuate the powers of *khāṣṣ maḥals* past or to reanimate the *Shujā'ī* dispensation of the mid-eighteenth century. She was also responding to an increasingly gendered discourse of Anglo-Awadh diplomacy, one that increasingly bifurcated "public," masculine matters of "state/sovereignty" (*amūr-i riyāsat*) with the "domestic," "private" and implicitly feminine concerns of the ruling dynasty (*amūr-i khānagī*). By referring simultaneously to the privileges accorded her as *khāṣṣ maḥal* and to her status as "an integral part" (*juz-i lā-yunfakk*) of "the state," Badshah Begum acknowledged the discursive division between the political and the domestic.

Nevertheless, by claiming to occupy preeminent positions in both domains, she also argued that, as *khāṣṣ maḥal*, she effectively transcended the boundary between them and could never be contained solely within the realm of the domestic.

Ironically, while Company officials dismissed her reasoning, especially the role of agreements with Bahu Begum in establishing durable political precedents, the discursive divide between political and domestic affairs that framed their dispute with Badshah Begum was largely a creation of those very compromises. Following the consolidation of Bahu Begum's *jāgīrs* into a contiguous "estate" around Faizabad in 1798 and the renewal of British protection for her and the members of her household, a new set of debates emerged between the begum, the Company, and Sa'adat Ali Khan. Where late-eighteenth century disputes arose from tensions between the nawabs' theoretically exclusive sovereignty and the reality of shared authority, in the early decades of the nineteenth century the most important questions concerned the physical and notional boundaries between "the state," the ruling dynasty, and its constituent households and the respective property rights of each.

The Awadh nawabs and Company officials, as we have seen, regularly reaffirmed that sovereignty encompassed both territorial dominion (*riyāsat*) and patriarchal proprietorship (*mālikīyat*) of the dynasty and its wealth. What remained ambiguous, however, was what precisely each entailed. This indeterminacy became particularly acute when, after the accession of Sa'adat Ali Khan, *riyāsat* came to be understood not as "authority" or "sovereignty" in the abstract but as an institutionally distinct "state"—one in which the Company had, by the treaty of 1801 and subsequent agreements, explicit rights to interfere. As a result, Sa'adat Ali Khan and his successors embraced increasingly reified distinctions between household and state, political

and domestic, in order to assert expansive claims to dynastic property and to enforce patriarchal authority over relatives protected by the Company. It is to this new conceptual conversation regarding the nature of the state, and its impact upon power and property relations within the Awadh dynasty, that we now turn.

Chapter 4—States and *sarkārs*: Differentiating household, family and state

Introduction

The present chapter considers how diplomatic exchanges between East India Company officials and members of the Awadh dynasty generated stark conceptual divisions between “the state,” the ruling family as whole, and its constituent households, and how these discursive divides created new points of intra-dynastic conflict and fissures for the expansion of British influence in Awadh. Before entering into the particulars of these processes, however, it will be necessary to recapitulate the argument thus far. To summarize: Following its defeats in 1764-65 and the subsequent formation of a military alliance, the Awadh regime engaged not only in a prolonged diplomatic relationship with the Company, but also far-reaching, multivalent conceptual conversations that continually remade the regime’s political culture and, ultimately, furnished the critical avenues by which the Company advanced its control the province.

In the latter half of eighteenth century, these conversations, surveyed in the three preceding chapters, centered primarily on the nature of local sovereignty. During the final decade of Shuja-ud-daula’s reign, an Anglo-Awadh consensus that local sovereignty was hereditary, proprietary, and territorial allowed the nawab to continue a long-term consolidation of the Awadh dynasty and to centralize the regime (in what has been described here as the *Shujā’ī* dispensation) around a cluster of administrative households (*sarkārs*) headed by himself, his chief consort, and his widowed mother. The *Shujā’ī* dispensation’s *de facto* co-sharing of dynastic finance and political power, however, came under considerable strain following the nawab’s death in 1775. In concert with Shuja-ud-daula’s successors, Company officials further redefined notions of local sovereignty, framing it as a unitary combination of territorial dominion

(*riyāsat*) and patriarchal proprietorship (*mālikīyat*) held exclusively by the reigning nawab, a redefinition that belied both the co-sharing of dynastic authority with the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums and the growing power of the Company. However, while the reformulation of sovereignty would spark fierce conflicts between the nawabs, *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums and the Company, particularly of the right to determine succession, it nevertheless became well entrenched in Anglo-Awadh discourse by the early nineteenth century. And while *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums would continue to challenge notions of unitary sovereignty and exclusive dynastic authority into the 1830s, compromises made with women like Bahu Begum at the turn of the century would shift the conceptual conversation between the Company and the Awadh regime. Where it had previously centered on abstract affirmations of sovereignty, Anglo-Awadh and intra-dynastic debate now centered on practical distinctions between “familial” and “political” authority and the physical and conceptual boundaries between competing *sarkārs*, the ruling “family” (*khāndān*) and “the state.”

As the present chapter will demonstrate, the most significant outcome of this evolving conversation would be the joint construction by the Company and the Awadh nawabs of household, family, and state as discrete, if contested categories. Through this process, the Awadh rulers would find themselves pulled between existing theories of Indo-Islamic governance, which viewed the normative exercise of sovereignty as an extension of bodily discipline, patriarchal authority, and domestic management,¹ and British dichotomies between royal households and the state, which were informed not only by durable divisions between royal households and the

¹ For the influence of Aristotelian economics and medieval Persianate ethical literature (*akhlāq*) on Mughal governance, see C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11-19; and “Sharia, Akhlaq, and Governance,” in M. Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India: 1200-1800* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 26-80 .

treasury but also the more recent subordination of the monarchy to parliament following the Glorious Revolution of 1688.² The rulers of Awadh would regularly resist Company reforms aimed at refashioning the Awadh regime along “universal” (i.e., British) principles of political organization, particularly with regard to the separation of household and governmental offices. Yet by the early nineteenth century, the nawabs came to adopt and adapt Company’s household/state and political/domestic binaries, not so much because they recognized these as universal maxims of enlightened governance but because they provided rhetorical possibilities for asserting greater control over household protectorates headed by powerful relatives under Company patronage.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Company attempts to reorganize the Awadh regime during the reign of Asaf-ud-daula (1775-97). In particular, it considers how Company officials, assuming an equivalence between the Indo-Persian term *sarkār* and European conceptions of the state, sought to isolate the nawab’s “public” finances and administrative personnel from his household. The chapter illustrates that while Asaf-ud-daula was, in practice, able to forestall many of these changes, the Company’s conceptual binaries nevertheless took root in Anglo-Awadh discourse during the reign of Sa’adat Ali Khan (1798-1814). It notes that while “state” and “household” appointments remained largely undifferentiated well into the nineteenth century, the nawab and his successors nevertheless embraced binaries between household and state, and between the political and the domestic, to assert the supremacy of his own *sarkār* vis-à-vis those of his powerful relatives under Company protection. The final section

² For the long-term division between British royal households and the treasury, and the latter’s expansion after 1688, see J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (New York: Knopf, 1989) and T. Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Chapter 4. For a recent re-evaluation of the Glorious Revolution and its aftermath, S.C.A Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

illustrates how, through a bold gambit involving his late father's numerous co-residential *mamtū'a* widows (the *khord maḥal*), Sa'adat Ali Khan attempted to incorporate his expansive family—and particularly his female relatives—within a capacious “domestic” sphere exempt from Company interference and subject to his exclusive patriarchal authority. The chapter concludes by noting that while the nawab failed to make headway against his protected relatives, his embrace of Company categories shaped an emergent political lexicon that would continue to define the parameters of political debate in Awadh for the remainder of the regime's existence.

“Public business” and “private expenses”

As with so many aspects of Anglo-Awadh relations, the accession of Asaf-ud-daula in 1775 inaugurated an era of increased intervention in the nawab's internal affairs. The nawab's growing debt to the Company, his notorious prodigality, and his seemingly anarchic administration prompted successive residents and governors-general to entertain increasingly ambitious plans of refashioning governance in Awadh throughout his reign. As shown in Chapter 2, Governor-General Hastings had already resolved in 1775 that Shuja-ud-daula's treaties with the Company permitted British officials to regulate the succession upon the nawab's death. In the years that followed, with Asaf-ud-daula's debt creating a potentially existential threat to Company finances, Hastings insisted upon the Company's right to assert greater control over the nawab and provincial administration. As important studies by Richard Barnett and Michael Fisher have shown, British intervention during this period entailed collecting detailed information on the nawab's financial resources, establishing control over high-ranking

administrative appointments, and assuming direct involvement in provincial revenue collection.³ At a more fundamental level, however, Company officials ultimately aimed to fashion a new kind of state in Awadh, one in which a “public,” autonomous, institutionally continuous government would remain distinct—physically, notionally, and, financially—from the “private” households and expenses of successive rulers.

Critically, British officials did not initially see themselves as promoting innovation. Rather, informed by notions of the nawab’s *sarkār* as an institutionally continuous state (as opposed a component of a larger constellation of semi-autonomous households), they understood themselves as repairing a profound generational schism in the wake Asaf-ud-daula’s accession. Ironically, it was the Company’s very presence in Awadh that precipitated such a cleavage in the first place. As had Shuja-ud-daula upon his own accession in 1754, Asaf-ud-daula found in 1775 a group of powerful senior relatives and officials eager to perpetuate their authority over the young nawab. In the absence of the Company alliance, Asaf-ud-daula, like his father, may well have been forced to conciliate members of the previous regime and to build his own administration slowly and cautiously. However, with the Company committed to enforcing the nawab’s claims against those of his brother Sa’adat Ali Khan, as well as to establishing the exclusivity of his authority (Chapter 2), Asaf-ud-daula was given a much freer hand to replace his father’s erstwhile supporters.

In this regard, the nawab did not so much deviate from his father’s precedent so much as accelerate it. Like Shuja-ud-daula, Asaf-ud-daula gave new charges to members of own

³ R.B. Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980); M.H. Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals* (Riverdale, Maryland: The Riverdale Company, 1987).

household establishment, many of whom had been his intimate companions since childhood. For example, immediately after his accession, he promoted from among his boyhood confidants his *khānsāmān* (household steward) Murtaza Khan to the position of *nā'ib* (“minister”) and gave his accountant (*mushrif-i biyūtāt*) and close friend Jhao Lal a military command and additional offices at court (*khidmāt-i ḥuzūr*). Additionally, he bestowed upon several of his orderlies and sepoy bodyguards (*ardālī, tilinga*)—many of whom were rumored to be his lovers—the title of “raja,” along with revenue farms (*‘amaldārīs*) and several of Shuja-ud-daula’s established infantry regiments (*risālas*). The new nawab delegated fewer offices to eunuchs than did Shuja-ud-daula but Tahsin Ali Khan, Asaf-ud-daula’s chief household eunuch (*nāzīr*), nevertheless formed a critical part of the new regime, supervising most household offices and workshops (*kārkhāna-hā*) and, through his Hindu relatives, providing the *sarkār* additional linkages to commercial and banking communities.⁴

Assigning intimate friends, lovers, and servants diverse portfolios of offices within the household, army, and revenue collection apparatus, Asaf-ud-daula clearly perpetuated the pattern, if not the particular personnel, of the *Shujā'ī* dispensation. Yet in the eyes of the Company officials, by marginalizing individuals like former *nā'ib* Muhammad Ilich Khan and *chēla* Muhammad Bashir Khan—men who had maintained working relationships with British officials since the mid-1760s—the young nawab seemed to be engendering profound *institutional* discontinuities that gravely threatened the Company’s interests in Awadh. Gesturing to both the generational cleavages within the Awadh regime and the threat of losing its influence

⁴ Abu Talib Khan, *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn, waqā' i-i zamān-i nawwāb aṣaf-ud-daula*, ed. by Abid Reza Bedar (Rampur: Institute of Oriental Studies, 1965), 14. For Tahsin Ali Khan’s relatives, see National Archives of India [NAI], Foreign Department-Political Consultation [FDPC], 31 Dec. 1813, Nos. 46-48.

with Asaf-ud-daula, John Bristow, the Company's new resident in Awadh, sent in April 1775 a lengthy report on the new men of the young nawab's court. Of *nā'ib* Murtaza Khan, he observed:

Notwithstanding the Confidence the Nabob reposes in [him], the [*khāṣṣ maḥal*] Begums [i.e., the nawab's mother and grandmother] are much dissatisfied with his Elevation. They recommended it to his Excellency to encourage the old Servants of the Government...In some Measure, too, this may appear consistent with the Interests of the Company, for as Ellije Cawn and the old Ministers have, by frequent Instances within their own knowledge, experienced the power of our Government, such men, I should conceive, are much more likely to pay a Deference to the Company.⁵

His initial reservations notwithstanding, Bristow was eventually able to form a working relationship with Murtaza Khan, particularly after the latter persuaded Asaf-ud-daula to cede the *zamīndārī* of Benares to the Company as partial payment of the nawab's debt. The unpopular *nā'ib*, however, was assassinated in 1776 (see Chapter 2). Again facing a potential loss of British influence, as well as the nawab's growing debt, Bristow now pressed Asaf-ud-daula for more substantial reforms. For the resident, apart from the loss of experienced officials, Asaf-ud-daula's administration had three interrelated defects. Firstly, by employing members of his household in the "government," the nawab had elevated men who "until now [had] never been in any Channel to render [themselves] conversant with *Public* Business." Secondly, by permitting presumably unqualified individuals to hold simultaneous appointments in "civil," "military," and "household" establishments, the nawab allowed accounts to become confused, obscuring the true extent of both his income and his disbursements. Thirdly, this overlap encouraged officials to embezzle money by maintaining inflated muster rolls of troops and by farming and sub-farming revenue collection and household provisioning.⁶

⁵ NAI, Foreign Department-Secret Consultation [FDSC], 20 Apr. 1775, No. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, and FDSC, 26 Feb. 1776, No. 11; FDSC, 26 Aug. 1776, No. 1; and FDSC, 23 Sep. 1776, No. 18. Emphasis added.

As Chapter 1 illustrated, nothing about Asaf-ud-daula's regime was especially new. Under Shuja-ud-daula, "unqualified" household servants had long been given charge of "public" offices, a fact well-known by Company officials. Indeed, only three years before Bristow described Muhammad Illich Khan as "the fittest Person to transact the executive Part of the Government," another Company officer had characterized him as a former *huqqa* bearer of "obscure" origins, who was virtually illiterate but nevertheless "perfectly versed in all that low cunning, falsehood, treachery and deceit which, according to the Ideas of the inhabitants of Hindostan, constitute a man of abilities."⁷ This same report also enumerated many other officials who held overlapping appointments within the *Shujā'ī* dispensation. Moreover, it suggested that the kinds of systemic "corruption" for which Company officials lambasted Asaf-ud-daula were endemic and indeed structural under Shuja-ud-daula. Like his father, the young nawab hoped to regulate accumulation and embezzlement by demanding advances (*pīshgī*) for appointments and by leveling semi-regular impositions in the form of honorary tribute (*nazar, nazrāna*) and feasting dues (*ziyāfat*). Indeed, Bristow himself noted that the alienation between the nawab and his father's officials was due as much to Asaf-ud-daula's desire to hold them to account as it was to the promotion of his own companions over them.⁸

Nevertheless, Bristow framed his critique of the nawab in terms of his failure not only to maintain institutional and administrative continuity but also to uphold more "universal" maxims of good governance, particularly with regard to the separation of "executive" and "financial" powers, "civil" and "military" establishments, and "public" and "private" finances. Following

⁷ FDSC, 24 Apr. 1776, No. 4; British Library [BL], Hastings Papers, Add. 29202, "Observations upon the Family of his Excellency the Nabob Vizier Sujah-ul-Dowlah, and upon the Characters of the Principal People about his Court, and some of his Civil and Military Sirdars," fol. 114b.

⁸ FDSC, 20 Mar. 1775, No. 6 and FDSC, 20 Apr. 1775, No. 3.

Murtaza Khan's death, Bristow eventually pressured Asaf-ud-daula to reappoint many of his father's officials. He also impressed upon him the need "to support the Heads of Office in their several Departments and to keep every Man solely in his own Line."⁹ Furthermore, to clamp down upon the *sarkār*'s structural "corruption," he urged to the nawab to create an office of *amānat* (security), "the Duties of which will be to see that no Innovations are made in the fixed Establishments either military or civil, and that no final adjustments of Accounts should be considered legal without the Superintendant's Signature."¹⁰

Although initially sanguine about the prospects of reform, Bristow was soon disappointed. Despite the reassignment of the old officials, Asaf-ud-daula merely bypassed them in favor of parallel appointments held by the same household officers objected to previously by the resident. The nawab was similarly able to obfuscate the designs of Bristow's successor, Nathaniel Middleton, who replaced him as resident in 1777. While Middleton was able to dictate the selection of Asaf-ud-daula's subsequent *nā'ibs* and to prevent particularly objectionable servants from occupying the post, his power and that of his hand-picked ministers remained limited by the influence of household officials and their overlapping appointments. Coupled with inflated collection charges deducted by revenue farmers, the impenetrable accounting of *sarkār* allowed Asaf-ud-daula to conceal the true extent of Awadh's financial resources from the Company. In turn, his ability to hide his dominion's wealth, along with the selective non-payment of salaries and stipends to household staff and to relatives living in Lucknow and

⁹ FDSC, 24 Apr. 1776, No. 4.

¹⁰ FDSC, 6 May 1776, No. 4.

Faizabad, permitted him to make a credible case that the Company's increasing demands vastly exceeded his ability to pay them.¹¹

To the nawab's credit, it was indeed true that there was a ceiling to Awadh's resources, one that Company officials, particularly in the wake of defeats during the first Anglo-Maratha War (1775-82), were unwilling to acknowledge in their haste to transfer the Company's financial burdens onto its closest ally. At the same time, however, Asaf-ud-daula did himself few favors with austerity-minded Company officials, his lavish lifestyle and proverbial munificence undercutting his pleas of poverty with Middleton and others. It has been argued that such largesse was critical to the nawab's own understanding of his obligations as a ruler and a desire to take refuge from British interference in a realm of intimate cultural consumption.¹² This is certainly true but the nawab's image as a munificent patron was also contradicted by his calculated deprivation of his household and extended family and his seeming failures as a sovereign patriarch—a point made not only by Company officials and their Indian partisans but also by members of the nawab's own family.¹³ By the end of the 1770s, Middleton ultimately concluded that the only way to force Asaf-ud-daula to meet both his "public" and "private" responsibilities was to put aside a fixed amount of revenue for the nawab's household expenses and to reserve the remainder for the payment of public debts—the Company's claims, of course, remaining the first priority.

¹¹ Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 159-63.

¹² Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, 77-79.

¹³ The most trenchant critique occurs throughout the account of former revenue farmer and partisan of Bristow, Abu Talib Khan, the unsubtly titled *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn* ("Exposure of the negligent"). See especially pp. 46-50. For an example of complaints by members of the ruling family, see Sa'adat Ali Khan's letter of protest that his brother's "gratuitous and worthless" (*rā'īgān wa bīkār*) expenditures had led to deductions in *his* stipend: NAI, Foreign Department-Persian Branch [FDPr], Original Letter Received (OR) 358, 4 Jul. 1797.

Hastings concurred with Middleton's assessment, as he did with the resident's determination that effective reform would require the governor-general's personal intercession. With these points in mind, Hastings traveled to Benares in fall 1781 to meet with Asaf-ud-daula. There, threatening a withdrawal of Company forces in the face of a resurgent Maratha threat from *sardār* Mahadji Shinde, the governor-general pressured the nawab to sign a new agreement. In it, the nawab pledged to reduce his military establishment (the source of so many collection charges and revenue deductions) in order to free up additional funds for debt repayment. Hastings, however, stipulated that "this may be difficult without making a separation of the Nabob's public and private funds." Therefore, he further "recommended" that the nawab "receive into his private purse no more than a fixed monthly sum, for the expenses of his person and household; and that the remainder of the net collections be left in a public treasury, *under the management of his public ministers and the inspection of the Resident.*"¹⁴ Later, in instructions to successive residents, Hastings also ordered that additional positions ("an office of collections and an office of treasury") be created to oversee the new public treasury.¹⁵

As invasive as Hastings's proposals were, the Company's residents would go further still in trying to isolate the nawab's household from the Awadh "state." This was particularly the case with John Bristow after his return to Awadh in 1782-83. Taking the governor-general's commands as a mandate for aggressive reform, Bristow formed an even bolder plan. In a letter to Hastings, in addition to the governor-general's demand for a "public treasury," the resident proposed to create an additional private treasury under the supervision of a treasurer (*khizānchī*)

¹⁴ C.U Aitchison, ed., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries* (Calcutta: Savielle and Cranenburgh, 1862), Vol. II, 81-82. Emphasis added.

¹⁵ FDPC, 21 Apr. 1783, No. 14.

and comptroller (*mushrif*); to have that new treasurer pay a fixed monthly allowance to the nawab for his household expenses; and to prohibit “Persons holding the great offices of the household,” from holding “other Employments” or from being “[tax] farmers or in anyway concerned in the Collection of the Revenues.”¹⁶

Subsequent letters of protest from the nawab and his ministers suggest that Bristow had even grander designs to separate, spatially and conceptually, the “public” administration from the nawab’s household. Their complaints also suggest how enmeshed the nawab’s household was with the existing architecture of “the state” and the extent to which the nawab’s own notions of his sovereignty authority rested on this imbrication. According to *nā`ib* Haidar Beg Khan, in early spring 1783, Bristow delivered to him a list of “proposals for the administration of His Majesty’s country and household” (*dafa`āt barā-yi intizām-i mulk wa khāna-yi janāb-i `ālī*). Among them, the resident not only demanded the right to appoint a new treasurer (*khizānchī-yi nau*) but also to divide the existing treasury (*khizāna-yi kull-i mulk*) into separate branches devoted to paying, respectively, the Company’s debt, the salaries and stipends of “government” officials and high-ranking relatives (*tankhwāhdārān wa jāgīrdārān*), and the expenses of the nawab’s household departments and livestock (*ikhrājāt-i kārkhānajāt wa duwāb*). He also informed the minister that he would make reductions in the nawab’s household expenses (*takhfīf-i ikhrājāt*) and would take control of the Persian-language administrative offices (*daftar-i fārsī-yi ahlkārān wa mutaṣaddīyān*) of the records department (*dīwān*), along with a newly established court of criminal justice (*`adālat-i faujdārī*).¹⁷

¹⁶ FDSC, 12 May 1783, No. 15.

¹⁷ For Persian copies, see FDP, OR 32 and 35, 4 and 13 May 1783; for English translations, see FDPC, 22 May 1783, No. 5 and FDSC, 16 Jun. 1783, Nos. 9 and T-1, and 9 Jul. 1783, No. 2.

While these appropriations of the nawab's authority were galling enough in and of themselves, what outraged the nawab and his ministers most was *where* Bristow proposed to conduct these activities. According to Haidar Beg Khan, the resident informed the nawab and the *nā'ib* that he would establish the new treasuries, the court, and the Persian record offices in a separate building (*dar ḥavēlī-yī 'alīḥada*), taking all documents currently held in the nawab's household (*kāghaz-i dafātar az sarkār-i janāb-i 'ālī*) and depositing them in the new *diwān*'s public office (*kachahrī-yi daftar khāna-yi fārsī dīwānī*). Yet as he explained to Bristow, this would be a violation of the regime's established traditions, as "the *sarkār*'s offices have long been housed in buildings adjoining the palace (*kachahrī-hā-yi sarkār az qadīm dar makānāt mutaṣṣil-i daulatkhāna mīshawand*)."¹⁸ Moreover, he noted, "the whole of the Duftur Papers or Accounts from the earliest period down to the present time, have been and are kept in the Duftur Khaunah of the Surcar of his Highness under the Charge of the Dewaunee mootasuddees [*mutaṣaddīs*, or clerks]." Such an arrangement not only conformed to precedent but was also, in the *nā'ib*'s view, expeditious, since, "whenever any accounts were required," they were close at hand in one of the palace's open air pavilions (*bārahdarī*).¹⁹

For the nawab, the physical connection of the offices to his household was not only a matter of administrative convenience but one of sovereign authority. So too was the right to staff those offices, a point he made particularly clear with regard to the proposed officers of the "private" treasury. While he had begrudgingly accepted the Company's "advice" in appointing the chief ministers, he had often been able to bypass them in favor of a clique of household officers. The resident's attempt to directly control the composition of his household, however,

¹⁸ FDPr, OR 26, 1 May 1783.

¹⁹ FDSC 16 Jun. 1783, No. W-1.

was a practical and conceptual encroachment that he was unwilling to tolerate. In a letter to Bristow, the nawab wrote that when the resident requested “a treasurer and comptroller might be appointed over the disbursements of the dowaub, domestics &c. of my Household,” he had objected “because it would reflect disgrace upon me in the eyes of the whole world, since it would be apparent that I had no longer any authority over my own household.” Nevertheless, since the resident was determined to make these appointments anyway, the nawab requested that the money allocated for his household expenses should at least “be transmitted to the place where I reside and separately delivered into the charge of my people” and “issued...under my directions or authority,” “corresponding to the regulations and practices of this surcar.” In this way, at least, the nawab hoped a modicum of “appearance [might] be preserved.”²⁰

Ultimately, both Hastings’s and Bristow’s plans came to naught. Asaf-ud-daula’s repeated accusations that he had undermined his sovereignty, coupled with the governor-general’s own animosity towards the resident, led to Bristow’s dismissal in 1783. Not long after, the governor-general himself was recalled to London to face impeachment proceedings, many of which concerned his alleged encroachments upon the sovereign authority of Indian rulers, including the nawab of Awadh. In the wake of Hastings’s impeachment, his eventual successor, Charles Cornwallis, was enjoined to reestablish the Company’s relations with Awadh on a more secure and decidedly non-interventionist footing. Accordingly, Cornwallis forgave a significant portion of the nawab’s outstanding debt and reduced his regular subsidy for Company forces serving in Awadh.²¹ Of equal significance, following the signing of a new treaty in Allahabad in 1787, he informed the new resident, Edward Ives, that since “all interference with the internal

²⁰ FDSC, 21 Apr. 1783, No. 15. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate the Persian original or a copy.

²¹ Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 223-33.

Government of the Vizier's dominions being now unnecessary, as well as contrary to the engagements subsisting between us and the Vizier," he should "be careful to avoid both the reality and the appearance of any" and to do his utmost to convince Asaf-ud-daula "that we have nothing in view but to render the connections with Oude of mutual benefit to both parties."²²

This did not mean, however, that British officials were any more satisfied with the state of Asaf-ud-daula's *sarkār*. So long as the nawab made his monthly subsidy payments (*qisṭs*), Cornwallis and the residents in Lucknow were largely willing to ignore its continued defects. Following the death of Haidar Beg Khan in 1792, however, the nawab's payments once again fell into arrears. Moreover, he also fell behind in repaying loans from independent European merchants and local networks of Hindu bankers. Fearing that the nawab's outstanding debts could destabilize North Indian credit networks (upon which the Company's own administration and commercial activities were also dependent), British officials resumed their active critique of the nawab's *sarkār*. Indeed, only two years after determining that "the British Government should refrain from all interference in the Government of the Country and that the Vizier's power should be unshackled and Supreme," Cornwallis saw the need to reign in those habits of the nawab "inconsistent with public economy and with decency and decorum in his personal character."²³

As had been the case during the Hastings administration, these habits concerned the nawab's "extravagant expenses," his employment of individuals "in every respect improper companions for a Prince," and his failure to prevent individuals from accumulating offices which

²² NAI, Foreign Department-Miscellaneous [FD-Misc], Vol. 46 (1786-93): Cornwallis to Ives, 1 Oct. 1787, 76-85.

²³ FD-Misc, Vol. 7: "An Abstract of the British Intercourse between The British Gov't and the Kingdom of Oude, From their first Contact in 1764 up to 1836, by Captain Paton, Assistant to the Resident, Lucknow," 66, and FDPC, 7 Oct. 1789, No. 3.

“ought to be distinct.”²⁴ Unlike Hastings and Bristow, however, Cornwallis, as well as his successor John Shore, realized that reform had to be “adopted to the nature of [Asaf-ud-daula’s] Government, and to the Correction of the evils existing in it, rather than to the introduction of new principles of administration, to which both the [nawab] and his Subjects would be adverse.” Thus, during the final decade of the eighteenth century, rather than trying to fabricate entirely new institutions in the manner of Bristow, the Company preferred to support its chosen *nā`ibs* in reducing the nawab’s “public and private” disbursements, preventing “the accumulation of offices in one person,” and eliminating the “interference” of the nawab’s “domestic servants.”²⁵

These measures, however, were only of limited success. While Asaf-ud-daula outwardly pledged to support the *nā`ibs* and to reign in his household servants and expenses, in fact he did none of these. Instead, once again bypassing the *nā`ibs*, he continued to expand the portfolios of household officers, allowing them to amass independent fortunes and collecting advances, tribute, and feast dues when necessary. Eventually, Shore came to the conclusion that the only means to keep the nawab’s “domestic servants” from interfering in Asaf-ud-daula’s government—and, more importantly, in the payment of his “public” debts—was to remove them from Awadh entirely. In early 1797, accusing him of colluding with the Afghan emperor Zaman Shah Durrani in a far-fetched invasion of North India, Shore demanded that the nawab dismiss and banish his infamous household manager, Jhao Lal, who was subsequently taken into custody in Company territory.²⁶ Later that year, Shore prepared to remove Raja Bhawani Mehra, another influential member of the nawab’s household coterie and the nominal head of his personal

²⁴ FDPC, 7 Oct. 1789, No. 3, and FD-Misc, Vol. 46: Shore to Cherry, 12 Aug. 1795, 185-208.

²⁵ FD-Misc, Vol. 46: Shore to Cherry, 12 Aug. 1795, 185-208, and Vol. 47 (1793-98): Shore to Cherry, 24 Jun. 1795, 153-76.

²⁶ *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, 159-60.

porters (*khāṣṣburdārs*).²⁷ Before he could do so, however, the nawab died suddenly in September 1797—from grief, some alleged, at finally being separated from Jhao Lal, his constant companion since childhood.²⁸

Whatever the cause of Asaf-ud-daula's death, the nawab died adamantly refusing to recognize the Company's conceptual distinction between his household and his "state." Yet the nawab's intractability notwithstanding, Sa'adat Ali Khan (his younger brother and eventual successor) would prove far more receptive to British categories of the political and the domestic in the early decades of the nineteenth century. His receptivity, however, did not signal his acceptance of Company principles of governance. If anything, his regime was perhaps more household-centric than that of his elder brother, with his sons and household slaves from his exile in Benares occupying nearly all administrative positions (see Chapter 2). Rather, his embrace of Company categories was motivated by a desire to extend the authority of his *sarkār*, in its incarnation as "the state," over the households of powerful relatives protected by the Company following Vazir Ali Khan's overthrow in 1798. It is to Sa'adat Ali Khan's appropriation and initial attempts to weaponize these categories in treaties with the Company that we now turn.

Company categories and the treaty of 1801

During the reign of Asaf-ud-daula, then, the primary question for Company officials regarding the nature of the Awadh "state" was how it would be differentiated and disaggregated from the nawab's household in practice. Less pressing was the need to define it in relation to the

²⁷ FDPC, 8 May 1797, Nos. 18, 19, 24 and 26.

²⁸ BL, OMS Or. 1726, Muhammad Reza Tabataba'i, *Akhbārāt-i hind*, fol. 313a.

other *sarkārs* that had constituted the regime under the *Shujā'ī* dispensation. This is not to suggest, however, that such questions did not arise at all. Indeed, Bahu Begum's initial *qaulnāma* in 1775 (see Chapter 3), as well as attempts by her mother-in-law to secure a similar agreement in 1778, aimed at preventing Asaf-ud-daula from exercising authority over their persons, the members of their households, and the territories that comprised their various *jāgīrs*. Relatedly, Hastings and successive residents framed Asaf-ud-daula's temporary resumption of all *jāgīrs*, as well as failed attempts to recover his father's "public treasury" in Faizabad, as an assertion of the legitimate authority of the nawab's *sarkār*—as a sovereign, unitary state—against the usurpations of his relatives' dangerously overgrown establishments.

Yet following Hastings's recall and the restoration of the *jāgīrs* in 1784-5, the need to formally define the relationship between Awadh's great households temporarily disappeared, as Asaf-ud-daula and Bahu Begum settled back into an earlier pattern of financial and familio-political co-sharing. It would not be until the overthrow of Vazir Ali Khan and the "revolution" of 1798 that these questions returned to the forefront of Anglo-Awadh relations. Ironically, although the removal of Vazir Ali Khan had been justified as a means of eliminating the influence of powerful *sarkār* heads like Bahu Begum, the measure in fact reinforced their claims to *de facto* autonomy, as Governor-General John Shore was compelled to create for them a special protected status to secure their support for the accession of Sa'adat Ali Khan. Eventually known (in a neat appropriation of Indo-Persian household terminology) as "Company dependents" (*mutawassilān-i sarkār-i kampanī*), these individuals were to enjoy guaranteed *jāgīrs* and/or cash stipends from the Awadh state, as well as the special protection and favor of the Company.

Shore's *ad hoc* arrangement, however, and the creation of what might be termed a kind of "intra-territoriality," solved the problem of Vazir Ali Khan's deposition only to produce far more intractable dilemmas soon thereafter. Principal among these was the question of what exactly it meant to a subject of one state while being a protected dependent of another. Here, notions of political intimacy were of special significance, as questions of attachment to and financial dependence upon a particular *sarkār* were not merely issues of political theory but also highly personal matters connected to familial identity and to durable traditions of service and patronage. The problem became especially thorny in a context where the *sarkārs* in question were, on the one hand, Sa'adat Ali Khan's transplanted household-in-exile and, on the other, the larger Company-state *and* its own local, household instantiation, the British residency, both of which were identified in the Company's own internal Persian discourse as *sarkārs*.

More complex still were the jurisdictions of *jāgīrdārs*, who were theoretically entitled solely to revenue collection in their territories but had long administered local justice through their collectors and revenue farmers. In the case of the two largest *jāgīrs*, the status of their holders, Bahu Begum and Asaf-ud-daula's widowed chief consort, Shams-un-nissa Begum, was further complicated by their "familial" relationship with Sa'adat Ali Khan. Soon under pressure from Governor-General Richard Wellesley to dismantle his military and, eventually, to cede half his territories as a permanent payment for Company forces stationed in Awadh, the nawab was determined to preserve what remained of his sovereignty and to assert his authority against the Company's dependent *jāgīrdārs*, especially his widowed stepmother and sister-in-law. Critical to his efforts would be a calculated appropriation of the Company's own discursive distinction between the household and "the state" and between political and domestic affairs.

These efforts began in earnest during negotiations over the 1801 treaty of annexation. Although Sa'adat Ali Khan had complained continuously since 1798 of Company dependents creating impediments to his administration, Wellesley and successive residents dismissed these as evidence of his reputed venality and, more importantly, his refusals to reform his government per the advice of Company officials. The negotiation of a new treaty, however, seemed to provide an opportunity to define more clearly the prerogatives of the nawab as sovereign patriarch and his *sarkār* as the epicenter of the state. Sa'adat Ali Khan made his agenda clear in early 1801 in a list of amendments to the proposed treaty.²⁹ While many of the eighteen proposals aimed at limiting his pecuniary obligations, several made specific demands for clarifying the relationship between the nawab as a sovereign patriarch, his *sarkār* as “the state,” and his relatives and other Company dependents as his subjects. Unlike Asaf-ud-daula, who had staunchly maintained the inseparability of the *sarkār* as both his personal household and “the state,” and who had made little reference of his *sarkār*'s relationship to his wider family, Sa'adat Ali Khan not only portrayed the *sarkār* as a distinct and continuous institutional body inhabited by successive rulers but also one that, by virtue of the current ruler's *riyāsat* (alternatively understood as sovereign authority or “the government”), held discrete rights vis-à-vis the ruling family. Although the nawab claimed to hold these rights through heredity and his particular status within the family, nevertheless, following Company officials, he increasingly held that his *sarkār* was not *primus inter pares* among similar ruling establishments, but rather a sovereign institutional body with exclusive authority over the ruling family and its dominions.

²⁹ For the Persian, see FDP, OR 440, May 1801. For an English translation produced by Company translators, see R. Wellesley and R.M. Martin, ed., *The Despatches, Minutes, and Correspondence, of the Marquess Wellesley, K.G., during His Administration in India* (London: J. Murray, 1836), Vol. II, 527-30n. Except where noted, I have used my own translation of the nawab's proposal.

Sa'adat Ali Khan made this view clear in his fourth request, stating explicitly that, as his late father and brother's sole heir and the current head of an autonomous state, it was his sovereign prerogative to consolidate assets held collectively and diffusely by his extended family. Despite arguing some twenty-five years earlier that his father's dominions should be rightfully parceled out among his surviving sons, now he claimed that the collective property and privileges of the dynasty (*khāndān*) was in fact attached to "the state" (*sarkār*) by virtue of sovereign authority (*riyāsat*). The ruler, implicitly the rightful and exclusive heir to familial property, also held title to these assets as the head of state. "As I am the late nawab's successor (*qā'im muqām-i nawwāb-i marhūm-īm*)," he wrote, "all the inheritance that Asaf-ud-daula received in this *sarkār* now reverts to me (*ānchi wirāsat dar īn sarkār bi-nawwāb aṣaf-ud-daula bahadūr mīrasīd hālā bi-ḥuṣūr mīrasad*)." Hence, he demanded, "let no one but me have any influence in exacting rights of inheritance (*sivā-yi ḥuṣūr kasī-rā dakhil dar akhaz-i ḥuqūq-i wirāsat nabāshad*)," "so that all the hereditary property of my ancestors and the rights connected to this family will belong to the *sarkār* by right of sovereign authority (*ki hamagī-yi muwārīs-i aslāf wa ḥuqūq-i muta'alluqa-yi īn khāndān bi-istiḥāqāq-i riyāsat dar sarkār ā'yid bashawand*)."³⁰

In subsequent articles, Sa'adat Ali Khan elaborated how the *sarkār's* claims were to be enforced. In so doing, he also suggested a paradigm for isolating his relatives and other Company's dependents from the realm of the "political" and from British protection. No Company official, he maintained, was to "interfere or object (*dakhil wa ta'arruz*)" in the recovery of (now quite expansively understood) "the rightful property of the state (*māl-wājibī-yi sarkār*),"

³⁰ FDP OR 440, May 1801. Translation mine.

whether or not it had been appropriated with “fraudulent motives (*bi-khiyānat*)” or for “any other reason (*bi-wajhī-yi dīgar*).” Nor was the Company to intervene in the “punishment or exile (*sazā-dahī yā ikhrāj*)” of anyone who had “shook off the reigns of obedience (*sartābī az farmānburdārī*)” or otherwise “interfered in government affairs/the exercise of sovereign authority (*mudākhl dar amūr-i riyāsat numāyad*).” Furthermore, the governor-general was not to correspond with “the dependents and interest-holders [i.e., the projected *jāgīrdārs*] of this state (*mutawassilān wa ‘ilāqadārān-i īn sarkār*)” without informing the nawab, as such a connection encouraged “impudence (*khīra-sarī*)” on their part. Moreover, the resident, out of a sense of “complete unity and affection (*bi-kamāl-i itiḥād wa muḥabbat*),” was to pay no attention to the “exhortations of self-interested villains (*iḡhār-i gharzḡyān-i wāqi ‘a-ṭalab*),” who might make complaints in the future out of “purely personal motives (*bi-aghrāz-i nafsānī*).”³¹

In framing his demands in this fashion, Sa’adat Ali Khan hoped to limit the expansion of indirect rule in Awadh by capitalizing on the conceptual consensus between British officials and the Awadh nawabs regarding the exclusivity of sovereignty and dynastic authority, as well as the Company’s earlier attempts to differentiate ruling households from the state. Recognizing that its involvement in his *sarkār* could not be challenged directly, the nawab gestured towards the affairs of the dynasty (*khāndān*) as an arena where the Company could not legitimately interfere without undermining mutual “unity and affection” or the norms of sovereign authority it had jointly constructed with the Awadh regime. Moreover, by attempting to prohibit his relatives and other dependents of the *sarkār* from co-sharing or “interference” (*dakhl*) in the *riyāsat*, Sa’adat Ali Khan laid the groundwork for inserting members of the dynasty within a “domestic” realm

³¹ Ibid. Translation mine.

subject to his patriarchal authority and isolated from British assistance. Although he did not yet make the binary between political and domestic as explicit as he would in later disputes, nevertheless the nawab's demands pointed to his determination to assert his nominal claims to unitary authority and to forestall the Company's encroachment by manipulating its own discursive framework for administrative reform.

However, as he had when the nawab had tried to negotiate his abdication the year before (see Chapter 2), Governor-General Wellesley swiftly rejected Sa'adat Ali Khan's proposals. Although galled principally by the nawab's attempts to reduce his outstanding balance to the Company, Wellesley also found the nawab's stance towards his family unjustifiable. Summoning a righteous indignation, the governor-general inveighed against Sa'adat Ali Khan's demands, replying:

The object of those articles appears to be, under the shelter of the British name, to cancel all the public debts of the state of Oude; to degrade and plunder the ancient and venerable remains of the family and household of Shujah Dowlah, together with...the surviving relations and servants of the late Nabob Asophoo Dowlah; to involve the whole nobility and gentry of Oude in vexatious accusations and extensive proscriptions; to deprive the established dependents and pensioners of the state of the means of subsistence; to frustrate every institution founded in the piety, munificence, or charity of preceding governments; and to spread over the whole country a general system of rapacious confiscation, arbitrary imprisonment, and cruel banishment.³²

In other words, the nawab's proposals were not to form part of the revised treaty.

In other negotiations, however, Sa'adat Ali Khan was more successful in securing, at least nominally, the *sarkār*'s distinct judicial authority over his relatives. In early 1802, after the treaty had already been ratified, Wellesley traveled to Awadh to meet with the nawab and to oversee plans for the Company's annexation of Rohilkhand, the Doab, and Gorakhpur. Once

³² Wellesley, *Despatches*, II, 532.

again, the nawab presented Wellesley with a list of proposals designed, among other things, to assert discrete powers over his relatives, most notably Bahu Begum.³³ This time, however, Sa'adat Ali Khan couched his demands in a language of filial piety, shared principles of governance, and a sincere desire to reform the *sarkār*. Foremost among these proposals was the creation of a system of courts (*'adālat*s), a desideratum of British officials since the accession of Asaf-ud-daula in 1775. Not only were these courts to operate throughout the nawab's directly administered territories but also in areas held as *jāgīr*, especially Bahu Begum's large contiguous estate around Faizabad. The nawab insisted this had nothing to do with undermining his stepmother's authority; as he considered her "his mother and *qibla* (*wāliḍa wa qibla*)" and his "superior (*buzurg*)," his only wish for her absolute "honor and comfort (*'izzat wa ārām*)."³⁴ Moreover, he disavowed any interest in the income of her or any other *jāgīr*. Rather, he desired simply that "all affairs connected to the courts be conducted on his behalf in Faizabad and all other *jāgīr*s, as elsewhere in his dominions, because such affairs [necessarily] appertain [solely] to the sovereign (*īn amūr bi-ra'īs ta'alluq dārad*)."³⁴ Furthermore, he argued, the begum's officials should not be permitted to interfere or participate in the administration of justice (*ahlkārān-i janāb-ī īshān ašlan dar ān dakhil nakunand*), because "governance (*hukūmat*)" did not admit of co-sharing or "partnership (*sharkat*)."³⁴ For the nawab, this stance accorded not only with established political principles but also local precedent, since, according to Sa'adat Ali Khan's revisionist account, "the administration of justice in the *jāgīr*s (*infiṣāl-i qazāyā dar jāgīrāt*)" had also been "connected to the state (*bi-sarkār ta'alluq dāsht*)" during the reign of his

³³ For the Persian, compare FDP, OR 82, 22 Feb. 1802 with FDP, Copies of Letters Received [CR], Vol. 15, Nos. 64 and 64a. For the official English translation, see Aitchison, II, 104-11.

³⁴ FDP, CR 15, No. 64. Translation mine.

late brother. “Accepting these points,” he held, would be “to strengthen [his] sovereign authority (*īn muqaddimāt mu’īd-i riyāsat-and*),” an obligation ostensibly placed upon the Company by treaty.³⁵

In this particular instance, Wellesley concurred. This is, however, perhaps unsurprising given not only the Company’s long insistence on implementing a system of courts in Awadh but also the importance of such system for its own articulation of sovereignty in Bengal.³⁶ In his response to Sa’adat Ali Khan, he agreed that the courts in Bahu Begum’s *jāgīr* should be “under the authority of the nawab’s government (*dar taḥat-i ikhtiyār-i sarkār-i janāb-i ālī*)” and that her officials should be subject to them. With these points in mind, he saw no problem in pledging the assistance of Company officials in establishing and enforcing the courts’ orders.

While Wellesley and other officials hoped that the courts would reign in the perceived abuses of revenue farming in Awadh, later chroniclers recognized the connection between the establishment of the courts and the nawab’s attempts to assert greater control over his family. One former Awadh official, Muhtasham Khan, praised in one breath Sa’adat Ali Khan’s formation of different judicial departments (*muḥakima-yi ‘adālat*) and his disregard of kinship in adjudicating disputes involving his family. As evidence, he cited an instance in which the nawab expelled one of his brothers, along with his wives and children, for illicitly seizing the land of a local *zamīndār* to build a new house. As Muhtasham Khan noted, upon hearing of the incident, Sa’adat Ali Khan demolished his brother’s house, returned the land to the *zamīndār*, and “ejected [his brother] Shuja’at Ali Khan barefooted and his wives uncovered from the city [Lucknow], casting not even a glance upon their shared kinship (*shuja’āt ‘alī khān-rā pā barhana ma’a bī*

³⁵ Ibid. Translation mine.

³⁶ See particularly Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, Chapter 6.

hijābī ‘aurāt-ish az shahr ikhrāj sākhta aṣlan bar birādarī-yi ū nazr nanamūd).” “From that day on, the population was duly warned and [the nawab’s] justice became renowned throughout the land (*az ān rūz ‘ibrat bar tamām khalqullah gardāda shuhra-yi ‘adl-i ū dar aṭrāf-i mumālik rasīd).*”³⁷

Muhtasham Khan, however, exaggerated the speed with which the courts were constructed and the ease with which Sa’adat Ali Khan could deploy them against his relatives. Establishing his authority over *zamīndārs* and revenue farmers, and coordinating the deployment of Company forces against them, occupied much of the nawab’s time in the wake of the 1801 annexation. It was not until 1807 that he took up the issue again, signaling his intent to the resident of establishing a court in Faizabad as part of a larger set of property disputes with Bahu Begum.³⁸ Once established, the courts also faced considerable resistance from precisely those individuals the nawab wished to control through them, i.e., the Company’s dependents and protected *jāgīrdārs*. While Wellesley had conceded that the nawab could wield at least judicial authority over his protected relatives, as well their own officials and dependents, the Company *mutawassilān* resisted fiercely his attempts to actualize such authority, as well as to implement a larger program of domestic surveillance that attended the establishment of the courts. As the next section will illustrate, efforts of the Company *mutawassilān* were bolstered not only by jurisdictional ambiguities inherent in the formation of “household protectorates” for the client *jāgīrdārs* but also by their tireless champion, Resident John Baillie, who sought to defend the Company’s dependents from what he perceived to be the nawab’s despotic and illegal overreach. The ensuing conflicts between the nawab, the resident, and the Company dependents were no

³⁷ BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4090, Muhammad Muhtasham Khan, *Tārīkh-i muhtasham*, fol. 4a.

³⁸ FDPC, 4 Jun. 1807, No. 31.

more contentious, or more complex, than in Faizabad, the seat of the most powerful of the protected *jāgīrdārs*, Bahu Begum.

Authority, jurisdiction, and domestic surveillance in Faizabad, 1810-12

When Governor-General John Shore guaranteed the *jāgīrs* of the Company's dependents in Awadh in 1798, it is clear that he did not intend to embroil later officials in protracted jurisdictional wrangling. Rather, by confirming the existing assets of Asaf-ud-daula's elderly female relatives (namely his mother, Bahu Begum, and his widowed chief consort, Shams-un-nissa Begum), along with those of influential officials from the late nawab's reign, Shore hoped to secure their acquiescence to and public support of the removal of Vazir Ali Khan and the installation of Sa'adat Ali Khan. While Shore succeeded in this regard, he failed to anticipate how difficult it would be to disentangle individual claims to shared dynastic property or to recognize how proprietary rights were interwoven with those to local authority.

This was particularly true for the two begums, the wealthiest and most influential of the new Company dependents. Much as the Awadh *ṣūba* had been for Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-daula (Chapter 1), the begums' *jāgīrs* were frequently described as quasi-proprietary "interests" (*ilāqa*), rather than, as had theoretically been the case under the Mughals, as temporary grants from "the state."³⁹ Where *ilāqas* were, as in the case of *jāgīrs*, geographically defined (as opposed to *ilāqas* constituted by offices), they conveyed not only a sense of proprietary right but also territorial authority. Hence, for example, when criminals or revenue

³⁹ Except where noted, the following section draws primarily from BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4341 and 4342, *Zubdat-ul-akhbārāt*, and University of Edinburgh Library, Center for Research Collections, Baillie Collection, MSS 127 (*Naql-i khuṭūṭ-i ṣāhib kalān*, 1807-10), 128 (*Naql-i shuqqajāt-i janāb-i 'ālī muta 'ālī*, 1807-10), 130 (*Naql-i khuṭūṭ-i ṣāhib kalān*, 1810-13), and 131 (*Naql-i shuqqajāt-i janāb-i 'ālī muta 'ālī*, 1810-12).

defaulters fled into their *jāgīrs*, the nawab frequently requested the begums to “extradite” (*fīristāda dihānidan*; lit., “to have them sent”) the individuals or otherwise assist in their prosecution. Similarly, Bahu Begum and her officials issued not only temporary transit passes (*dastaks*) but also perpetual grants of rent-free villages (*ma‘āfīs*) in name of her “dominions” (*mulk*) and/or the “jurisdiction” (*chakla*) of her *jāgīr*.⁴⁰

The *jāgīrs*, however, even after being consolidated by Governor-General Shore, were hardly homogenous estates. Within their territorial confines were numerous other *‘ilāqas* held by various individuals, including the nawab himself. These could take the form of further subdivisions of land, revenue rights and perquisites, or titles to particular offices. The overlap of *‘ilāqas* was especially pronounced in Lucknow and Faizabad, where the nawab held properties ostensibly inherited from Shuja-ud-daula and Asaf-ud-daula that were entangled with the portfolios accumulated by the begums during their long residences in the cities. In Lucknow, for example, although Sa‘adat Ali Khan claimed rights to the ancestral Machhi Bhawan and Panjmahalla complexes, Shams-un-nissa Begum continued to reside in parts of the palaces and to hold proprietary interests in attached marketplaces and ferries, leading to numerous disputes over the precise boundaries of their respective holdings. In Faizabad, although Bahu Begum claimed many of the structures built during her husband’s reign and administered much of the city through her household servants, the tomb of Shuja-ud-daula and its immediate environs (an area known as Gulab Bari, or “the rose garden”) and the local mint (*dār-ul-ḡarb*) were both considered *‘ilāqas* of the nawab and, as such, were staffed by officials appointed by him.

⁴⁰ For examples, see Lucknow University, Tagore Library, MS RP954 F30, *Farmans and Papers*, Nos. 31-33.

Yet despite serving the “state” and the sovereign, officials at Gulab Bari and the mint had little independent authority in the city. Even after the establishment of the court in Faizabad, in cases where individuals working for the mint (itself an important symbol of Indo-Islamic sovereignty) were assaulted by persons living in the begum’s *‘ilāqa*, the new court’s superintendent (*dārōgha*) depended upon the cooperation of the begum’s officials for resolution of the dispute. Indeed, from contemporary *akhbārāt*, it appears the begum was able to manipulate the nawab’s *dārōgha* at will. In one instance, the *dārōgha* reported to Darab Ali Khan, the begum’s chief eunuch, telling him that, “per the orders of [her] exalted *sarkār* (*bi-maujab-i hukm-i sarkār-i ‘āliya*),” he had curtailed gambling throughout the city, but that dice parlors (*kārkhāna-i qimārbāzī*) remained active inside the Gulab Bari complex. Although this area was nominally under the authority of the nawab, the eunuch told the *dārōgha* that he was to order gaming be shut down there well. “If the gamblers obey,” the eunuch said, “so much the better (*agar bi-‘amal ārand bihtar*).” “Otherwise, Her Majesty’s orders are to plunder the parlors and seize their contents (*wa illā qimārkhāna-hā-rā ghārat karda bāyad girift*).”⁴¹

Jurisdictional ambiguities and the nawab’s dependence on local cooperation not only allowed Bahu Begum and her dependents in Faizabad to subvert the new courts but also the nawab’s attempts to more closely surveil their establishments. These efforts were directed principally through another new office in Faizabad, that of the “news writer” (*akhbār nawīs*). An important component of Mughal imperial administration, intelligence collection played a similar, if not more, important role in successor regimes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth

⁴¹ I.O. Islamic 4341, *Zubdat-ul-akhbārāt*, 20 Oct. 1810. NB: For ease of reference, dates correspond to that given at the top of each daily digest, rather than those of their respective entries.

centuries.⁴² In the eighteenth century, along with their personal representatives (*wakīls*), regional rulers typically sent news writers to one another's courts to report on "public" business, as well as to gather local intelligence through more clandestine means. News was then transmitted through a network of scouts, runners, and spies (collectively known as *harkāras*, lit. "factotums"). At the apogee of his reign, Shuja-ud-daula's reputedly employed upwards of twenty-thousand *harkāras* who could relay news from as far away as the Maratha *peshwā*'s court in Pune—nearly a thousand miles distant—in little more than a week.⁴³

Significantly, *harkāras* themselves were considered part of the ranks of the nawab's *shāgirdpēsha*, or household servants, and were often listed in household employment rolls next to "menials" (*halāl-khorān*) like sweepers (*khākrūbān*) and carpet spreaders (*farrāsh*).⁴⁴ More importantly, *harkāras* were not exclusive to the households of the Awadh nawabs or their contemporaries elsewhere. Rather, they were ubiquitous fixtures of elite households more generally, serving as the primary means of transmitting messages and information between households. In this regard, they were also the prime instruments of domestic surveillance. *Harkāras* of one household, stationed at another for the ostensible purpose of delivering messages, were frequently charged with monitoring happenings around that establishment and, through female servants and eunuchs, more intimate affairs inside. As the Company slowly dismantled the "foreign" intelligence operations of rulers like the nawabs of Awadh in the early nineteenth century, "domestic" surveillance (both in the sense of occurring within local borders

⁴² For important studies of intelligence gathering in Mughal and colonial India, see M.H. Fisher, "The Office of Akhbār Nawīs: The Transition from Mughal to British Forms," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 45–82, and C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴³ *Akhbārāt-i hind*, fol. 239a.

⁴⁴ BL, OMS Add. 16,721 *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*: 26 *Jamadī-ūṣ-ṣānī* 1210, fol. 110a

and of being targeted at prominent households) took on far greater significance, with *harkāras* themselves becoming increasingly wealthy and influential.

This process, however, was not immediate. During the reign of Asaf-ud-daula, it is unclear the extent to which the nawab engaged in such overt “domestic” surveillance, particularly over his mother and other relatives living in Faizabad. Certainly, Asaf-ud-daula monitored closely both his chief officials and his relatives living in Lucknow; Persian reports from the Company’s own intelligence infrastructure (itself adapted from Indian models), along with complaints from the nawab’s brothers, indicate that these activities were widespread.⁴⁵ Yet it appears that although Lucknow was under heavy surveillance, individuals living in Faizabad may not have been. News reports from the reign of Asaf-ud-daula do not mention news writers or *harkāras* stationed in Faizabad. Instead, from narrative histories, it appears that the nawab and his officials sought information more directly from high-ranking eunuchs working in the households of Bahu Begum and her mother-in-law.⁴⁶

Given the fierce resistance of Bahu Begum to her son’s officials serving in her *jāgīrs* during their brief resumption in the mid-1780s, it is perhaps unsurprising that Asaf-ud-daula did not station a separate *akhbār nawīs* in Faizabad during his reign. Shortly after Sa’adat Ali Khan’s accession, however, the creation of household protectorates for Company dependents like Bahu Begum, along with the beginning of a more combative relationship between the *sarkārs* of Lucknow and Faizabad, led both the nawab and the British resident to install their own news

⁴⁵ For the former, see BL, OMS Add. 16,721 *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*, as well as Royal Asiatic Society, MSS 92 and 93, *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*, 1208-9 AH [1794-95] and 1209-1210 AH [1795-96].

⁴⁶ Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh, and William Hoey and H. A Qureshi, ed. and tr., *Memoirs of Faizabad, Being a Translation of the “Tarikh-i-Farahbakhsh” of Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh* (Lucknow: New Royal Book Co., 2004), Vol. I, 110, 124.

writers in Faizabad.⁴⁷ Although often deploying their news writers in tandem, the nawab and the resident seemed to have had somewhat different agendas. While both aimed to keep an eye on happenings in the city of Faizabad and in the begum's *jāgīr* more generally, the resident also used his news writer's office to communicate directly with the begum and, particularly after the 1801 annexation, to coordinate the movement of Company troops between British held territory, the begum's *jāgīr*, and the nawab's directly administered dominions. Conversely, the nawab used his *akhbār nawīs* primarily to deliver his orders to the begum's officials, to surveil the establishments of the begum and her dependents, and to incite disruptions therein.

The begum and her dependents clearly considered this increased surveillance by the nawab as an unprecedented violation. In 1810, for instance, the resident's news writer reported that, when a *harkāra* was stationed publicly at the threshold (*dē'ōrhī*) of Mirza Asghar Ali Khan (one of the begum's nephews), the *mīrzā* spoke to him roughly (*sakht sust gufta*) and ejected him from the premises (*bar khāsta dādand*). When Sa'adat Ali Khan's *akhbār nawīs* complained, the *mīrzā* told him that the *harkāra* had come to the threshold of the women's quarters (*zanāna*), which he had found to be manifestly "out of the ordinary (*khilāf-i ma'mūl*)."⁴⁸ The following year, Mirza Asghar Ali Khan once again came into conflict with the nawab's news writer, this time allegedly whipping one of the *akhbār nawīs*'s *harkāras*, as well as a blacksmith (*āhangar*) working in the mint. The begum and her eunuchs, however, accused the news writer Faqir Chand of fomenting conflict by writing lies to the nawab. More damningly, one of the eunuchs asserted that the *harkāra* stationed at Mirza Asghar Ali Khan's house had said that "he pays three rupees per month to one of Mirza Asghar Ali Khan's nursemaids (*aṣīl*) to deliver information about the

⁴⁷ The resident had a news writer stationed in Faizabad in 1800, if not earlier. FDSC, 31 Dec. 1800, Nos. 48 and 49.

⁴⁸ BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4341, *Zubdat-ul-akhbārāt*, 28 Apr. 1810.

women of household (*harkāra-yi shumā sih rupiya dar-māha jahat-i guftan-i khabar-i maḥal bi-aṣīl-i mīrzā aṣghar ‘alī khān dādan mīguft*).” “What kind of regulation is this (*īn chi ā’īn ast*), “the eunuch demanded of the news writer. In a wry response, Faqir Chand replied that he was “a news writer, not a psychic (*ghulām akhbār nawīs ast ghā’ibdān nīst*).” More matter of factly, he told the eunuch, “I’ll get information from anyone I can and by any means, including bribery and flattery’ (*bi-har nū’ī ki ṭama’ dādan wa khūsh āmad az har kasī ki khwāham tawānast daryāft-i khabar khwāham kard*).” If the begum did not approve, all she had to do was “order her servants not to speak to the *harkāras* (*az huzūr bi-mulāzimān taqaiyud shawad ki az harkāra-ha nagufta bāshand*).” Bahu Begum readily took up his proposal: Two days later, she curtly informed her servants that if any one of them gave news to Faqir Chand’s *harkāras* she would have their hands and noses cut off.⁴⁹

The violent responses of Bahu Begum and her dependents to the expansion of domestic surveillance clearly demonstrated their displeasure with Sa’adat Ali Khan and his attempts to enforce his authority over them. They also illustrated the difficulty of defining the spatial and jurisdictional boundaries between the nawab’s dominions and the household protectorates, let alone relative authority of the nawab’s *sarkār* as “the state” vis-à-vis those of the protected *jāgīrdārs*. Mirza Asghar Ali Khan’s repeated run-ins with employees of the Faizabad mint (in addition to his altercations with the news writer) vividly demonstrated the complexity of the new dispensation. The conflict had begun when, in order to expand his adjacent compound (*aḥāṭa*), the *mīrzā* allegedly damaged the wall of the mint, blocked its entrance, and evicted its employees living nearby without paying to resettle them. One of these employees was the blacksmith

⁴⁹ BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4342, *Zubdat-ul-akhbārāt*, 27-28 Mar. 1811.

mentioned above, who was supposedly whipped after complaining to Mirza Asghar Ali Khan about the eviction. After reports from Faqir Chand prompted letters of complaint from the nawab, Bahu Begum summoned the news writer to her palace. In a meeting conducted through eunuch intermediaries, the begum explained to him—and in a manner that drew explicitly on the language of sovereignty and subjecthood—that Mirza Asghar Ali Khan had not removed the blacksmith of his own volition, but per her orders (*ḥisb-ul-ḥukm-i ḥuzūr*; lit., “according to the command of the [royal] presence”). More importantly, despite Faqir Chand’s assertion that the blacksmith was “a servant of the mint, an interest of His Majesty [the nawab] (*mulāzim-i dār-ul-ẓarb ‘ilāqa-yi janāb-i ‘ālī*),” he was, in fact, a resident of Faizabad and therefore, just like her nephew Mirza Asghar Ali Khan, a “subject of [her] exalted *sarkār* (*ra‘iyat-i sarkār-i ‘āliya*)” and thus subject to her authority.⁵⁰

Critically, Company officials shared the begum’s view of her *sarkār* possessing a distinct jurisdiction over subjects living in her *jāgīr*. Indeed, despite its ostensible commitment to enforcing the nawab’s exclusive sovereignty, and often at the expense of the *khāṣṣ mahāl* begums, in practice the Company treated its dependents’ *jāgīrs* as quasi-independent territorial entities. This was especially true of Lieutenant-Colonel John Baillie, the Company’s resident in Awadh from 1807 until 1815. Before being posted to the Awadh court, Baillie had served as instructor of Arabic and Persian at the Company’s Fort William College and, under Sir William Jones, had produced one of the first English works on Shi’i jurisprudence.⁵¹ He later served in the Company’s recently annexed territories of Bundelkhand, subjugating Gossain chieftains

⁵⁰ Ibid., 26 Mar. 1810.

⁵¹ John Baillie and William Jones, *A Digest of Mohummudan Law according to the Tenets of the Twelve Imams*, (Calcutta: Printed at the Hon. Company’s Press, 1805).

formerly in the service of the Awadh nawabs.⁵² Along with his experience in the field, fluency in Indian languages, and literacy in Islamic law, Baillie also brought to the nawab's court a pedantic sensibility and a determination to uphold the Company's supremacy in Awadh. This posture often verged on the absurd: At one point during his tenure, Baillie forwarded a large volume of vernacular correspondence from the residency's archive in Lucknow to the governor-general in Calcutta solely to demonstrate that Sa'adat Ali Khan had all but abandoned standard forms of Indo-Persian epistolary courtesy and was now using a language which the resident found to be "exceptionable," "highly offensive," and little different from that used by the Mughal emperors to address their slaves.⁵³

More importantly, however, this same concern for adherence to rule and custom animated Baillie's vigorous defense of the privileges of the Company's protected *jāgīrdārs* from what he believed to be Sa'adat Ali Khan's illicit over-reach. Although he often pursued this agenda through regular appeals to the nawab and the governor-general, he also accomplished it through his own calculated inaction. Early in the resident's tenure, for example, complaining of Bahu Begum's failure to heed the resident's advice and reign in the depredations of *zamīndārs* living in her *jāgīr*, Sa'adat Ali Khan took Baillie to task. After complaining that he had "submitted [his] recommendation to Her Majesty" without her taking action, he chided him that "your status is not such that only discussion should be conducted through you (*martaba-yi niyāzmand ānchunān nīst ki faqaṭ sawāl wa jawāb az niyāzmand shuda bāshand*)." Instead, he argued the resident should act in such a manner that any affair the nawab should write to him about would be

⁵² W. R. Pinch, "Who Was Himmat Bahadur? Gosains, Rajputs and the British in Bundelkhand, Ca. 1800," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 35, no. 3 (1998): 293–335.

⁵³ FDPC, 22 Feb. 1813, No. 15.

concluded immediately—and presumably in the nawab’s favor. Baillie, however, portrayed his obligations in a much different manner. He replied that where “the resident’s intervention is consistent with [correct] governance (*mudākhilat-i niyāzmand bi-ṭarīq-i ḥukūmat*),” such as in the deployment of Company troops or British officials, he always had been and always would be of assistance. “However,” he continued, “in affairs where the resolution depends upon the *sarkārs* of both Your Majesties (*amā amūrī ki tamshīyat-i ān muta‘alluq bi-sarkār-i janāb-i ‘āliya...wa sarkār-i ḥuzūr purnūr*),” he could only offer the two parties advice and hope they reached a solution of their own accord.⁵⁴

Baillie’s position, however, entailed rather stark contradictions. On the one hand, in positing a distinct sphere of “governance” in which the Company’s intervention was legitimate, it seemed to suggest the nawab’s protected relatives somehow lay outside this domain. As the next section will illustrate, this was a contention which Sa’adat Ali Khan would eagerly take up in later disputes. On the other hand, by framing the resident as independent mediator between two *sarkārs*, he implied that Sa’adat Ali Khan and Bahu Begum ruled distinct sovereign spaces, suggesting that neither the nawab’s “state” nor his authority were as unitary or as exclusive as Company officials had previously maintained. Moreover, despite posing as impartial and ultimately powerless referees, it was Company officials like Baillie and his successors who were most eager to rebuke the Awadh rulers for failing to meet patriarchal obligations to their relatives and subjects, and who were most assiduous in assuming themselves the role of patron, protector, and, in effect, sovereign—a view that, as the final chapter will show, the protected dependents did little to disabuse.

⁵⁴ Baillie Collection, MS 127, *Naql-i khuṭūṭ-i ṣāḥib kalān*, 27 Apr. 1808/30 *Ṣafar* 1223

Yet apart from being contradictory, Baillie's position was also ineffective. Far from abating, conflict between Sa'adat Ali Khan and the Company's dependents increased throughout the nawab's reign until his death in 1814. Indeed, for more than a decade, the nawab and the protected *jāgīrdārs* (particularly Bahu Begum but also Asaf-ud-daula's widow Shams-un-nissa Begum and others) engaged in what amounted to low-level economic warfare. Empowered by the resident's protection, the *jāgīrdārs* often refused to relinquish perquisites claimed by the nawab inside the disputed boundaries of their territories. In Faizabad, Bahu Begum continued her campaign against the mint: In order to starve it of bullion and specie, she ordered her officials to take bonds (*machalkas*) from local money lenders (*ṣarrāfs*) promising they would sell their Lucknow rupees only to her eunuchs and never to the nawab's officials at the mint.⁵⁵ Sa'adat Ali Khan responded in kind, resuming all allowances and stipends not specifically protected by written guarantees by the Company. He also depopulated and defunded marketplaces whose proceeds funded the begums' households.⁵⁶ Additionally, both the nawab and the *jāgīrdārs* encouraged *zamīndārs* in the other's territory to resist tax collection, to foment disturbances, and to flee into friendlier jurisdictions.

Sa'adat Ali Khan, however, went still further, regularly denying permission for the Company's troops (now Awadh's primary enforcers of revenue collection after the 1801 demobilization) to help quell *zamīndār* revolts in protected *jāgīrs*, actions Baillie found to be an outrageous dereliction of his sovereign duty. On one occasion, the resident complained to Sa'adat Ali Khan about his refusal to allow Company forces to deploy in Bahu Begum's *jāgīr*. Appealing to what he hoped was the nawab's sagacity and sense of sovereign duty, he told him

⁵⁵ Ibid., MS 131, *Naql-i shuqqajāt-i janāb-i 'ālī muta 'ālī*, 5 Oct. 1811/15 *Ramzān* 1226

⁵⁶ FDPC, 25 Oct. 1811, Nos. 54-55.

that, “insofar as rebellion in the *‘ilāqa* of Her Majesty’s *jāgīr* should be considered the same as that in His Majesty’s directly administered territories, its extirpation is necessarily one of the obligations of sovereignty and kingship (*az īnjā ki hangāma wa fasād dar ‘ilāqa-yi jāgīr-i janāb-i mamdūha bi-‘ayina dar mulk-i khāliṣa-yi ḥuzūr-i purnūr mutaṣawwur lā-jaram irtifā‘-i ān az lawāzam-i riyāsat wa mulkdārī ast*).” Therefore, as the nawab was the “master of the [entire] country (*mālik-i mulk*),” he reasoned that “rebellion in any of its territorial divisions would never be agreeable to his capacious mind (*hangāma wa fasād dar iqtā‘-yi mumālik-i mahrūsa gawāra wa pasand-i khāṭir-i daryā muqāṭir nakhwāhad būd*).”⁵⁷

Ironically, in attempting to convince the nawab that rebellion in the *jāgīrs* was the same as that in his directly administered territories, Baillie underscored the fact that two were widely understood as being distinct and effectively independent from one another. He further clarified this point, maintaining that, although the begum’s *jāgīr* was nominally a division (*iqṭā‘*) of the nawab’s “sovereign” (lit., “protected”) dominions (*mumālik-i mahrūsa*), “Her Majesty’s safety and security is in every regard the responsibility of officials of the British government (*ḥifāzat wa ḥirāsat-i janāb-i mamdūha min jamī‘-ul-wujūh bi-zimma-yi ahālī-yi sarkār angrēz bahādur ast*).” Accordingly, “if it were not possible for the nawab to aid the collector of the begum’s *jāgīr* (*dar ṣurat-i ‘adam-i imkān-i imdād-i ‘āmil-i jāgīr az ḥuzūr purnūr*),” the resident would take it upon himself to find a solution.⁵⁸ In this instance, that solution was to solicit the permission of the governor-general to deploy British forces independently of the nawab. The governor-general, however, found the idea untenable, determining the resident’s proposal to be a potential violation of the 1801 treaty and ultimately the nawab’s sovereignty. Although sympathetic to Baillie’s

⁵⁷ Baillie Collection, MS 127, *Naql-i khuṭūt-i ṣāhib kalān*, 13 Feb. 1809/27 *Zī‘l-hijja* 1223

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

aims, the governor-general was “reluctantly compelled to determine that, in the cases in question, no other measures are admissible than those of remonstrance.”⁵⁹

With “remonstrance” his only means of coercion, Baillie personally made little headway in ending the nawab’s campaign against the Company’s dependents. Nevertheless, his zealotry in bringing their every grievance to the nawab’s attention, along with his repeated pleas to the governor-general for intercession, made clear that such antagonism had its limits. More significantly, his efforts signaled that the Company would not tolerate direct challenges to the protected *jāgīrdārs* or their local territorial authority. Thus, for example, when the nawab traveled to Faizabad in 1810 upon the news that Bahu Begum was gravely ill, it was in the company of Baillie—and a large body of British forces—who were determined to forestall any attempts to seize the begum’s property in the event of her death.⁶⁰ Similarly, in 1812, after losing her patience with Sa’adat Ali Khan’s incessant harassment, his sister-in-law Shams-un-nissa Begum fled from Lucknow to her *jāgīr* in Pratabganj.⁶¹ In so doing, she offered not only a public rebuke to the nawab but also an unsubtle suggestion that the rural enclave, though frequently beset by “seditious” *zamīndārs*, was inherently safer for her than the urban seat of her brother-in-law’s *sarkār*, since Company forces would protect her if necessary.

In this regard, then, Sa’adat Ali Khan largely failed in his attempts to assert greater control over the great households of Awadh’s ruling dynasty or the Company’s dependents. Unable to insert sweeping language into the revised treaty of 1801, the nawab had sought to expand his authority through a system of courts supported by the Company, along with a

⁵⁹ FDPC, 6 Mar. 1809, No. 94.

⁶⁰ For a detailed itinerary of the visit, see BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4341, *Zubdat-ul-akhbārāt*, 3-25 Apr. 1810.

⁶¹ FDPC, 2 Jul. 1813, No. 45

program of expansive domestic surveillance. Obfuscated by the power of local officials in Faizabad and opposed by the resident, the nawab, however, was forced to accept within the truncated confines of his sovereign territories the existence of *de facto* British protectorates centered on the households of Company dependents. Yet the nawab had a final rhetorical card to play, one that would draw upon a final clause in his original 1798 agreement with the Company and radically reset the terms of Anglo-Awadh political debate: If he could not make the *jāgīrdārs* obey him as subjects of the state, he would make them do so as “domestic” subjects under his exclusive, patriarchal authority, isolating them from the realm of “the political”—and from the legitimate protection of Company officials.

Nāmūs and the khord maḥal, 1775-1813

Significantly, Sa’adat Ali Khan did not advance this bold line of argument during any grand debates over the Company’s role in Awadh or its support for its local clients, but rather during a quarrel over a seemingly insignificant aspect of Anglo-Awadh relations: The selection of the eunuch overseer (*nāẓir*) for the Faizabad *khord maḥal*, i.e., the residence of Shuja-ud-daula’s widowed *mamtū’a* wives, their pre-adolescent children, and their unmarried, adult daughters. This may seem surprising, given that the women of the *khord maḥal* (unlike Bahu Begum and other *khāss maḥals*) have received virtually no attention from modern historians.⁶² Yet, as we shall see, the *khord maḥal*’s particular status within the Awadh ruling family illustrates

⁶² Of the forty-six chapters in Shaikh Tasadduq Hussain’s Urdu-language *Bēgumāt-i awadh*, none are devoted to any of the women of Shuja-ud-daula’s *khord maḥal*. Taṣadduq Ḥusain, *Bēgumāt-i awadh* (Lucknow: Kitab Nagar, 1900). Similarly, K.S. Santha considers them only superficially in chapter devoted to “The Secondary Begums of Awadh.” K. S. Santha, *Begums of Awadh* (Varanasi: Bharati Prakashan, 1980), 267-312. The most detailed treatment to date is in Michael Fisher’s brief but useful “Women and the Feminine in the Court and High Culture of Awadh, 1722-1856,” in G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 489-511.

not only additional complexities and contradictions of the household protectorates' relationship to the nawab's *sarkār*-state but also the possibilities (and pitfalls) of establishing discrete spheres of authority through a calculated differentiation of household, family, and state.

The reader will recall that, as he consolidated his hold over the Awadh regime in the late 1750s and 1760s, Shuja-ud-daula largely abandoned the matrimonial and reproductive restraint of his predecessors, marrying numerous women and fathering, by most accounts, nearly sixty children. Most (if not all) of these women were married not by *nikāḥ* rite (as Bahu Begum and other *khāṣṣ mahāls* were) but by the less prestigious *mut'ā*, or "temporary," rite.⁶³ As a result, they did not receive the same status or the economic privileges as Bahu Begum, nor did they maintain independent households. Rather, they and their children lived together in a single residence in Faizabad, supported by monthly cash stipends from the nawab.

After Shuja-ud-daula's death, however, custody of and responsibility for the women and children of the *khord maḥal* remained an open question. Asaf-ud-daula (as his father's successor), his mother Bahu Begum (as her late husband's chief consort), and his grandmother Sadr-un-nissa Begum (as the eldest *khāṣṣ maḥal*) each claimed rights over the *khord maḥal* widows, particularly regarding the arrangement of their children's marriages. Bahu Begum also sought for many years the privilege of staffing the *khord maḥal* with eunuchs from her *sarkār* (as opposed to those from her son's establishment), likely as a means of providing them an additional perquisite, since small deductions were regularly made from cash allowances like those paid to the *khord maḥal*. Additionally, as the *khord maḥal* housed the mothers of Asaf-ud-

⁶³ Harcharan Das mentions Shuja-ud-daula's marriage to Dulhan Begum, the daughter of Ali Beg Khan, by *nikāḥ* rite in 1770, but this is not confirmed by any other contemporary source. BL, OMS Or. 1732, Harcharan Das, *Chahār gulzār-i shujā'ī*, 404.

daula's adult brothers (and potential rivals), all three had a vested interest in keeping the women confined in a single location as potential hostages. Indeed, in a rare moment of consensus between them, in 1784 Asaf-ud-daula, Bahu Begum and Sadr-un-nissa Begum jointly opposed Sa'adat Ali Khan's request to have his biological mother, a resident of the Faizabad *khord maḥal*, join him in exile in Benares.⁶⁴

At the same time, however, each sought to minimize their financial burdens vis-à-vis the *khord maḥal*. Both begums argued that the *khord maḥal* stipends and marriage costs for their children were Asaf-ud-daula's responsibility, and they frequently chastised him for his continued failure to meet his obligations.⁶⁵ For his part, the nawab conceded the point but often left the allowances unpaid as a means of demonstrating his poverty to the Company. As we have seen, such a maneuver incurred the censure of British officials, for whom the non-payment of such familial stipends only further demonstrated the need to compartmentalize the nawab's household costs from his public finances. Indian commentators, however, such as the disgruntled former revenue farmer Abu Talib Khan, excoriated not only Asaf-ud-daula but also Bahu Begum, upon whom he heaped opprobrium for the "hardheartedness and shamelessness (*qasāwat-i qalb wa 'adam-i ḥayā*)" that led her to neglect her co-wives and their children.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ FDPr, Copies of Letters Issued [CI], Vol. 14 (1783-84), No. 289. The English translation letter of this letter (FDPr, Translations of Letters Issued [TI], Vol. 18, No. 115), and its corresponding entry in the Calendar of Persian Correspondence mistakenly has Sa'adat Ali Khan requesting permission for Bahu Begum (!) and Sadr-un-nissa Begum to join him in Benares. The Persian letter, however, makes clear that he had requested permission for his biological mother (*wālida-yi mājida-yi khūd*) and that Sadr-un-nissa (*nawwāb-i 'ālīya janāb*) and Bahu Begum (*bahū bēgum sāhibā*) were in agreement (*rāzī*) with Asaf-ud-daula's desire (*marzī*) that "all Shuja-ud-daula's wives, who to this day are in one location, not be separated" (*hamagī-yi nāmūs-i nawwāb jannat ārāmgāh ki tā hanūz yakjā hastand 'alīhāda nashawand*).

⁶⁵ See, for example, BL, OMS Or. 4609, *Akhbārāt*, 16 and 20 *Rabī'-ul-avval* 1210, fols. 100b-101b and 123a-b, and RAS, MS 93, *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*, 6 *Sha 'bān* 1795, fols. 86a-b

⁶⁶ *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, 47.

Yet despite their vulnerability and financial dependence, the women of the *khord maḥal* were not powerless. In response to late or non-payment of their allowances, they often sent their servants at night to raid the markets of Faizabad and plunder them for provisions.⁶⁷ More importantly, not unlike Badshah Begum in the mid-1830s (Chapter 3), they used strategically the concept of *nāmūs*, or dynastic honor, generally understood to be collectively embodied by all women of the family and especially a ruler's wives and widows. Indeed, so closely linked was the notion of *nāmūs* to female bodies that the word was often used as a metonym for women in general. And although the women of the *khord maḥal* commanded far less power and prestige than Bahu Begum and other *khāṣṣ maḥals*, nevertheless they too were considered part, and an embodiment, of Shuja-ud-daula's *nāmūs*. This status justified their continued confinement and moral policing on the part of the nawab and the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums but it also provided a means to protest ill-treatment by their custodians, which they pursued primarily through exposure (or the threat of exposure) to public gaze. In a context where the seclusion of women from adult male non-kin increasingly connoted high social status and political standing, exposure to the public gaze constituted an extreme disgrace and a possible extirpation of a lineage's collective dynastic honor. By exiting or threatening to exit their residence, the women of the *khord maḥal* used the possibility of willingly incurring dishonor to highlight the extremity of their situation and the extent of their displeasure.

It was during these moments, when the women of the *khord maḥal* threatened to expose the dynastic honor they collectively embodied, that they attracted the attention of Company officials. One such incident occurred during the Company occupation of Faizabad in 1782-3. To

⁶⁷ Ibid.

demonstrate their inability to meet Company demands, Asaf-ud-daula, Bahu Begum, and Sadrun-nissa Begum all cut off funds to the *khord maḥal*. After weeks of deprivation, many of the women began nightly ascents to the top of their residence. Under cover of darkness, they cursed the Company sentinels guarding the *khord maḥal*, threw dirt at them, and threatened to commit suicide by leaping from the walls. The commander of the Company's forces was so unnerved by the continued protests that he eventually prevailed upon Resident Bristow for money to supply them, a sum which was only partially reimbursed by Asaf-ud-daula.⁶⁸

A far more contentious episode occurred in the wake of Sa'adat Ali Khan's accession in 1798 and set the stage for more far-reaching debates about the relationship between political and familial authority and the distinction between household(s) and "the state." As illustrated in the preceding chapter, in exchange for her acquiescence to the nawab's installation, Governor-General Shore not only consolidated Bahu Begum's scattered *jāgīrs* into a contiguous estate but also added to it the nearby district of Gonda. The addition was designated as a *jā'idād* (i.e., a revenue grant assigned for a specific purpose) for the payment of various stipends, including those of *khord maḥal*, which were to be disbursed by the begum and her officials. Although the settlement was quickly ratified in a treaty (*'ahadnāma*) signed by Shore and Sa'adat Ali Khan, the women of the *khord maḥal* soon made their displeasure known, occupying and demonstrating in public spaces outside their residence. They were particularly aggrieved that their stipend, which had been one-*lakh* rupees under Shuja-ud-daula, had been halved over the course of Asaf-ud-daula's reign. Moreover, they refused to accept their stipends from Bahu Begum, fearing that her eunuchs would "defraud" them of their allowances.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ NAI, Foreign Department-Secret Proceedings [FDSP], Vol. 60, 11 Aug. 1783.

⁶⁹ FDPC, 6 Aug. 1798, No. 15.

It is unclear exactly how the situation was resolved in 1798, as the Company's official attention soon turned to arrears in the nawab's subsidy payments and the demobilization of his military. It appears, however, that Bahu Begum tried to placate the women of the *khord maḥal* by promising to raise their stipends, though she stipulated this additional amount was to be paid from Sa'adat Ali Khan's treasury rather than from her own *jā'īdād*. In turn, the nawab, professing a fear of further damage to his family's *nāmūs* from continued protest, agreed to the raise. The *khord maḥal* remained adamant that it would never consent to dependency upon Bahu Begum but it seems that they accepted, at least temporarily, the decision to retain Tahsin Ali Khan as *nāzīr* of the *khord maḥal*. The chief eunuch of Asaf-ud-daula's *sarkār* since the nawab's youth, Tahsin Ali Khan had managed throughout his reign the nawab's own *khord maḥal* in Lucknow as well as Shuja-ud-daula's *khord maḥal* in Faizabad. Significantly, owing to his role in Vazir Ali Khan's deposition, Company officials not only approved of his continued superintendence of the *khord maḥal* but recognized him, along with Bahu Begum, as one of their dependents.⁷⁰ While he was not the first choice for either Bahu Begum or Sa'adat Ali Khan, who both preferred eunuchs from their own establishments, he was more acceptable than any candidate the other would have proposed.

Over the next fifteen years, the women of the *khord maḥal* largely receded from the Company's official notice. Yet we can detect lingering tensions in reports generated by the resident's news writer in Faizabad, as well as from occasional references in Company proceedings.⁷¹ From these, it appears that Sa'adat Ali Khan did pay additional stipends (at least

⁷⁰ FDPC, 8 May 1812, No. 64.

⁷¹ The following discussion draws primarily from BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4341 and 4342, *Zubdat-ul-akhbārāt*, Baillie Collection, MSS 128-132, and FDPC, 8 May 1812, Nos. 64-73 and 2 Jul. 1813, Nos. 38-65.

to his unmarried sisters) through Tahsin Ali Khan. The increases, however, were either not sufficient or not paid regularly, as women from the *khord maḥal* continued to send regular letters of complaint. They also continued to engage in more overt forms of protest, demonstrating in the streets of Faizabad and occasionally quitting the city altogether. Their efforts, it seems, prompted occasionally violent reprisals from Tahsin Ali Khan and Bahu Begum. For her part, the begum seems to have had little compunction about deploying coercive force against any of the women under her control, including her own blood relations. On one occasion, for example, she ordered *harkāras* assigned to the household of her late nephew, Zafar-ud-daula, to beat the women of his *khord maḥal* if they attempted to exit their quarters.⁷²

At the same time, the *khord maḥal*'s grievances also intersected larger jurisdictional disputes between the Bahu Begum and Sa'adat Ali Khan's *sarkārs*. For example, in October 1810 Har Prasad, *dārōgha* of Sa'adat Ali Khan's 'adālat in Faizabad, received a petition from Dulhan Begum, one of the residents of the *khord maḥal*. According to the begum (who, as the daughter of Ali Beg Khan, a prominent official of both Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-daula, enjoyed a status among the late nawab's wives second only to Bahu Begum), her eunuch Mahram had been murdered and four thousand rupees of her property had been stolen. The perpetrator, she maintained, was probably Nahal Khan, a resident of her later father's quarter (*maḥalla*) who had previously committed a robbery in the vicinity. Nevertheless, despite knowing the culprit's identity and "in spite of her son [Sa'adat Ali Khan]'s justice" (*bā wujūd-i inṣāf-i bar khordār*), neither incident had been investigated by Bahu Begum's officials. Pressed by Har Prasad, as well

⁷² BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4342, 25 May 1811.

as by Tahsin Ali Khan, who had also received petitions from Dulhan Begum, the begum's officials investigated and eventually took Nahal Khan in custody.⁷³

While Dulhan Begum prevailed on this particular occasion, the incident demonstrated the *khord maḥal*'s potential to exacerbate tensions between the *sarkārs* of Sa'adat Ali Khan and Bahu Begum. These tensions erupted in spring 1812 when, following growing tumult in Faizabad, Sa'adat Ali Khan abruptly dismissed Tahsin Ali Khan from his position as *nāẓir*. His decision prompted immediate complaint from Bahu Begum, who demanded Resident John Baillie intervene to have him restored. As noted above, Baillie and the nawab had long been at odds, clashing over the nawab's resistance to the Company's proposed administrative reforms but also over his campaign against Bahu Begum and other Company dependents. Unsurprisingly, as Tahsin Ali Khan was himself considered among the protected dependents, Baillie intervened aggressively in his favor.

Despite Sa'adat Ali Khan's intransigence, by mid-summer Resident Baillie and the governor-general seemed to have prevailed upon him to restore Tahsin Ali Khan to the superintendence (*nizārat*) of the *khord maḥal*. Yet no sooner had orders for his reinstatement been issued than the women of the *khord maḥal* raised an even greater disturbance in Faizabad. Initially barring Tahsin Ali Khan's deputy from entering the *maḥal*, the women soon began exiting their residence, demonstrating in bazars and chowks of the city and brandishing the same banners and standards typically displayed during Muḥarram processions to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussain and his followers at Karbala. Acting on the resident's advice, Bahu Begum demanded their return and threatened them with force but the *khord maḥal* begums

⁷³ BL, OMS I.O. Islamic 4341, 10 Oct. 1810.

refused to acknowledge her or the *nāẓir*'s authority. Instead, in August 1812, they resolved to embark in protest for Lucknow. After traveling to the nawab's capital, uncovered and in ox-drawn carts, they took up residence in Asaf-ud-daula's congregational *imāmbāra*, where for the next four months they would stay, resolutely demanding redress.

The *khord maḥal* crisis and the making of the domestic

It was during this period of dispute over the *khord maḥal nizārat* that Sa'adat Ali Khan found a new avenue to contest the Company's support of its dependents and the household protectorates. Rather than argue, as he had in treaty negotiations with Governor-General Wellesley, for the *sarkār*'s expansive sovereign authority over all its subjects (including those of the ruling family), here he would contend that his female relatives, regardless of their affiliation with the Company, constituted a distinct category of individuals. Construing them as members of a broadly conceived household (*khāna*), irrespective of their actual place of residence, the nawab argued that the women of the ruling dynasty (*khāndān*) owed him obedience not as their sovereign but as their guardian and hereditary patriarch (*wāriṣ*). In so doing, he sought to capitalize upon the final clause in the treaty of 1798, which granted him "full authority over his domestic affairs (*amūr-i khānagī*).” In so doing, he hoped to encapsulate his extended family within a larger conceptual "household" (*khāna*) and render all the women of his family as inherently "domestic" (*khānagī*; lit., "belonging the house). As illustrated by the arguments of Badshah Begum in the preceding chapter, in the long-term the nawab's contentions would help redefine the parameters of Anglo-Awadh and dynastic political discourse in subsequent decades. Yet during the *nizārat* crisis itself, his notions were fiercely contested, as Bahu Begum, the

resident, and the women of the *khord maḥal* all brought to bear their own notions of family and the domestic.

Sa'adat Ali Khan began making his arguments shortly after dismissing Tahsin Ali Khan in March 1812, as both Bahu Begum and Resident Baillie considered the move a violation of various agreements and demanded his immediate reinstatement. Baillie in particular considered the eunuch's dismissal to be not only a breach of Bahu Begum's *jā'īdād* agreement in 1798 but also the 1801 treaty, which required the nawab to consult with Company officials "in all great affairs of the [nawab's] munificent state (*amūr-i 'umda-yi sarkār-i faiẓ āṣār*).” Although he denied that the begum's control of her *jā'īdād* gave her the right to determine who staffed the *khord maḥal*, the nawab conceded the latter treaty did stipulate his consultation of Company officials. “But,” he replied, such consultations “are unnecessary in this instance (*dar īn ṣūrat ẓurūr nīst*),” since the position of *nāẓir* (that is, the overseer of the household, particularly women's living spaces) was a “domestic” one and, “according to the treaty [of 1798] (*muwwāfiq-i 'ahadnāma*),” the nawab “possesses full power and authority in all domestic affairs (*dar amūr-i khānagī ikhtiyār wa iqtidār ḥāṣil ast*).” More importantly, he added, this authority was derived not only from the treaty but also from the fact that, as hereditary successor to his late father and brother, he had become “the heir and guardian of all [his] female relations (*wāriṣ-i kull-i nāmūs-i khūd*).”⁷⁴

In construing his “female relations” as *nāmūs*, the dynastic honor collectively embodied by female relatives, and himself as its/their “heir and guardian” (*wāriṣ*), Sa'adat Ali Khan also made a bolder statement about the relationship between “domestic” authority and political

⁷⁴ Baillie Collection, MS 131, Sa'adat Ali Khan to Baillie, 6 Apr. 1812 and FDPC, 8 May 1812, No. 66. Baillie's translation with some modifications for clarity and consistency.

sovereignty. As it had been for his father and brother, sovereignty for the nawab followed from and was contingent upon both hereditary rights (*wirāṣat*) and authority over one's household. For Sa'adat Ali Khan, these principles were so fundamental to the construction of sovereignty that no agreement with the Company—even those that mandated he consult British officials “in all great affairs” or that limited his powers in favor of Bahu Begum—could alter them. As he explained to Baillie, the relationship of familial authority to political sovereignty was as inviolable as kinship itself. Bahu Begum's 1798 *jā'idād* with the Company was “undoubtedly binding and specific,” but it could not “circumscribe or render negatory [his] hereditary rights and authority in [his] domestic affairs” (*wirāṣat wa iqtidār dar amūr-i khānagī zāyil wa bāṭil namītawānad shud*), no more than it could “sever” (*munqaṭi'*) “[his] relation of son (*nisbat-i farzandī*)” to Bahu Begum.⁷⁵ Invoking his filial relationship to Bahu Begum, Sa'adat Ali Khan thus inverted the claims to natural, matriarchal authority the begum had made to Asaf-ud-daula (Chapter 3), arguing that, as his mother, she was necessarily part of a domestic realm subject to his authority and a constituent of the embodied dynastic honor to which the nawab was the sole and hereditary custodian.

Yet while he propounded the notion that political sovereignty followed from patriarchal authority and domestic management—ideas well established in Indo-Islamic theories of governance—Sa'adat Ali Khan also embraced views promulgated by the Company, namely that the “political” and the “domestic” formed necessarily distinct and separate spheres. This did not mean necessarily that the nawab accepted in practice the Company's rigid conceptual division between the “state” and his own household, particularly with regarding the staffing of

⁷⁵ Baillie Collection, MS 131, Sa'adat Ali Khan to Baillie, 15 Apr. 1812 and FDPC, 8 May 1812, No. 71. Baillie's translation with some modifications.

administrative positions. Where he did practice such a division within his own *sarkār*, however, he eagerly embraced a gendered division, between the masculine, “sovereign” affairs of “state” (*amūr-i riyāsat*) and the feminine, “domestic” affairs (*amūr-i khānagī*) of the dynasty, to contest British support for Company dependents—the most powerful of whom were, of course, women—through the language of its own treaties. Indeed, for Sa’adat Ali Khan, “*khānagī*” seems to have meant as much pertaining to “women of the ruling dynasty” as it did to the “household.”

In framing the *khāna/riyāsat* division in this fashion, the nawab accepted (at least superficially) the discursive parameters established by British officials but recast them to make pointed assertions about his specific authority over his female relations— especially Bahu Begum and Shams-un-nissa Begum—and the necessarily restricted nature of Company’s relationship with members of his family. Since the 1798 treaty granted him exclusive “domestic authority,” and since the 1801 treaty only stipulated that he consult with the Company in “great matters of his *sarkār*”—which, of course, British officials had long insisted should be a distinct, political institution anyway—Sa’adat Ali Khan reasoned that his relationship with the Company was purely “political” and that its officials could have no legitimate involvement in the “domestic” affairs of his female relations. As he explained to Baillie, “the fact of the matter is that domestic affairs are separate from, and do not impose obligations upon the exercise of sovereign authority (*haqīqat-ish īn ki amūrāt-i khānagī-rā riyāsat farz wa lāzim nīst*).” More importantly, his “rights to administer the affairs of relatives like [his] mother [Bahu Begum] and sister [Shams-un-nissa Begum] (*‘ilāyiq az qabīl-i wālida wā hamshīra wa ghaira intizām-i amūr-i īshān*)” were “not limited by sovereignty (*na mashrūṭ-i riyāsat ast*)” or by “political”

obligations, (i.e., treaties), incurred through the exercise thereof. These distinct and inalienable rights to domestic authority, he maintained, had been previously been recognized and upheld by the Company. For example, Governor-General Wellesley had approved of his plan to establish separate courts of justice in Faizabad and had refused to harbor Shams-un-nissa Begum in Company territory when she had threatened to flee without Sa'adat Ali Khan's permission (see Chapter 5). "How, then," he demanded of the resident, "could the Company's counsel and its advice ever negate [his] authority in domestic affairs? (*wujūb wa istiṣwāb mubaṭṭil-i ikhtiyār wa iqtidār dar amūr-i khānagī az kujāst*)."⁷⁶

As novel as Sa'adat Ali Khan's arguments were for the Awadh nawabs, Baillie's response was similarly inventive on the part of British officials, positing the resident as not merely an disinterested mediator, but a vital check upon the nawab's authority, particularly with regard to the Company's dependents and local clients. As he wrote to then Governor-General Lord Minto after Tahsin Ali Khan's dismissal, his opinion of the nawab's "general conduct" towards the two begums, and "indeed to all the dependents of the British Government residing in this Country," was "extremely unfavourable." Such unfavorable conduct, he argued, seemed "to authorize and require a more decided interposition of [the Company's] influence, for the protection of those Individuals, than has ever been hitherto suggested since the Conclusion of the Treaty of 1801."⁷⁷

Although a seemingly trivial affair in the scheme of Anglo-Awadh relations, the dispute over the *khord maḥal niz ārat* not only offered Baillie an important opportunity to assert the Company's influence but also to make an argument about the relationship of its clients to the Awadh state. For Baillie, while Bahu Begum and Shams-un-nissa Begum might, as women, be

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ FDPC, 8 May 1812, No. 64.

construed as “domestic,” the existence of their formal agreements with the Company necessarily recast them and their affairs as inherently “political.” The resident made the point explicit in a letter to Sa’adat Ali Khan written in July 1812. In it, he conceded that “the affairs of your mother [Bahu Begum] and Shams-un-nissa Begum, who is your sister-in-law, can on this account [i.e., their gender] be called ‘domestic’ (*har chand muqaddimāt-i wālida-yi mājida wa shams-un-nissā’ bēgum ṣāḥiba ki bhāvij hastand wa bi-īn ḥisab khānagī gufta mishawad*).” “Yet,” he went on, “in the beginning of your reign, both begums...requested that their *jāgīrs* and other matters be settled through the intercession and advocacy of the Company *sarkār*’s officials (*har dū janāb-i mamdūḥa az ibtidā’-yi ‘ahad-i daulat abad muddat...istida‘ā-yi taqarrur-i jāgīr wa amūr-i dīgar-i khūd bi-wasāṭat wa kifālat-i ahālī-yi sarkār-i daulat madār-i kampanī angrēz bahādur namūdand*).” As a result, not only had “the affairs of the two begums necessarily been excluded from His Majesty’s domestic concerns (*amūr-i har dū janāb bi-īn i‘tibār az amūr-i khānagī-yi janāb-i ‘ālī muta‘ālī ba’l zurūrat khārij gardīda*),” but “the interference of Company officials in such matters had [also] become absolutely obligatory (*mudākhillat-i ahālī-yi sarkār-i mauṣūf dar ān wājib wa lāzim uftād*).”⁷⁸

In other words, although Company officials had previously maintained, and would continue to maintain, that the begums were inherently domestic actors who could exercise no legitimate political authority of their own (Chapter 3), Baillie held that their legal ties to the Company had rendered their affairs—if not their persons—as political concerns that could be taken up by British officers on their behalf. At the same time, the resident also articulated a defense of the begums in familial terms, arguing that the nawab had violated Bahu Begum’s

⁷⁸ Baillie Collection, MS 130, Baillie to Sa’adat Ali Khan, 9 Apr. 1812. I have translated directly from Baillie’s Persian letter, as its argument is more explicit than that in his English translation (FDPC, 8 May 1812, No. 67)

established gender and generational prerogatives, as well as “just rights” derived from her agreements with the Company. Significantly, however, this seems to have been a point directed more at Lord Minto and the council in Calcutta than Sa’adat Ali Khan. A close comparison of original Persian correspondence sent to the nawab with the English translations prepared for Company officials suggests that Baillie (a former instructor of Persian and Arabic at Fort William College in Calcutta) tailored his arguments for his respective audience. For example, in a translation of a letter forwarded to the governor-general, Baillie argued to Sa’adat Ali Khan that the nawab’s interference in the *nizārat* of the *khord maḥal* and Bahu Begum’s other affairs was “improper,” “being contrary to established usage, and more particularly so with reference to the high rank of her Highness the Begum of Fyzabad and the relation in which she stands to your Excellency.”⁷⁹ The copy of the letter made for his record books, however, gestured towards the begum’s “seniority” (*buzurgī*) but omitted the second clause, suggesting the point about the begum’s relative rank was not made to the nawab. Elsewhere, in a narrative of a conversation with Sa’adat Ali Khan, the resident claimed to have told the nawab that Bahu Begum, as his late father’s most senior widow, was the rightful custodian of the *khord maḥal*, “their reputation, honor, and good conduct as the females of her Husband’s [Shuja-ud-daula’s] household [forming] an object *naturally* of more importance and of greater interest than to his Excellency or to any other person in the World.”⁸⁰ This contention, however, does not seem to have made its way into any of his Persian correspondence either.

Nor, for that matter, did he state his true feeling about the women of the *khord maḥal*.

Echoing the opinions of other British officials regarding *mamtū ‘a* wives, Baillie considered the

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ FDPC, 2 Jul. 1813, No. 38.

khord maḥal begums—whom Sa’adat Ali Khan, like Asaf-ud-daula before him, described collectively as “his mothers” (*wālida-hā-yi ḥuẓūr*)⁸¹—to be essentially enslaved and disgraced concubines. As a result, in a letter to the governor-general, the resident dismissed the nawab’s claims to their custodianship by virtue of their embodying dynastic *nāmūs*. The women, “whose rank in his father’s Household was never higher than that of Slaves,” he held, “had neither honor nor reputation to lose.”⁸² Moreover, even if they had previously constituted part of the ruling lineage’s honor, their conduct (which had “ever been disreputable”) and their previous demonstrations and threats had destroyed it, along the nawab’s supposed concern for his *nāmūs*. In his exchanges with Sa’adat Ali Khan, however, the resident merely maintained that the “measures of rigor” supposedly suggested by Tahsin Ali Khan, which had formed the pretext for his dismissal, were hardly unprecedented and had in fact been deployed against the women of the *khord maḥal* on previous occasions without issue.⁸³

Baillie’s dissimulations notwithstanding, throughout these conversations, the *khord maḥal* and its residents remained an abstraction upon which Sa’adat Ali Khan, Bahu Begum and the resident projected their respective visions of normative intra-familial relations, the proper boundaries between “political” and “domestic” arenas, and the right of the Company to arbitrate between protected households and the state. Yet the women of the *khord maḥal* did not remain silent. Indeed, apart from their public protests and their use of Muharram symbolism and Shi’i idioms of martyrdom, the *khord maḥal* begums also sent numerous letters to Sa’adat Ali Khan,

⁸¹ For Asaf-ud-daula, see FDPr, OR 68, 23 Aug. 1782; For Sa’adat Ali Khan, see Baillie Collection, MS 131, Sa’adat Ali Khan to Baillie, 6 Apr. 1812.

⁸² FDPC, 2 Jul. 1813, No. 60.

⁸³ FDPC, 8 May 1812, No. 67.

which he subsequently forwarded to Baillie.⁸⁴ Although the resident dismissed the claims made in their letters as the “machinations” of a few of the women and their sons in collusion with the nawab, a closer examination of their letters suggest that at least some of the women of the *khord maḥal* held distinct opinions about their relationship to Bahu Begum, the nature of “domestic” authority, and the definition of family. And while many of their contentions mirrored those of Sa’adat Ali Khan, in other regards their words and actions reflected not only the fungibility of “household” and “family” among Shuja-ud-daula’s survivors but also the ways in which claims of both the nawabs and *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums like Bahu Begum remained contested within the larger Awadh ruling family.

Most explicitly, the *khord maḥal* begums and their sons maintained that they were not—nor had they ever been—under Bahu Begum’s authority, and neither her assertion that “the Concerns of the whole of the Mehuls have ever been under my direction and control” nor her agreement with the Company could make it otherwise.⁸⁵ Following the death of Shuja-ud-daula, they argued, any authority she might have wielded during his lifetime had ceased, and Asaf-ud-daula had set the two establishments on distinct footings. In a lengthy account (*kaifīyat*) written on behalf of their mothers in the *khord maḥal*, two of Sa’adat Ali Khan’s younger half-brothers declared that, “after the death of [Shuja-ud-daula], the late Asaf-ud-daula made the *khord maḥal* a separate interest (*ba’ad az wafāt-i nawwāb jannat ārāmgāh aṣaf-ud-daula bahādūr marḥūm ‘ilāqa-yi khord maḥal ‘alīhāda namūda-and*).” At that point, “[Bahu Begum] no longer had any business with the *khord maḥal* (*az bēgum ṣāḥiba hīch sar wa kār namānda*),” “nor did she have

⁸⁴ For Persian copies of these, see FDP, CR 38, Nos. 86-86b, 88a, and 105-105g and Baillie Collection, MS 129, *Naql-i khuṭūṭ*. For English translations, see 2 Jul. 1813, Nos. 48, 51, and 52.

⁸⁵ FDPC, 8 May 1812, No. 65. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate a Persian copy of this letter.

any influence in any of its affairs” (*na amrī az amūr-i khord maḥal bēgum ṣāḥiba dakhli mīkardand*). Asaf-ud-daula, they claimed, had further recognized the two establishments as separate households not only by “paying [their] stipends separately” (*tankhwāh-i māyān ‘alīhada...mīdādand*) but also by “sending—separately—gifts of fruit and the like for Bahu Begum and for us (*balki anchi tuḥfa wa taḥāyif az qism-i mīva wa ghaira ki mīfiristādand barā-yi bēgum ṣāḥiba ‘alīhada wa barā-yi māyān judā mīfiristādand*).” This division meant that, even though they recognized her as the “ruler” (*ḥākim*) of Faizabad, Bahu Begum held no authority over the *khord maḥal* and their sons, familial or otherwise. “During the reign of Asaf-ud-daula, who was the begum’s own offspring [*ṣulb-i īshān būdand*], she never had any connection with our affairs such that she should [be able to] oppress us now (*gāhī dar amūr-i māyān ta ‘alluq-i janāb-i ‘āliya nabūda ki al-ḥāl bar māyān zulm kunand*).” Most pertinently for the present dispute, although Asaf-ud-daula had employed Tahsin Ali Khan as *nāzīr* of the *khord maḥal* he had done so only with the express consent of its residents. “The *nizārat* of Tahsin Ali Khan,” the two men declared, “was dependent on our [continued] obedience (*mauqūf bar iṭā‘at-i māyān būd*),” not upon the mandate of the nawab or Bahu Begum. Now that Tahsin Ali Khan was acting tyrannically towards them, retaining three percent of their stipends and charging their relatives admission fees of sixteen and seventeen rupees to meet with them, the women of the *khord maḥal* had justly refused to submit to him.⁸⁶

In this regard, as Baillie pointed out, the letters from the *khord maḥal* dovetailed perhaps suspiciously well with Sa’adat Ali Khan’s view that Bahu Begum’s *sarkār* and the *khord maḥal* were distinct households. Elsewhere, the women also seemed to reflect the nawab’s own

⁸⁶ Baillie Collection, MS 129 and FDP, CR 38, No. 88a. Translation mine.

conception of himself as a sovereign patriarch and the hereditary custodian of his family. In their many petitions (*‘arẓī*), they frequently addressed the nawab in highly deferential terms as their true “guardian and master (*wāriṣ wa mālik*),” a status they maintained was grounded in both custom and law. In one petition, they urged the nawab that “if he could get no results from the British resident (*az khāṭir-i angrēz ṣāhib az ḥuẓūr hīch namīshawad*)” then he should “adjudicate [their] dispute according to ‘the law’ (*ma ‘āmla-yi māyān-rā dar shar‘ andākhta sawāl-jawāb numāyand*),” since (gesturing towards the eunuch’s nominally enslaved status) “according to ‘the law’ (*az rū-yi shar‘*),” Tahsin Ali Khan could never be their “guardian and governor (*hargiz... wāriṣ wa ḥākim bar māyān tawānad [sic] shud*).”⁸⁷

Yet despite the parallels to Sa’adat Ali Khan’s own reasoning, the *khord maḥals*’ arguments were not the thoughtless facsimiles that Baillie made them out to be. Instead, not unlike Bahu Begum, the women invoked the nawab’s filial obligations to assert at least a modicum of authority over him. In one letter, Dulhan Begum—whom Baillie held to be the *khord maḥal*’s foremost agitator against Tahsin Ali Khan and Bahu Begum—took Sa’adat Ali Khan to task for failure to remove the *nāẓir*, reminding him that, as he was “their dear son and guardian (*wāriṣ-i nūr chashm*),” “upholding their rights [was] his responsibility (*ḥuqūq-i mā bar zimma-yi ḥuẓūr ast*).” Similarly, turning the notion of embodied honor against him, she found it “a wonder (*jā-yi ta‘ajub*)” that he seemed more concerned with the dignity (*ābrū*) of Tahsin Ali Khan than that of his mothers and late father. “In this world,” she reminded him, “there is no honor greater than that of one’s mother and father and one’s own *nāmūs* (*dar īn dunyā ziyāda az*

⁸⁷ Baillie Collection, MS 129 and FDP, CR 38, No. 105f. Translation mine.

ābrū-yi mādar wa pidar wa nāmūs-i khwīsh ābrū-yi dīgar nīst.” “How can the dignity of slaves (*ābrū-yi kanīz wa ghūlām*) be greater than our own?”⁸⁸

More radically, perhaps, the women of the *khord maḥal* differed with the nawab over the meaning of *khāndān* and of “family” more generally. For his part, Sa’adat Ali Khan used the term in two distinct, if widely encompassing senses. On the one hand, *khāndān* connoted for the nawab his patrilineal, dynastic bloodline, as when he told Baillie that Tahsin Ali Khan’s actions had occasioned “a dishonor and a disgrace to the women [*nāmūs*] of this family (*bī ‘izzatī wa bī ḥurmatī-yi nāmūs-i īn khāndān*),” the likes of which had “never occurred at any time or in any age (*gāhī dar hīch waqtī wa zamānī bi-zuhūr narasīda būd*).”⁸⁹ On the other, it marked an expansive group of consanguineous and affinal kin to be compartmentalized within a single conceptual household (*khāna*), under the heading of the domestic (*khānagī*) and his personal control. In this regard, Sa’adat Ali Khan’s usage paralleled but also surpassed that of Bahu Begum, who had often portrayed herself in the late-eighteenth century as the defender of the *Shujā’ī* dispensation, which she designated with the term *khāndān*.

In their desire to distance themselves from Bahu Begum, however, the women of the *khord maḥal* framed their own “family” in far narrower terms. Unlike Sa’adat Ali Khan or Bahu Begum, who commonly referred to a broadly encompassing kin and service collectivity with the phrase “this family (*īn khāndān*),” the *khord maḥal* begums spoke in more specific terms. In a refutation of Bahu Begum’s agreement with the Company, one of the documents the *khord maḥal* forwarded to Sa’adat Ali Khan was a treaty (*‘ahadnāma*) of their own, which the women “had signed with one another (*bā hamdīgar namūda-and*)” and “ratified with their own seals

⁸⁸ Ibid. and FDP, CR 38, No. 105. Translation mine.

⁸⁹ Baillie Collection, MS 131, Sa’adat Ali Khan to Baillie, 20 Sep. 1812 and FDP, CR 38, No. 88. Translation mine.

(*muwāhir-i khūd ṣābit-i ṣabt namūda-and*).” In it, they pledged that, although they would “accept any calamity which befell them (*ānchi bilā bar sar khwāhad āmad qabūl ast*),” they would never tolerate the *nizārat* of Tahsin Ali Khan, who was “a tyrant and an enemy of *our* family (*zālim wa dushman-i khāndān-i mā*).”⁹⁰ The *khord maḥal* ‘*ahadnāma* did not make explicit whether the women considered Sa’adat Ali Khan part of “their” *khāndān*. Their tendency to address the nawab in filial terms certainly would indicate as much. Yet the framing of the ‘*ahadnāma* as a binding compact among the residents of the *khord maḥal* and the possessive “*our* family (*-i mā*),” as opposed to the more inclusive—and rhetorically typical—“*this* family (*īn khāndān*)” favored by the nawab and Bahu Begum, suggest the women understood family less as Sa’adat Ali Khan’s storied lineage or an expansive kin group under his authority than a localized collectivity defined by co-residence, affect, and shared experience. Whether or not we can read this much into their ‘*ahadnāma*, at the very least it is clear that the *khord maḥal* begums and their sons placed Bahu Begum and Tahsin Ali Khan decidedly outside “their family.” In so doing, they also undermined Sa’adat Ali Khan’s claim to command absolute obedience from the Company’s dependents as the head of domestic arena that encompassed a broadly conceived ruling *khāndān*.

Yet if they meant to mark themselves as a family somehow separate from both Sa’adat Ali Khan and Bahu Begum, the women of the *khord maḥal* also had no intention of quietly submitting to the nawab or of renouncing their claims to property as the wives and daughters of Shuja-ud-daula. Indeed, if, as Baillie suspected, some of the *khord maḥal* begums had in fact conspired deliberately with Sa’adat Ali Khan to undermine the authority of Bahu Begum, the resident’s own newsletters illustrate their alleged partnership quickly frayed once the women

⁹⁰ Baillie Collection, MS 129 and FDP, CR 38, No. 105c. Translation mine.

arrived in Lucknow in late August 1812.⁹¹ Having taken up residence in Asaf-ud-daula's congregational mosque and *imāmbāra* complex, many of the women found themselves in financial straights as negotiations over the *nizārat* dragged into the fall. After pawning their jewelry to *mahājans* (who had followed them from Faizabad and set up shops outside the *imāmbāra*), in desperation they sent their female slaves and servants (*khawāṣṣān wa aṣīlān*) into adjoining storehouses to plunder the goods inside.

While the newsletters do not provide a justification on the *khord maḥal*'s part, later histories frame their actions in terms of laying claim to shared familial property. In the words of Kamal-ud-din Haidar, a mid-nineteenth century historian who wrote a narrative of Awadh at the behest of the British scholar-official Henry Miers Eliot, Shuja-ud-daula's daughters (*ṣāhibzādīs*) "looted a [nearby] storehouse, having boldly conceived of its contents as their father's property (*bēbākāna apnē bāp kā māl samajhkar ek kōṭhī kā asbāb lūṭ liyā*)."⁹² He went on to note that the women "often told His Majesty [Sa'adat Ali Khan] that, 'We are the same as you. If you will be just then [you will recognize] we are worthy of your mercy' (*janāb-i 'ālī kō akṣar kihtī thūñ ki jō tum hō voh ham haiñ agar inṣāf karō tō ham wājib-ul-raḥm haiñ*)."⁹² Accordingly, after they "returned some of the worthless items they had looted" (*unhōñ nē kuchh asbāb-i faẓūl apnē lūṭ kā mustarriḍ kar diyā*)," Sa'adat Ali Khan agreed to pardon their plunder of the storehouses, as well as their "bold" pretenses to shared ownership of "state" (*sarkārī*) property ("*us khayāl sē*

⁹¹ FDP, CR 38, No. 89.

⁹² Kamal-ud-din Haidar, *Tawārikh-i awadh* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1879), 5. Kamal-ud-din Haidar has the women plundering storehouses in the Panjmahalla palace, but it appears he is describing the same incident.

[*bhī*] *dar guzar kartē thē*).⁹³ The nawab's supposed magnanimity, however, is belied by Baillie's reports, which indicate that Sa'adat Ali Khan immediately sent his eldest son, the soon-to-be nawab Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, to remove all goods from the nearby storerooms and to bar the *khord maḥal*'s servants and slave girls from entering them. Additionally, several of the nawab's brothers, who had also been raised in the *khord maḥal*, came to chastise the women for allowing the items to be taken "without [Sa'adat Ali Khan's] permission (*bī ijāzat-i ḥuḏūr*)," telling them that such actions "reflected poorly on them (*īn ma'nī dar ḥaqq-i shumāyān bihtar nīst*)" and that the nawab would be "very displeased (*janāb-i 'ālī bisiyār nā khwāst khwāhand shud*)."⁹⁴

Sa'adat Ali Khan's disapproval, coupled with their financial distress, ultimately exacerbated growing tensions among the *khord maḥal* begums, many of whom blamed Dulhan Begum for leading them astray in their quixotic efforts against Bahu Begum and Tahsin Ali Khan. Finally, in December 1812, in exchange for an increased stipend and a promise to pay them in "sicca" rupees (as opposed the lower weight "rikabee" rupees minted in Lucknow), most of the women signed a deed of satisfaction (*rāzīnama*) pledging to support of Tahsin Ali Khan as *nāzīr*. Days later, they set out for Faizabad, this time accompanied by a guard of Company sepoy.⁹⁵

⁹³ Kamal-ud-din Haidar initially wrote his history in Persian but also produced an Urdu translation that was subsequently published by the Nawal Kishore press in Lucknow and Kanpur. I have relied primarily on the published Urdu translation but the term "*sarkārī*" appears in the Persian original as well. See BL, OMS Or. 1821. For the Nawal Kishore press, see U. Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Nawal Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

⁹⁴ FRPr, CR 38, No. 89.

⁹⁵ FDPC, 8 Jan. 1813, Nos. 13-16.

Conclusion

At the time, the dispute over the *khord maḥal nizārat*—like the decade of conflicts preceding it—seemed to change little. Baillie, the nawab, and Bahu Begum all clung to their stated positions. Sa’adat Ali Khan agreed to reinstate Tahsin Ali Khan but refused to concede any independent authority on Bahu Begum’s part, while the resident and Bahu Begum continued to promote her rights and privileges and to decry the nawab’s harassment and overreach. The reinstatement of Tahsin Ali Khan soon proved moot, however, as the eunuch soon became ill and died the following year. Baillie declared preemptively that Bahu Begum would decide his replacement “as a matter of course” but it is unclear who actually replaced him or if Sa’adat Ali Khan once again asserted his “domestic” prerogative to appoint a *nāẓir*.⁹⁶ As the next chapter will illustrate, the resident and the nawab were far more preoccupied with debating the legality of the eunuch’s will and the nawab’s claims to his property. Indeed, questions of future property claims quickly became far more pressing than concerns of immediate authority, as Tahsin Ali Khan’s death presaged the demise of several other elderly Company dependents, including, by 1815, both Shams-un-nissa Begum and Bahu Begum.

Yet the *khord maḥal* dispute nevertheless marked a critical shift in the discourse of Anglo-Awadh diplomacy and the ruling dynasty itself. Although unpersuasive to Baillie or Lord Minto, Sa’adat Ali Khan’s arguments regarding his “domestic” authority reflected a new binary on the part of the Awadh rulers between “political” affairs of sovereignty and the state (*amūr-i riyāsat*) and those of the family and the “domestic” (*amūr-i khānagī*). While Asaf-ud-daula had resisted attempts to demarcate a boundary between his household and the state, his brother

⁹⁶ FDPC, 3 Sep. 1813, No. 33.

embraced the distinction as a means of compartmentalizing his fractious family within a discrete, domestic arena and asserting his authority over the Company's dependents as members of an expansively conceived household. The gambit did not achieve the nawab's intended aims during his lifetime, but the terms set by the *khāna/riyāsat* binary became increasingly institutionalized, allowing both Company officials and Sa'adat Ali Khan's successors a means to selectively designate intra-dynastic affairs as a space of British non-interference and to discursively delegitimize *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums like Badshah Begum during the 1830s (Chapter 3). With the dynasty subordinated to the domestic, Bahu Begum's understanding of the *khāndān*—as a designation for anachronistic political dispensation characterized by the co-sharing of sovereignty between several quasi-independent *sarkārs*—became outmoded. Instead, “family” came to be understood either as the narrowly defined lineage of the ruling *Manṣūrīya* dynasty⁹⁷ or, as represented by the women of the *khord maḥal*, as one of the numerous, fractious, and increasingly atomized co-residential groups loosely under its control.

The *khord maḥal* dispute, however, as the culmination of a decade of conflicts between Sa'adat Ali Khan, the resident, and the Company dependents, also signaled an attendant shift in British policy in Awadh. While Lord Minto, the governor-general for much of Baillie's tenure, often encouraged the resident's zealous efforts on behalf of the Company's clients, by 1813 he expressed concern that “minor affairs” like that of the *khord maḥal* were jeopardizing British influence in Awadh and its larger reform agenda. Lord Minto's successor, Lord Moira, was still more worried. Alarmed at Baillie's high-handed attitude toward Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, Sa'adat Ali

⁹⁷ Although modern historians usually consider *ṣūbadār* Burhan-ul-mulk Sa'adat Khan (r. 1722-39) the founder of the Awadh regime, the dynasty saw itself instead as the lineal descendants of his nephew (*khwāharzāda*) and son-in-law (*dāmād*), Safdar Jang (r. 1739-54). By the reign of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar (1814-28), members of the dynasty most often described themselves as the *khāndān-i manṣūrīya*, playing upon the word “*manṣūrīya*” as an adjective meaning “victorious” and as a derivation from one of Safdar Jang's titles, Mansur Ali Khan.

Khan's successor, the governor-general removed him in 1815. For his part, the new nawab was only too happy to see him go, accusing the resident of inducing his father's fatal illness through constant "vexation and dissatisfaction."⁹⁸ As Chapter 2 demonstrated, Lord Moira once again made non-intervention in the nawab's "domestic affairs" central to British policy, reaffirming patriarchal, dynastic authority as fundamental to local sovereignty.

Lord Moira hoped that, by conciliating Ghazi-ud-din Haidar in this fashion, he would be far more amenable than his father to administrative reforms proposed by the Company. Ironically, despite his reputation for recalcitrance towards reform, Sa'adat Ali Khan had quietly implemented many of the structural changes demanded by British officials of Asaf-ud-daula, dramatically refashioning the spatial dimensions of the *sarkār* by the end of his reign. A passionate builder, Sa'adat Ali Khan abandoned the old Macchi Bhawan and Panjmahalla palaces (parts of which were still occupied by Asaf-ud-daula's widow, Shams-un-nissa Begum) in favor of newly built palaces constructed in an "Indo-European" style, bungalows purchased from European merchants, and mansions seized from deceased noblemen.⁹⁹ Revealingly, this complex of buildings was referred to in the following decades, collectively and impersonally, as "state buildings" (*makānāt-i sarkārī*) or "state properties" (*imlāk-i sarkārī*), using the increasingly common adjectival neologism, "*sarkārī*" ("of the state"), the construction of which was informed by the same discursive transformations noted above.¹⁰⁰ The centerpiece of the

⁹⁸ FDPC 7 Mar. 1815, No. 20.

⁹⁹ For surveys of these buildings, see R. Llewellyn-Jones, *A Fatal Friendship: The Nawabs, the British, and the City of Lucknow* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985) and B. Tandan, *The Architecture of Lucknow and Oudh, 1722-1856: Its Evolution in an Aesthetic and Social Context* (Cambridge: Zophorus, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Andhra Pradesh State Archives [APSA], Oriental Manuscript Library and Research Institute [OMRLI], MS *Tārīkh* 702, *Akhbār-i darbār-i ghāzī-ud-dīn haidar bādshāh-i awadh*, 19 *Zī'l hijja* 1239/16 Aug. 1824, 223 and Rampur Raza Library, MS 2416, Lal-ji, *Mir'āt-ul-auzā'*, 123.

complex was a new central pavilion (*bārahdarī*), which served as public audience hall (*darbār*) and office (*daftar*) easily accessible to the Company's new residency, also constructed by Sa'adat Ali Khan during his reign (and at his expense). Most importantly, connected to the *bārahdarī* was a separate "public" treasury for the disbursement of civil and military salaries (*khizāna-yi taqsīm-i tankhwāh-i mulāzimān wa sipāh*).¹⁰¹ Not insignificantly, this would be the same complex occupied by Badshah Begum and Munna Jan during their brief "coup" in 1837.

Assuming an institutional form more acceptable to Company officials, however, did not free the Awadh *sarkār* and its relationship to the ruling family from structural or ideological contradictions. Indeed, the same palace complex and its treasuries illustrated as much. In addition to the new "public" treasury, Sa'adat Ali Khan also maintained a separate "private" treasury. Known as the "great" treasury (*khizāna-i kalān*), it contained at the time of the nawab's death perhaps ten to twenty million rupees, much of which had been amassed by appropriating the property of deceased officials *and* members of the ruling family.¹⁰² For while Sa'adat Ali Khan, at times, promulgated a stark division between the affairs of the state and those of his household/family, he nevertheless continued to claim—as would his successors—exclusive inheritance of familial estates as a right of "sovereignty" and/or "the state" (*riyāsat*).

As the next chapter will show, this drive to bind more fully the assets of the ruling family to the state had a number of profound consequences. Most immediately, it encouraged not only the Company's protected dependents but gradually other members of the ruling dynasty to seek economic shelter for their legatees in the form of permanent pensions guaranteed by British officials and funded by Company securities. In so doing, branches of the ruling family became

¹⁰¹ *Akhhārāt-i hind*, fol. 327b.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

interwoven not with the Awadh “state” but with the Company *sarkār* and its own great “household,” the British residency.¹⁰³ At the same time, as the Awadh rulers themselves came to appropriate successfully the very instruments designed to protect Company clients from their *sarkār*, the increasingly institutionalized divides between household, family, and state furnished British officials with new means to critique the Awadh regime. Where residents like Baillie had once sought to protect select members of the dynasty from the state, by the 1840s and 1850s, they now worried about how to save the state *and* the ruling dynasty from the sovereign and his predatory household.

¹⁰³ Significantly, Company *akhbārāt* referred to both the Company-state and the Lucknow residency as *sarkārs*, with the latter typically designated as the *sarkār-i ṣaḥīb kalān*. For examples, see APSA-OMLRI, MS *Tārīkh* 702 and BL, OMS Add. 22,264: Reports on Occurrences at the Court of Delhi, 1830.

Chapter 5—Wills, *waṣīqa*, and the politics of *parwarish*

Introduction

In exploring multivalent conceptual conversations between the East India Company and members of Awadh's ruling dynasty, earlier chapters have examined how evolving notions of sovereignty and the state reshaped the political culture of the Awadh regime and its complex relationship with the British colonial state. Chapter 1 showed how the formation of the Anglo-Awadh alliance in 1764/5 redefined local sovereignty as the hereditary, proprietary right of Shuja-ud-daula and his successors, allowing the nawab to intensify on-going processes of dynastic consolidation and household formation. Chapter 2 illustrated how, following Shuja-ud-daula's death in 1775, the nawab's successors and Company officials jointly framed sovereignty as the ruler's exclusive right and a fusion of unitary territorial dominion (*riyāsat*) and patriarchal proprietorship (*mālikīyat*) of the dynasty and its wealth. In so doing, they established succession events as moments of both collaboration and competition between the Awadh dynasty and the Company, as the nawabs strove to actualize their theoretical rights by personally designating successors, while British officials sought to regularize transfers of unitary authority by imposing quasi-legalistic idioms of primogeniture.

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the reified notions of sovereignty and dynastic authority that informed these conflicting practices also brought the nawabs and the Company into conflict with wealthy widows and influential chief consorts, who vigorously defended not only their rights to manage succession, but also to the shared sovereignty and financial co-sharing that characterized the *Shujā'ī* dispensation of the mid-eighteenth century. Despite their continued resistance, however, the influence of the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums was increasingly denigrated in the

nineteenth century—by Company officers, Indian chroniclers, and the Awadh rulers alike—as illicit “interference.” Yet as discussed in Chapter 4, the Company’s dependence upon their public consent to legitimize the controversial deposition of Vazir Ali Khan in 1797/8 led to the creation of lifetime guarantees and *de facto* household “protectorates” for the most influential *khāṣṣ mahals*. These compromises, in turn, shifted the broader conceptual conversation from the exclusive, unitary nature of local sovereignty to the relationship between “political” and “domestic” authority, and to the boundaries between ruling household(s), “the state,” and the dynasty.

The present chapter considers how this shifting conversation shaped the attempts of Nawab Sa’adat Ali Khan (r. 1798-1814) and his successors not only to assert their exclusive authority over guaranteed Company dependents and their households, but also to claim extensive rights to dynastic property. It contends that British officials, assuming unrestricted escheat to be integral to “despotic” Indo-Islamic regimes, regularly upheld the practice as a sovereign privilege, if not a right to be codified by treaty, particularly with regards to the property of the “ladies and slaves” of the nawab’s family. Nevertheless, wary of giving license to domestic tyranny, Company officers also attempted to mitigate escheat’s effects by pressing the nawabs to their observe familial and patronage obligations, and by continuing to offer limited protection to select householders and the persons and property under their direct control.

The instruments devised for these purposes—most notably permanent pensions funded by interest on Company securities (*waṣīqas*)—were, however, eventually appropriated and repurposed by the rulers of Awadh as a vehicle for distributing patronage and articulating sovereign authority. Yet in so doing, the nawabs (later, “kings”) became increasingly susceptible

to strident liberal critiques that—following from discursive distinctions between household, family, and state fashioned in conversation between the Company and the Awadh regime—portrayed them as dissolute plunderers of state property and negligent caretakers of their families, subjects, and dominions. By embracing the power of the Company state and its financial instruments to preserve an inflated sense of proprietary sovereignty, the rulers of Awadh inadvertently contributed to a persuasive case for their unfitness to rule and for their ultimate disposability.

The “custom” of *zabt* and the politics of *parwarish*

The Company’s case for annexation, however, did not rest solely on lessons supposedly learned from the long history of Anglo-Awadh relations. Like numerous policy decisions in Awadh and elsewhere, annexation was also informed by received European knowledge about the intractable nature of the “Asiatic” state, as well as the character and exercise of despotic, Oriental sovereignty. The foundations of this knowledge were built upon the accounts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European travelers throughout the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires. For many of these travelers, a profound disregard for personal property rights became one, if not *the*, defining characteristic of despotic Oriental regimes. In the context of Mughal India, forms of “escheat” (*zabt/muṭālaba*), in which the emperor and his officials confiscated the property of deceased or disgraced nobles, were considered especially offensive, especially as “natural” rights to property became increasingly central to European political theory. Imperial seizure of property received particular attention in the mid-seventeenth century account of French physician Francois Bernier. According to Bernier, the emperor justified such

appropriations by laying exclusive, proprietary claim to the entirety of his dominions and all that they encompassed. Effectively denying even the possibility of private property, the emperor saw no objection in taking back what was merely borrowed in the first place.¹

Through the writings of Baron de Montesquieu and others, Bernier's view of Mughal escheat and the Oriental despot's contempt for private property became widely disseminated and largely accepted among European political and social theorists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.² Bernier, however, undoubtedly overstated the ubiquity and universality of *zabt*, which was probably implemented with less regularity, permanence or severity than he suggested.³ Moreover, emperors in the seventeenth century hardly denied the existence of personal property or inheritance rights, regularly issuing regulations to ensure that confiscations conform to Hindu and Muslim inheritance law.⁴ For the most part it seems that, far from being an assertion of absolute sovereignty and universal proprietorship, *zabt* under the Mughals was more important as a tool for the punishment of corrupt or disloyal officials and, especially by the beginning of the eighteenth century, for retribution against the losers of imperial succession struggles and their supporters.⁵

Nevertheless, with the disintegration of the empire and the emergence of fiscalizing regimes in the eighteenth century, *zabt* appears to have become a more important and widespread

¹ See in particular his letter to Colbert in F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-68*, tr. by I. Brook and A. Constable (London: A. Constable & Co., 1891), 232-35.

² R. Thapar, "Ideology and the Interpretation of Early Indian History," *Review*, 3 (Winter 1982), 394.

³ M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966), 63-68.

⁴ For example, see Jahangir, *Tūzuk-i jahāngīrī*, tr. by H. Beveridge (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909), 8. See also J.F. Richards, "Norms of Comportment Among Mughal Imperial Officers," in B.D. Metcalf, ed., *Modes of Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 264.

⁵ This latter point is made convincingly M. Faruqi, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 318.

practice, as standing infantry armies displaced the periodic cavalry levies of the previous century and cash liquidity became increasingly critical to military efficacy.⁶ Awadh was not exceptional in this regard, particularly when his dramatic losses to Company sepoys prompted Shuja-ud-daula to reorganize his military on European lines.⁷ Furthermore, by the mid 1770s, the Company's expanding subsidy demands created additional pressures on the Awadh rulers to realize increasing amounts of liquid wealth through extraordinary measures.

The attendant expansion and regularization of *ḡabṡ* targeted two particular groups. The first, as under the Mughals, consisted of the regime's senior officials, particularly the *nā'ib* and *dīwān*, as well as increasingly wealthy and powerful tax farmers (*'āmil*s). The second comprised influential members of the ruling dynasty. While seizures from the first group likely yielded more economic benefit, exercise of *ḡabṡ* over the second group was more politically significant. Reflecting the eventual supremacy of Safdar Jang's lineal descendants (the *khāndān-i manṡūrīya*), over rival branches of the Nishapuri dynasty, as well as the nawabs' own growing patrimonial pretensions, *ḡabṡ* vividly advertised the nawabs' deliberate management of their *sarkārs*, their effective subordination of the family, and their ability to project power across their dominions. In one representative incident, Shuja-ud-daula marked his triumph over his rival, Muhammad Quli Khan, by ordering his cousin's home in Allahabad to be plundered following his capture and imprisonment.⁸ Similarly, in 1778, Asaf-ud-daula lost no time in confiscating the

⁶ For a discussion of military-fiscalism in eighteenth-century India, see B. Stein, "Eighteenth-century India: Another View," in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62-89.

⁷ For Shuja-ud-daula's military reforms, see Chapter 1, as well as R.B. Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 75-83; and S. Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India: 1770-1830* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17-26.

⁸ Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 50. See also Chapter 1.

property of the recently deceased Sher Jang, Burhan-ul-mulk's fraternal nephew and erstwhile challenger to Safdar Jang, the nawab's grandfather.⁹ The nawabs further demonstrated the dynastic significance of *zabt* in how they distributed confiscated property. While the assets of *nā'ibs*, *dīwāns*, and *'āmil*s usually entered the nawab's personal treasury, property seized from royal family members was often entrusted to a reigning or widowed *khāṣṣ maḥal*—a practice which often made determining ownership of such property after the nawab's demise highly contentious.¹⁰

Significantly, North Indian revenue and scribal officials seem to have considered *zabt* a legitimate exercise of the nawab's authority. While Company officials—for whom sanctity of personal property was essential to their own imperial ideology and their critique of “native states”—lambasted the practice, Indian commentators seldom did. Where Indian critics of the Awadh regime did object to *zabt*, they typically faulted the particulars of its application rather than the practice itself. Notably, Ghulam Hussain Tabataba'i, in his panoramic *Siyar-ul-muta'ākhkhirīn*, described *zabt* generally as a “disgusting tradition of the Baburid-Timurid dynasty (*sunnat-i zishtī-yi khāndān-i timūrīya-yi bāburīya*).” Yet when he excoriated Shuja-ud-daula for seizing the property of Mir Qasim, he did so not for perpetuating an objectionable practice but because the Awadh ruler had broken a sacred oath to protect the nawab and his

⁹ National Archives of India [NAI], Foreign Department, Secret Consultation [FDSC], 9 Mar. 1778, No. 5.

¹⁰ Shuja-ud-daula famously gave treasure plundered from Mir Qasim, the exiled nawab of Murshidabad, to his wife, Bahu Begum. Qasim Ali Khan Nishapuri, *Tārīkh-i shāhīya-yi nīshāpūrīya*, ed. Shah Abd-us-salam (Rampur: Raza Library, 1998), 68). Asaf-ud-daula also shared the property of his grandmother with his mother, the same Bahu Begum. British Library [BL], OMS. Or. 1726, Muhammad Reza Tabataba'i, *Akhbārāt-i hind*, fol. 312a. During his lifetime, Sa'adat Ali Khan entrusted significant cash holdings with his own *khāṣṣ maḥal*, much of which had been acquired through *zabt*. *Tārīkh-i shāhīya-yi nīshāpūrīya*, 67. Similarly, Nasir-ud-din Haidar distinguished his second *mankūḥa* wife, Malika Zamaniya with gifts from Bahu Begum's confiscated treasury. *Akhbārāt-i hind*, fol. 365a.

property.¹¹ Similarly, the former Awadh revenue collector Abu Talib Khan thought “customary confiscation” (*rasm-i zabṭī*), which he claimed had been “practiced regularly in that *sarkār* since the reign of the late Shuja-ud-daula (*az ‘ahad-i nawwāb-i marḥūm dar ān sarkār rivāj dārad*),” could be “absolutely necessary (*az jumla-yi zurūrīyat*)” in the case of notoriously corrupt officials.¹² He chastised Asaf-ud-daula, however, for seizing the property of his deceased grandmother in 1797, because he took “offensive measure[s] (*‘amal-i shanī*)” against the eunuchs and servants of her household while executing the *zabṭ*.¹³ Asaf-ud-daula’s mother, Bahu Begum, seems to have held a similar opinion of her son’s actions. Following the confiscation of her mother-in-law’s property and the arrest of her eunuchs and slave girls, Bahu Begum wrote to the nawab to criticize not the seizure itself (in which she later shared) but the excessive treatment of imprisoned slaves and the indiscriminate appropriation of property belonging to the deceased begum’s still-living relatives.¹⁴

In addition to the context and rigor of its application, Indian criticism of *zabṭ* also focused how the nawab used the appropriated wealth, and the extent to which he cared for surviving members of the deceased’s household. In so doing, these objections touched on larger questions of political legitimacy and familial obligation. The Awadh nawabs, like the Mughal emperors, fashioned themselves household patriarchs and “caretakers” (*parwardigar*) of their families, their

¹¹ Ghulam Hussain Tabataba’i, *Siyar-ul-muta’ākhkhirīn*, Vol. II, ed. by Abd-ul-majid (Calcutta: Dar-ul-Imarat, 1833), 94.

¹² Abu Talib Khan, *Tafzīh-ul-ghāfilīn*, ed. by Abid Reza Bedar (Rampur: Saulat Public Library, 1965), 120.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴ BL, OMS. Add. 16,721, *Intikhāb-i akhbārāt*: 17 *Zī’l-hijja* and 27 *Zī’l-qa’da* 1210, fols. 277b and 289b-300a

servants and dependents, and—by extension—the subjects of their dominions.¹⁵ As they had been for the Mughals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, idioms of feeding, rearing and nourishing were central to political discourse in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Awadh. The nawabs and *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums, as “heads” (*ra’īs/ra’īsa*) of their household-state(s) (*sarkārs*) and the ruling dynasty (*khāndān*), expected loyalty and obedience from extended family members, as well as their dependents, servants, and slaves; in exchange, they bestowed sustained “nourishment” (*parwarish*), i.e., employment and/or economic maintenance upon their devoted subordinates.

Failure to meet these mutual obligations could bring considerable censure. In the eyes of Abu Talib Khan, Asaf-ud-daula’s inveterate critic, the nawab’s primary failing was squandering his enormous wealth on “foolish expenditures (*ikhrājāt-i fuṣūl*)” and his entourage of sepoy and menials, rather than on the care of his blood relatives and devoted servants of the dynasty. “It should be understood,” he mused, “that the *wazīr*’s parsimony extends [only] to those with [legitimate] claims upon him (*bāyad dānist ki imsāk-i wazīr...dar ḥaqq-i mardum-i bā istiḥāqāq mībāshad*).” The expenses of Asaf-ud-daula’s numerous animal coops were more than adequate to provide for his late father’s *mamtū*’a wives and their children, but “in the eyes of the *wazīr*, all things are dear except people, particularly his brothers and [the family’s] old servants.”¹⁶ Abu Talib Khan heaped even greater scorn upon Bahu Begum, Asaf-ud-daula’s mother and the *khāṣṣ maḥal* of Shuja-ud-daula, illustrating how gender compounded the expectations of *parwarish*

¹⁵ For important discussions of these ideals, see: C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11-15; “Shari’a, Akhlaq, and Governance,” in M. Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004), and R. O’Hanlon, 26-80; and “Kingdom, Household, and Body: History, Gender and Imperial Service under Akbar,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 41, no. 5 (2007): 889-923.

¹⁶ *Tafẓīḥ-ul-ghāfilīn*, 48-50.

upon the most influential women of the dynasty. Despite the fact that “the women of the [*khord*] *mahal*” were supposedly starving and sending their slave girls (*kanīz-i ḥaramsarā*) to raid grain markets at night, the begum “never cast [even] a friendly glance upon them (*gāhī nazr-i iltifāt bi-ḥāl namīandāzad*).” In spite of her immense wealth (which included the treasure of Mir Qasim seized by her late husband), the begum left Shuja-ud-daula’s daughters unmarried, using her great *jāgīr* and prodigious income only to pursue “her personal preoccupations (*mashghala-hā-yi khūd*),” a detailed description of which Abu Talib Khan thought too “vile” (*qabīḥ*) for his readers.¹⁷

The embittered Abu Talib undoubtedly exaggerated Asaf-ud-daula and his mother’s parsimoniousness. Nevertheless, fear of such criticism certainly drove the Awadh rulers to provide at least minimal livelihoods to even distant members of their expansive families. As the nawab and his revenue farmers took increasing control of revenue collection, familial provisions were predominantly granted in the form of cash stipends paid from the nawab’s treasury. The awarding and payment of such stipends was, however, hardly straightforward. If displeased or reluctant to patronize certain individuals, rulers could delay payment or compel court attendance, forcing stipendiaries to take on debts to meet daily living and/or court (*darbār*) expenses. Nonpayment of stipends also became a favored strategy to protest Company financial pressure, as Asaf-ud-daula and Bahu Begum both used the desperate condition of destitute stipendiaries to demonstrate their inability to meet Company demands.¹⁸ At the same time, however, pension amounts also offered a clearly enumerated hierarchy among stipendiaries. If the amount awarded

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁸ FDPr, OR 68, 23 Aug. 1782; Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh, *Tārīkh-i farāḥ bakhsh*, tr. by W. Hooey as *Memoirs of Faizabad*, Vol. II (repr.) (Lucknow: New Royal Book Co., 2005), 182-83.

did not correspond with perceived status, grantees often balked and refused to accept the stipend. During the reign of Asaf-ud-daula, such discrepancies compelled many of the nawab's brothers to leave Lucknow and seek larger and/or more regularly paid stipends and *jāgīrs* from rival courts in Delhi and Gwalior.¹⁹ Women, particularly in the *khord maḥal*, had far less freedom to abandon the nawab's dominions but, through public demonstrations and strategic violations of female seclusion, they too could register their dissatisfaction and, occasionally, have their stipends favorably adjusted (see preceding chapter).

Further complicating matters were the politics of succession. Each accession was accompanied by new a balance of affect and obligation, as the new ruler sought to reward loyal servants and favorites, to eliminate enemies, and to displace those whose support was no longer deemed politically necessary. Moreover, successions often entailed numerous occasional expenses, which were further compounded by the Company's frequent imposition of additional fiscal obligations at the beginning of a new regime. Thus, even when a new ruler genuinely desired to continue the stipends granted by his predecessor, it was often financially impossible to do so. As Ghazi-ud-din Haidar explained to the resident in 1825, "it has been always customary in kingdoms that whenever a new sovereign takes the reins of government he curtails the expenses and disbursements of his predecessor." However, he cautioned, "in the event of a reduction not being made, that government must be ruined."²⁰

¹⁹ In addition to Sa'adat Ali Khan, at least two of Asaf-ud-daula's other brothers (Mirza Jangli and Mirza Mendu) fled Lucknow during his reign: NAI, Foreign Department, Persian Branch [FDPr], Original Letters Received [OR] 22, 10 Jan. 1787 and OR 455, 17 Nov. 1797. These same two brothers were also driven into permanent exile during the reign of Sa'adat Ali Khan.

²⁰ NAI, Foreign Department, Political Consultation [FDPC], 16 Sep. 1825, No. 46.

Underpinned by *zabt*, stipend awards, and post-succession retrenchments, a complex of practices emerged around property rights, familial authority, and patronage obligations, the careful balancing of which might be termed a politics of *parwarish*. In exchange for increasingly exclusive rights to familial property (often realized through *zabt*), the nawabs (and to a greater extent, widowed *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums) were expected to use their vast wealth to fulfill the obligations of *parwarish* to loyal servants and obedient family members. To minimize their financial burdens, however, *sarkār* heads reduced, delayed or eliminated existing payments, and avoided new grants, often denying the legitimacy of claims to *parwarish* based on a deficiency of kinship, affect, deference, or loyalty. At the same time, neither the nawabs nor the *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums could entirely evade such claims without forfeiting dynastic legitimacy, particularly in cases where kinship or a history of service could not be denied. As Asaf-ud-daula noted pithily in a letter to Warren Hastings, “No respectable person—*so long as he has the means to do so*—errs in the support of his connections.”²¹

In any circumstances, the politics of *parwarish* would have been contentious. The Company’s expanding influence in Awadh, however, complicated them significantly. On the one hand, funding the Company’s forces in Awadh created, particularly in the 1770s and 1780s, financial pressures which were met and/or contested by reducing *parwarish* expenses. On the other hand, British officials were keen to force the nawabs to meet existing *parwarish* obligations, as well as those imposed by the Company itself. This was, in part, because the Company, always sensitive to doubts about its own legitimacy as an imperial power, did not wish to be seen propping up tyrannical regimes that disregarded its “public” obligations to its servants

²¹ *Hīch ahl-i ‘izzat bi-shart-i dastras az khabargīrī-yi muta‘alluqān-i khūd qaṣūr namīkunad*. FDPr, OR 68, 23 Aug. 1782. Emphasis added.

and the established rights of its subjects. In the early nineteenth century, the fear of empowering Oriental despotism became especially acute, as Sa'adat Ali Khan, now thoroughly dependent on Company military power, strove to exert much tighter control over the ruling dynasty and its property. However, by imposing their own patronage obligations upon the nawabs, British officials also hoped to reward its growing coterie of elite supporters in Awadh at a minimum of cost. Framing financial support for "loyal supporters of both states" as the nawab's sole responsibility, the Company could cheaply support its partisans by shifting the costs to the nawab's government. While Company-imposed pensions and guarantees often benefitted cooperative ministers and other clients in the Awadh administration, as shown in the following sections, they were more frequently extended to ostensibly "apolitical" members of the royal family, especially after the deposition of Vazir Ali Khan in 1797/8.²²

More importantly, through new legal and financial instruments, the Company offered members of the ruling family the hope of formalizing and exacting their rights to *parwarish*, as well as of evading *zabt* and contesting the nawab's expansive claims to familial property. From 1775 until the end of the 1830s, ruling family members and Company officials developed increasingly complex forms of legal protection and financial support. Beginning with relatively simple written agreements (*qaulnāmas*) and culminating in permanent pensions financed by investments in Company debt (*waṣīqas*), these instruments evolved rapidly in terms of both their conceptual implications and their jurisdictional complications. Although they seldom lived up to hopes of their authors, these interlocking engagements would radically alter the internal dynamics of the Awadh ruling family and its complex relationship with the Company. It is to the

²² M.H. Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals* (Riverdale, MD: The Riverdale Co., 1987), 181-85.

development and consequences of these engagements that the remainder of this chapter now turns.

“When she shall be no more”: Negotiating Bahu Begum’s bequest

In establishing the thicket of legal and financial relationships between the Company and the Awadh dynasty, arguably no individual was more instrumental than Bahu Begum, the widowed *khāṣṣ maḥal* of Shuja-ud-daula and mother to Asaf-ud-daula. As discussed in Chapter 3, the begum entered into a series of engagements with the Company in the 1770s in order to protect her wealth from her son, as the latter attempted to appropriate Shuja-ud-daula’s treasury and, in the eyes of the begum, to subvert the norms of shared sovereignty and co-proprietorship that had characterized her husband’s reign. For the most part, the begum’s engagements aimed only to protect persons, property, and privileges under her direct control, and only for the duration of her lifetime. They said little about support to be provided by the reigning nawab’s *sarkār* or provisions for her survivors after her death. While she later attempted to enforce certain specific *parwarish* obligations (e.g., wedding expenditures) upon her son through a revised *qaulnāma* in 1778, this agreement emphasized her rights over her co-wives and their unmarried children in the *khord maḥal* as much as her son’s familial responsibilities.

With the Company largely unable or unwilling to enforce the stipends promised in the revised *qaulnāma*, and with Asaf-ud-daula exercising at the end of this reign increasingly rigorous forms of *zabṭ* against eunuchs in Faizabad, the begum began to contemplate how best to maintain her expansive household and to protect her vulnerable dependents after her eventual death. Her predicament became even more pressing after Asaf-ud-daula’s death and Vazir Ali

Khan's overthrow, when her stepson Sa'adat Ali Khan, with whom she maintained a relationship of mutual and unconcealed antipathy, assumed the throne. As we have seen, Sa'adat Ali Khan soon made plain his desire to curtail the power and prestige of Bahu Begum. In the months after his accession, he publicly elevated his biological mother, a *mamtū* 'a wife of Shuja-ud-daula, with the titles and trappings of the *khāṣṣ maḥal* and he eliminated customary allowances paid to the begum from the *sarkār* of Asaf-ud-daula. With the new nawab's hostility manifest, there was little doubt that he would assert his claims to the property of her and her dependents even more relentlessly than his predecessors.

Yet in many ways the begum's situation in 1798 was also more favorable than it had been in the 1770s and 1780s, particularly with regard to her relationship with the Company. Despite British officials' ambivalence and frequent hostility towards Bahu Begum in previous decades, her crucial, albeit reluctant role in the deposition of Vazir Ali Khan had placed her in much better stead with the Company at the turn of the century. As noted previously, in exchange for her public acclamation of Sa'adat Ali Khan in 1798, Governor-General John Shore had revised her previous engagements as a treaty (*'ahadnāma*), consolidating her disparate *jāgīrs* and *jā'idāds* into a contiguous estate, establishing her as a Company "dependent," and designating her Faizabad *sarkār* as a *de facto* protectorate. It was in this context of growing tensions with Sa'adat Ali Khan and improved relations with the Company that Bahu Begum sent in late 1799 a startling proposition to Governor-General Richard Wellesley: In exchange for rendering her and her *sarkār* formally independent of Sa'adat Ali Khan's authority, and for providing stipends in perpetuity to her relatives and dependents, she would bequeath to the Company the same fortune that Warren Hastings and Asaf-ud-daula had failed to seize in 1782.

Eager to humble Sa'adat Ali Khan and to appropriate the begum's vast treasure, Wellesley needed little convincing to accept her offer. Nor was he particularly troubled by any of the legal and political questions inherent in the proposition. Following received wisdom about the prerogatives of Oriental despots, he concluded that the rulers of "Mahomedan Governments" had at least a customary claim to the property of their "officers." He was not convinced, however, they could make similar claims against high-ranking members of their own families. Making a momentary departure from the Company's usual affirmation of the Awadh sovereign's exclusive patriarchal rights, Wellesley concluded that, in this case, familial hierarchies superseded the nawab's nominal authority. As he wrote to the resident soon after receiving her proposal:

The exalted rank of the Begum and the superior relation in which she [stands] towards the Vizier [are] circumstances which distinguish...her condition from that of a subject possessing no rights of property independent of the will of his despotic sovereign.²³

Moreover, making explicit the contention that sovereign proprietorship of the Awadh dominions and its produce ultimately lay with the Company itself, Wellesley reasoned that it was the Company that had both elevated Sa'adat Ali Khan to the throne and guaranteed Bahu Begum's property. As a result, there could be no reasonable objection to her bequest, since her wealth would go to support the paramount power that was perpetuating the existence of the Awadh regime anyway. Considering himself therefore justified in accepting the begum's offer, the governor-general ordered the resident to pursue the bequest while he finalized the new treaty with the nawab.²⁴

²³ FDPC, 17 Oct. 1808, No. 86.

²⁴ Ibid. See also A.F.M Abdul Ali, "The Last Will and Testament of Bahu Begum," Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission, 6 (Jan. 1924): 149-56

Yet in spite of his keen interest, military entanglements throughout India prevented Wellesley from finalizing an agreement with the begum before the end of his tenure in 1805. The matter lay dormant until 1808, when, based on her assumption that it was now her heir and protector, the begum requested the Company's assistance in taking hold of the property of the eunuch revenue farmer, Almas Ali Khan (see following section). Realizing the agreement had never been completed, the new governor-general, Lord Minto, ordered the resident to renew negotiations with the begum. Believing, however, his predecessor's tenure to have been characterized by reckless territorial aggrandizement and an unjust erosion of client rulers' sovereign rights, Lord Minto saw the proposal far differently than his predecessor. For the new governor-general, accepting the begum's bequest necessarily entailed granting her formal autonomy from the nawab, as this had been the substance of her initial request. Nevertheless, since subsequent negotiations between Wellesley and Sa'adat Ali Khan had confirmed the nawab's sole authority in establishing law courts and administering justice in her *jāgīr*, the British government could not guarantee the begum's complete independence without necessarily compromising the nawab's rights. Consequently, the Company could not become her legatee.²⁵

Yet the governor-general also concluded that the spirit of the Company's previous agreements with her obliged it to protect and assist the begum in establishing a provision for her surviving family members and dependents. This could only be done, however, by making a remarkable, if unacknowledged, departure from British administrators' earlier views about the nature of the begum's fortune. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Company officials in the 1780s had construed the horde in her possession as the "public" treasury of Shuja-ud-daula and the rightful

²⁵ Ibid. For details of the treaty negotiations with Sa'adat Ali Khan, see Chapters 2 and 4.

property of both his successor, Asaf-ud-daula, and “the state.” Now Lord Minto determined that, independent of her *jāgīr* (which, contrary to the begum’s views, he considered a temporary grant from the state), the wealth in her possession was not the misappropriated fisc of her late husband but personal property “unquestionably her own.” Provided it was sufficient for the proposed bequest, there was no reason, then, her present liquid assets could not be set aside to provide for her beneficiaries. Informed by these conclusions, the governor-general enjoined the current resident, John Baillie, to determine the exact terms of her bequest and whether her personal resources would allow her to fulfill them.²⁶

Owing to the begum’s extreme reluctance to disclose the extent of her assets and to the constant conflict between Baillie and Sa’adat Ali Khan, another five years passed before the agreement was finally completed in 1813. In the interim, Bahu Begum drafted a will (*waṣīyatnāma*), which she forwarded to the resident in 1810. Baillie, however, considered the will deficient in several respects. Firstly, it continued to refer to the Company as her heir and legatee, a status which Lord Minto had already refused for the British government to assume. Secondly, it enumerated allowances for her beneficiaries to be drawn upon future revenues from her *jāgīr*, even though the Company accepted the nawab’s right to resume the *jāgīr* upon her death. Lastly, and most importantly for the Company, the begum gave no information about the extent of her cash, jewels and other moveable property, and thus it remained uncertain to the resident if her funds were sufficient to pay the proposed allowances without the *jāgīr* revenues.²⁷ Thus, when the begum fell gravely ill in 1813, the resident traveled to Faizabad to inventory her property and finalize her bequest.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ FDPC, 12 Mar 1813, Nos. 5-8.

Yet once the resident arrived in Faizabad, Bahu Begum and her *nāzīr* Darab Ali Khan clung tenaciously to the hope that the *jāgīr* would ultimately be included in the bequest. They justified the begum's permanent title to the *jāgīr* in a number of ways. Principally they maintained—as she and earlier advisors had since the 1770s—that her *jāgīr* was a gift from her late husband and, as such, was effectively irrevocable private property. To this, they also added that at least part of the *jāgīr* revenues also constituted her dower (*mahr*), to which Sa'adat Ali Khan could have no legal claim, since *mahr* was not subject to inheritance law. At the same time, however, they embraced Wellesley's view of Company paramountcy to develop another line of argument as well. They argued that, much in the same way the Company had restored sovereignty to Shuja-ud-daula and the Awadh dynasty in 1765, fusing the imperial *ṣūbadārī* and its territorial dependencies into a hereditary patrimony, it could also convert her *jāgīr* into a proprietary estate independently of the nawab's consent. In fact, Darab Ali Khan and Bahu Begum, Governor-General Shore had already done so when he had consolidated the begum's *jāgīrs* into a single territorial unit in 1798. Moreover, by removing Vazir Ali Khan and installing Sa'adat Ali Khan, the Company had demonstrated once again that it was the ultimate source of sovereign authority and proprietary rights. As both the Awadh throne and the *jāgīr* had been renewed and modified by the Company independently of one another, this proved for the begum and Darab Ali Khan that rights to the *jāgīr* did not derive from the nawab. Consequently, the nawab could not, by virtue of personal inheritance or sovereign right, confiscate either her *jāgīr* or her moveable property. In one particularly heated conversation with the resident, Darab Ali Khan wove together her contentions about the irrevocability of spousal gifts and the ultimate sovereignty of the Company:

The Minister interrupted me to enquire on what principle the Vizier [Sa'adat Ali Khan] was to be considered [...] entitled to the revenue of her jageer, far more to her personal property, in opposition to her declared will. His Excellency had succeeded to the musnud [*masnad*, throne] as the heir of his father Shoojah ood Dowla, through the influence of the British power... [But] her jageer was the gift of his Father. If considered as attached to the musnud, the British government would have transferred it to the Vizier, instead of confirming and adding to it... The British Government, *as possessing the power*, might give her Highness's jageer to whom it pleased but could not surely in justice interfere to deprive her of any part of her personal property for the purpose of bestowing it on the Vizier.²⁸

Bound by the 1801 treaty to uphold the nawab's rights to his hereditary dominions and the governor-general's recent instructions, Baillie would not concede the begum's irrevocable title to the *jāgīr*. Hoping, however, to convince her to invest her ready money in Company securities, or, at the very least, enumerate the extent of her present assets, Baillie encouraged her to view her moveable personal property as expansively as possible. While she might not have perpetual rights to the *jāgīr*'s revenues, whatever she had amassed to date—whether from her husband's treasury or from her revenue grants—was, in the Company's current view, her personal property and would be the sole source of her bequest. Declining to part with her wealth during her lifetime, however, the begum refused to invest anything before her death. She also initially refused to detail any of her property but when threatened with a withdrawal of Company protection, she consented to produce an inventory and to disclose the locations where her fortune was concealed. Afterwards, the resident drew up “deed of deposit” for the begum and Darab Ali Khan, in which the *nāzīr* promised to transfer the inventoried property to the Company following the begum's death. The Company would then hold the property in perpetuity in the form of government securities, paying from the accruing interest the various allowances specified in the

²⁸ FDPC, 27 Aug. 1813, No. 1. Emphasis added.

begum's original *waṣīyatnāma*. Although it was far from what they had originally sought, Bahu Begum and Darab Ali Khan finally consented, signing the deed of deposit on July 30, 1813.²⁹

Following his return to Lucknow, Baillie forwarded the agreement to Lord Minto's successor, the recently arrived Lord Moira. The governor-general ratified the document but insisted that Sa'adat Ali Khan should be notified of the arrangement. Additionally, he ordered the resident to explain to the nawab that although the Company would honor the terms of the begum's bequest, it had expressly declined to become her heir and would recognize the nawab's right to appropriate any remaining property after the Company had taken the capital requisite to endow the pension fund.³⁰ The resident promised to do so but, owing to his poor relationship with the nawab, he found ample excuses to put off further discussion of the agreement. He was still avoiding the issue when Sa'adat Ali Khan died suddenly in July 1814. Taking advantage of his successor's seeming pliability, Baillie informed Ghazi-ud-din Haidar of the begum's bequest and pressed him sign a *qaulnāma* to confirm several of its provisions.³¹

Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, however, had every intention of pursuing his sovereign rights as zealously as his father. Although the nawab signed Baillie's *qaulnāma*, he refused to recognize the bequest's legitimacy and took the earliest opportunity to contest it. Such an opportunity came in fall of 1814, when the nawab traveled to Kanpur to meet Lord Moira during the governor-general's tour of North India. There, the nawab renewed Sa'adat Ali Khan's attempts to establish by treaty his absolute right to seize familial property and to impose limitations upon, if not avoid

²⁹ Ibid., Nos. 1 and 3. For the English translation of the "deed of deposit" and accompanying documents, see C.U. Aitchison, ed., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighboring Countries*, Vol. II (Calcutta: Foreign Office Press, 1876), 115-23.

³⁰ FDPC, 24 Sep. 1813, No. 7, and 29 Oct. 1813, No. 2.

³¹ FDPC, 2 Aug. 1814, No. 46, and 16 Aug. 1814, Nos. 50 and 51; Aitchison, II, 123-25.

completely, unwanted *parwarish* obligations.³² In repeated lists of proposals sent to the governor-general at Kanpur, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar demanded that he be allowed to modify his relatives' stipends and *jāgīrs* in whatever manner he saw fit. Linking his right to reduce familial allowances with his ability to manage the state, he proposed that pensioners be prohibited from complaining to the Company if their *jāgīrs* or allowances were resumed or diminished.³³ Elsewhere, he signaled his intention to follow his predecessors and exercise his hereditary and sovereign rights to the property of the "ladies and slaves" of his family.

My grandfather Shuja-ud-daula, my uncle Asaf-ud-daula, and my late father Sa'adat Ali Khan had in every respect the power of making augmentations and reductions [to stipends] (*kam-zīyāda namūdan*) and of confiscating on their demise the property and effects of the ladies of the mahul and of their own slaves (*zabṭ-i māl-i fuwwatī-yi maḥalāt wa ghulāmān*). By your Lordship's favor I shall act in this affair in conformity to the established usages of this state (*muwwāfiq-i ā'īn-i qadīm-i īn sarkār*).³⁴

These "established usages" demanded that the nawab also lay unambiguous claim to the property of his grandmother.

When [Bahu Begum] shall be no more, I, following the path of sovereignty and the principles of all kings and *wazīrs* (*az rāh-i riyāsat wa ā'īn-i jamī' bādshāhān wa wuzrā'*), and in particular those of this state (*wa 'alī-ul-makhṣūṣ īn sarkār*), [will be] the master and proprietor (of her property) (*mālik wa mukhtār-i ūshān ast*). According to the usages of this sarkar and the principles of sovereignty (*muwwāfiq-i ā'īn-i īn sarkār wa qawānīn-i riyāsat*), no one has any right to interfere with me, with respect to it.³⁵

In pressing his claims, however, the nawab assured the governor-general that he was not pursuing his rights for financial gain, but rather to promote established traditions of kingship and

³² For details of the treaty negotiations, see the second section of the preceding chapter.

³³ FDPC, 7 Mar. 1815, No. 17; FDP, OR 702, 26 Oct. 1814.

³⁴ FDPC, 7 Mar. 1815, No. 16; FDP, OR 664, 13 Oct. 1814.

³⁵ Ibid. Original translation, with modifications for clarity and consistency.

the *sarkār*. “I do not make this declaration from any avaricious motives, but because it is in conformity to the usages of our house (*illa bar-ṭabq-i ā’īn wa dastūr-i qadīm*).” Accordingly, he assured the governor-general that he would uphold the obligations of *parwarish*, on the condition that the begum’s relatives and dependents obey his authority. “The persons who received allowances from Her Highness the Bhow Begum shall continue to receive them from me on the condition that they attend [court] and obey my orders” (*bi-shart-i ḥāzir-bāshī wa farmānburdārī*).³⁶

Lord Moira, presuming the unchanging nature and fundamental principles Oriental despotism, accepted the nawab’s defense of his sovereign rights. “The relations of the Nabob Vizier,” he replied, “must owe to him that obedience and submission which is due to the sovereign from his family in all Mahomedan Governments, and the British government can never legitimately uphold any of them in contumacy against their sovereign.” Moreover, accepting the nawab’s pretension to be master and proprietor of his family, he similarly observed that “the British Government can have no cognizance of anything that relates to the ladies of the muhul or slaves,” maintaining that “any interference [in the nawab’s domestic affairs] would be improper.” Yet the governor-general also maintained that non-interference could not extend “to anterior fundamental arrangements,” i.e., the Company’s now-finalized agreement with Bahu Begum.³⁷ When Ghazi-ud-din Haidar continued to press the issue after the Kanpur conference, the governor-general swore that, despite his commitment to upholding the agreement, he would not allow it to infringe upon the nawab’s rights. As he explained later, he had ratified the engagement with Bahu Begum “because I considered it to combine...our obligations to the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ FDPC, 7 Mar. 1815, Nos. 46-47

Begum [with] the most entire regard for the rights of the Awadh sovereign.” While “good faith” would require fulfillment of the agreement, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar could rest assured “that the surplus of Her Highness’s wealth ... shall be faithfully paid into His Excellency’s Treasury.”³⁸

Yet for the nawab maintaining the appearance of complete control over the dynasty and its collective property was just as important as the wealth itself. When Bahu Begum finally died in December 1815 at the age of eighty-four, the nawab once again pressed his rights to the begum’s property and to exercise unrestricted *ḡabṡ*. Recognizing that it would not renege upon the agreement, the nawab now offered to pay the Company directly the seventy *lakh* rupee endowment promised in the begum’s engagement. In exchange, the entirety of the begum’s property would be transferred directly to his agents.³⁹ In arguing for the proposal, the nawab now stressed the threat to his sovereign dignity if it appeared the Company was usurping the right of *ḡabṡ*, particularly over the property of his family members. In fact, he claimed, were the Company to take control of any of the begum’s possessions, it would irrevocably damage the family’s “honor” (*nang wa nāmūs*) and its sovereignty (*riyāsāt*), as well as that of the nawab himself. This was because “from the first establishment of this family’s sovereign authority (*az ibtidā’-yi riyāsāt-i īn khāndān*),” “the property of a single lady (*matrūka-yi aḡadī az mukhadarāt-i tataq aṡmat*) had never left the possession of “the sovereign princes (*wālīyān-i īn riyāsāt*).” Recognizing “confiscation of family property (*ḡabṡī-yi khāna*)” to be the sole prerogative of the “reigning sovereign (*ra’īs-i waqt*),” Lord Moira had previously demurred from interfering in similar cases (see next section). Now, the nawab pleaded, it would cause utter “degradation and humiliation (*ḡaqqat wa zillat*)” to “both his sovereign government and to his

³⁸ FDPC, 18 Jul. 1815, No. 10.

³⁹ FDPC, 2 Mar. 1816, No. 88; FDP, OR 130, 16 Feb. 1816.

allies (*īn riyāsat wa...mutaḥḥadān-i īn riyāsat*)” if even “the clothes of a chaste lady connected to his sovereign authority (*malbūsāt-i mukhadara-yi tataq aṣmat wa kadbānū-yi riyāsat*)”—“let alone those of the head of the dynasty (*bi’l ra’īsa-yi khāndān-i wizārat*)”—were to pass from his control.⁴⁰

Playing upon British fears of offending Muslim sexual propriety, as well as Lord Moira’s personal commitment to upholding the nawab’s nominal authority, the nawab’s letters achieved their desired effect. The governor-general refused to remove British protection from the begum’s dependents, but he consented to the rest of the nawab’s offer, permitting the nawab’s agents to take the inventoried property from Darab Ali Khan and accepting seventy-*lakh* rupees to fund the pensions.⁴¹ Although Richard Strachey, the new resident in Lucknow, did not consider the agreement a notable success, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar saw the concession as a clear vindication of his rights: To celebrate the governor-general’s favorable reply, he publicly awarded *khil’ats* to all of his principal advisors.⁴²

In the long term, both the resident and the nawab’s assessments proved correct. Despite granting Ghazi-ud-din Haidar permission to perform *zabt* in Faizabad, the Company’s enforcement of Bahu Begum’s bequest and its protection of her dependents proved to be a source of constant irritation and a threat to the sovereign authority of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar and his successors. At the same time, the nawab’s symbolic victory in Faizabad marked the last time that such an endowment would be created without at least the ruler’s tacit consent. Indeed, following

⁴⁰ FDPC, 2 Mar. 1816, No. 99; FDP, OR 151, 28 Feb. 1816.

⁴¹ FDPC, 2 Mar. 1816, No. 93

⁴² FDPC, 6 Apr. 1816, No. 27.

the death of Bahu Begum, guaranteed pensions—like rights to dynastic property more generally—would soon become the sole prerogative of the Awadh rulers themselves.

“Ladies and slaves”: Wills after Bahu Begum

In the early nineteenth century, however, it was not at all clear that Bahu Begum's bequest was to be a singular creation. Indeed, by 1820 a number of high-ranking “ladies and slaves” had tried to imitate the begum and forestall *zabt* by drafting wills guaranteed by the Company. Like Bahu Begum, these individuals, having typically held positions of power under Shuja-ud-daula and/or Asaf-ud-daula, feared the aggressive application of *zabt* by Sa'adat Ali Khan and his successors. Moreover, like the begum, they perceived the Company's relationship with Awadh, and particularly the deposition of Vazir Ali Khan in 1798, to have fundamentally reformulated power and property relations within the regime. In repeated appeals to the resident and governor-general, they argued that, in actively intervening in the Awadh succession, the Company had not only assumed an obligation to protect its prominent supporters, but also the prerogative to redefine the nature of property rights and privileges, particularly with regard to *jāgīrs* and other revenue perquisites. Consequently, they hoped the Company, as it had done with the Awadh regime vis-à-vis the Mughal emperor in the treaty of Allahabad in 1765, would render their household property and revenue portfolios as discrete, hereditary estates immune to resumption by the dynastic sovereign. At the very least, they too hoped to form bequests for their survivors that would be executed by British officials and insulated from the claims of the Awadh rulers.

Critically, however, none of Bahu Begum's imitators possessed her same combination of dynastic prestige, vast wealth, and long-term legal connections with the Company. Moreover, while Company officials shared the begum and her contemporaries' view of an emergent British paramountcy, its officials were reluctant to needlessly demonstrate the Company's power during this period. Fearing backlash from the Company's client states after Wellesley's aggressive and annexationist tenure, successive governors-general sought to placate weakened Indian potentates like the Awadh nawabs with regard to their sovereign rights. As a result, the Company consistently declined to enforce wills inspired by Bahu Begum's bequest, frequently appealing to particularist readings of Islamic law to nullify the bequests through technicalities rather than admitting the desire to avoid conflict with the Awadh rulers. Thus, while her case seemed to create a crucial precedent for guarding dynastic households from *zabt* and for establishing perpetual *parwarish* through Company securities, her imitators' hopes for the future were ultimately dashed against the nominal British commitment to upholding local rulers' sovereign rights.

a. Shams-un-nissa Begum

This disappointment may have been most acute for Shams-un-nissa Begum, the widowed *khāṣṣ mahāl* of Asaf-ud-daula. As discussed in the preceding chapter, after more than a decade of incessant conflict with Sa'adat Ali Khan over palaces in Lucknow, the administration of her *jāgīr*, and the enjoyment of privileges and perquisites assigned by her late husband, the begum fled to Company territory, where she died shortly thereafter in 1814. Throughout this time, she regularly wrote to the Company's officials in Lucknow and Calcutta. While much of her

correspondence aimed at parrying her brother-in-law's specific encroachments, she also worked to turn her *jāgīr* into a hereditary estate managed by the Company for the benefit of her household dependents. As did other *khāṣṣ maḥals*, Shams-un-nissa Begum used her high rank and the threat of pilgrimage in an effort to cajole concessions from the nawab and the Company.

However, while Wellesley and his underlings encouraged her to think of her *jāgīr* in overtly proprietary terms, later governors-general withdrew from his novel position.⁴³ In late 1807, anticipating a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, the begum hoped to entrust Lord Minto with the care of her adopted daughter, as well as that of all her “relatives, dependents, eunuchs, domestics, servants and others attached to my family.” To ensure that they would “continue to enjoy the same means of livelihood,” she pledged to make over to the Company “the few worldly effects of which I am possessed, [including] my jaggeer, vessels of gold and silver, and the revenues of the bazar.”⁴⁴ Lord Minto, however, recognized only the nawab's proprietary rights to the *jāgīr*. “You must be sensible” he replied “that the British Government does not possess authority to dispose of jaggeers in His Excellency the Vizier's country; nor to bestow provisions derived from the resources of His Excellency's dominion.”⁴⁵

Similar reasoning underpinned the Company's response when the begum defied Sa'adat Ali Khan and fled to Allahabad in 1813. Once in Company territory, the begum, apparently no longer subject to the nawab's authority, once again proposed to go on pilgrimage, this time to Karbala. Writing to notify to Lord Moira about her anticipated departure, she used her letter as an excuse to put her worldly affairs in order. In the likely event of her death abroad, she requested

⁴³ FDSC, 18 Nov. 1802, Nos. 8-10.

⁴⁴ FDPC, 18 Jan. 1808, Nos. 41 and 43

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 44.

that her *jāgīr* revenues be converted into a hereditary bequest for her “relations and dependents.” Furthermore, she asked the Company to act as her “executor, agent, and representative” over all her “possessions and [revenue] rights (*imlāk wa wujūh-i muḥāṣil wa mudākḥil*),” and, considering her survivors “worthy of its patronage (*mustaḥiqq-ul-aḥsān*),” to “support and cherish them” (lit., “to nourish them beneath the shade of its support and protection”: *dar zīr-i sāya-yi ḥimāyat wa ḥifāẓat parwarish farmāyand*).⁴⁶ However, again citing his inability “to bestow provisions derived from the resources of His Excellency the Vizier’s Dominions,” Lord Moira regretted that the Company could not accept her proposal.⁴⁷ Unlike Bahu Begum, Shams-un-nissa had no time to respond and create a pension fund from her moveable assets: Several weeks after receiving the governor-general’s response, she succumbed to a lengthy illness.⁴⁸

b. Almas Ali Khan and Tahsin Ali Khan

Despite Lord Moira’s rejection of her will, however, the bequests proposed by Shams-un-nissa were eventually guaranteed by the terms of the “First Oudh Loan” *waṣīqa* (see following section). A similarly circuitous process settled the bequest of the begum’s contemporary, the eunuch Tahsin Ali Khan. Unlike “respectable and exemplary” ladies like Bahu Begum and Shams-un-nissa Begum,⁴⁹ high-ranking eunuchs like Tahsin Ali Khan occupied an ambiguous legal and social status, both within the Awadh regime and the eyes of Company officials. On one hand, as *nāẓirs*, revenue farmers, and superintendents of various household departments, eunuchs

⁴⁶ FDPC, 23 Jun. 1814, No. 65; FDPr, OR 107, 7 Feb. 1814.

⁴⁷ FDPC, 23 Jun. 1814, No. 67.

⁴⁸ FDPC, 12 Jul. 1814, No. 40.

⁴⁹ FDPC, 23 Jun. 1814, No. 64.

wielded considerable power, enjoyed great prestige within the *sarkārs* they served and in the regime more broadly, and received ample opportunities to amass considerable wealth. On the other hand, Islamic law dictated that, as at least nominally enslaved, they could not possess property independently of their masters. Indeed, such a legal logic partially underpinned Shuja-ud-daula's drive to acquire numerous eunuchs and to install them in positions of power under the *Shujā'ī* dispensation, and it continued to inform the procurement of eunuchs into the following century. As one English observer noted in the mid-nineteenth century:

[Eunuchs] are in great request among the highest order of people...they enjoy many privileges denied to other classes of slaves; –are admitted at all hours and seasons to the *zeenahnahs*; and often, by the liberality of their patrons, become rich and honourable; –still 'he is but a slave', and when he dies, his property reverts to his owner...This accounts, perhaps, for the common practice in the higher circles of the Mussulmaun population, of heaping ornaments and riches on favourite slaves; the wealth thus expended at one time, is but a loan in the hands of safe keepers, to revert again to the original proprietor whenever required by the master, or no longer of service to the slave, who has neither power to bestow, nor heirs to benefit from the property he may leave when he dies.⁵⁰

Yet Mrs. Mir Hasan Ali, writing in the wake of Sa'adat Ali Khan and Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's zealous assertion of more rigorous forms of *zabt*, oversimplified eunuchs' presumed heirlessness and lack of property rights, particularly for the period prior to 1801. Although evidence is sparse, eighteenth-century accounts suggest that, in at the same time that they pursued their rights to *zabt*, the nawabs and *khāṣṣ mahāl* begums acknowledged not only the existence and legitimacy of eunuchs' families, but also the eunuch's right to care for such families through bequests of "personal" property. In 1785, for example, Bahu Begum permitted her dying *nāẓir*, Bahar Ali Khan, to disburse his property (*māl*) to his adopted brother and young

⁵⁰ Mrs. Meer Ali Hasan, *Observations on the Mussulmauns of India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), 39.

eunuch disciples (*bachagāna*) once he had settled his accounts with her.⁵¹ Just as importantly, she pledged to continue rearing his survivors in her household (*dar ḥaqq-i īshān nazr-i parwarish farmūda bāshand*), a promise that other sources suggest she kept. For example, according to the begum's secretary, Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh, Bahar Ali Khan's adopted brother remained in Bahu Begum's service well into the nineteenth century.⁵²

However, settlements like that made between Bahar Ali Khan and Bahu Begum largely disappeared in the nineteenth century, as Sa'adat Ali Khan and his successors made unrestricted *zabt* and exclusive familial proprietorship an increasingly important marker of sovereignty and dynastic authority. A first indication that eunuch property would be a contentious aspect of these claims came in 1808 with the death of the formidable revenue farmer, Almas Ali Khan. Both Sa'adat Ali Khan and Bahu Begum laid immediate claim to Almas Ali Khan's property and appealed to the Company for support. Recognizing *zabt* as among "the acknowledged prerogatives of the Vizier," Lord Minto ruled in the nawab's favor and ordered Resident Baillie not to oppose him.⁵³ Despite the governor-general's contention, however, that escheat was "the right of sovereigns of Mahometan countries,"⁵⁴ the resident seems to have viewed the matter in more strictly legalistic terms: Since he had left neither biological heirs nor a will, Almas Ali Khan had died intestate and thus his property would revert to "the state."⁵⁵

Several years later, this disparity between political and legal rationales would fuel heated debate between Baillie and Sa'adat Ali Khan over the will of Tahsin Ali Khan, former *nāzīr* to

⁵¹ BL, OMS Harcharan Das, *Chahār gulzār-i shujā'ī*, 567.

⁵² *Memoirs of Faizabad*, II, 271.

⁵³ FDPC, 10 Oct. 1808, No. 35.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ FDPC, 31 Dec. 1813, No. 46.

Asaf-ud-daula and now *nāẓir* of the Faizabad *khord maḥal*. In September 1812, after petitioning the resident, Tahsin Ali Khan received a Company guarantee for the payment of small pensions, funded by his own property, to “some relatives and other dependents” after his death. The following year, after the resident’s return from his trip to Faizabad to finalize Bahu Begum’s will, the *nāẓir*’s health seriously declined. Building upon the Company’s previous guarantee, Tahsin Ali Khan took the opportunity to request that Baillie execute a last will and testament as well. Like the *khāṣṣ maḥals* Bahu Begum and Shams-un-nissa Begum, Tahsin Ali Khan also held a *jāgīr* that had been confirmed by John Shore in 1798 in exchange for his disclosures about Vazir Ali Khan’s parentage. Having been expressly dissuaded by the resident from doing so, he made no attempt in his will to alienate its revenues. Instead, in the manner of Bahu Begum’s bequest, he requested that the Company would immediately seize all of his moveable and immoveable property, auction them in their entirety, invest the proceeds in Company securities, and pay the interest in the form of permanent pensions to “his relations and friends.” Moreover, he declared the two grandsons of his deceased brother, Chatramal Seth, were to be his “heirs and residuary legatees.” Upon making his requests, he died several days later on August 27, 1813.⁵⁶

Notifying the governor-general of the will, the resident initially concluded that “the right of Tuhseen Allee Khaun”—“who has so long and so deservedly enjoyed the favor and protection of our Government” from the role he played in deposing Vazir Ali Khan—was “almost unquestionable.”⁵⁷ In a decidedly idiosyncratic view of their legal status, Baillie, a scholar of Shi’i jurisprudence and former professor of Arabic, determined that, by the most rigorous interpretation of the relevant authorities, Muslim eunuchs could not be considered legally

⁵⁶ FDPC, 3 Sep. 1813, No. 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

enslaved.⁵⁸ Tahsin Ali Khan's will, therefore, was "fully supported by the rules of Muhummuden Law, though not by the practice of Mussulmans under the arbitrary government of the Vizier," or indeed any other contemporary Indian or Islamicate regime.⁵⁹ Yet shortly thereafter the resident realized he had made an error. The will *was* in fact invalid: Not because of Tahsin Ali Khan's legal status, but because, as a Shi'i Muslim, he could not legally bequeath property to his non-Muslim grand nephews. "If His Excellency the Vizier should insist on his right to the residue of the estate," he regretted, "though the claim would be illiberal and unworthy, it must I fear be admitted by the Government."⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly, the nawab balked when Baillie nevertheless presented the will as a *fait accompli*. As the resident predicted, Sa'adat Ali Khan objected to the will on legal grounds that the religious difference between Tahsin Ali Khan and his grandnephews rendered it invalid. At the same time, he also maintained that Tahsin Ali Khan's status as a slave prohibited him, legally and customarily, from making a will, a fact he maintained the Company had acknowledged during the seizure of Almas Ali Khan's property. In a letter enumerating his several objections, he noted "it is an established custom in Hindoostan from time immemorial that the property ... possessed by slaves should at their death, revert to their master." Accordingly, "it is obvious that all the property appertaining to the late Tuhseen Alee Khan undoubtedly and unquestionably belongs to me, and the British Government itself acknowledged my right to this property by its decision in the case of Mahommud Almas Ali Khan, which is exactly similar to the present."⁶¹

⁵⁸ Company officials, however, made similar determinations in eunuch inheritance cases in the *nizāmat* of Murshidabad as well. See I. Chatterjee: *Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 166-75.

⁵⁹ FDPC, 3 Sep. 1813, No. 33.

⁶⁰ FDPC, 10 Sep. 1813, No. 9

⁶¹ FDPC, 31 Dec. 1813, No. 47.

Pivoting next to the tenets of “divine law,” the nawab maintained that “disposition of the property by will...can never be proper by a slave, without obtaining his master’s consent and approbation.” Instead, alluding to the kinds of informal arrangements that had taken place between Bahar Ali Khan and Bahu Begum decades earlier, he argued that “[Tahsin Ali Khan] should have informed me of his intention and after obtaining my consent he might then have bestowed his property in any manner he pleased.” Unfortunately, he had not. Now, the nawab argued, all talk of the will should cease and “all the servants of the deceased should hereafter serve me as they served him, and trust to my generosity to provide for them in which case a provision may be made.” For if Baillie insisted on executing the will, “no possible advantage [could] arise, save the loss of my property and infraction of my rights to be publicly proclaimed to the whole world, and thus to encourage my other servants in similar practice.”⁶²

In his response, the resident assured the nawab—somewhat disingenuously, given that he had finalized Bahu Begum’s will only two months before—that Tahsin Ali Khan’s will would not serve as a precedent for future testaments or for limiting his sovereign authority. In assisting in the overthrow of Vazir Ali Khan, Tahsin Ali Khan had become a “faithful dependent” of the British government in circumstances so exceptional that they were unlikely to occur again. Moreover, in the resident’s eyes, the will did nothing to impinge upon the nawab’s privileges. Although “the practice of confiscating [property from] public servants at their death and returning their posterity to beggary” could “never be approved by [the British] Government,” nevertheless the Company had no intention to oppose “escheat as the privilege of Indian Princes.” Hence, it had not interfered in the seizure of the intestate Almas Ali Khan’s property,

⁶² Ibid.

recent appropriations from the nawab's late *nā'ib*, nor even the resumption of Tahsin Ali Khan's *jāgīr*. Rather, he urged execution of the admittedly defective will based on "principles of justice," and in so doing conflated rewards for loyalty to the Company with the nawab's obligation of *parwarish* to his servants and their dependents. "Your Excellency," he declared "has already exerted the privilege and followed the practice of your ancestors in resuming the jageer of the deceased." Now, "your gracious remission of the trifling remainder of the forfeiture [and] your bestowing it on his relations and dependents can have no other possible effect than that of promoting you reputation and gratifying your best friends, the Right Hon'ble the Governor General in Council and myself."⁶³

Sa'adat Ali Khan, however, was in no mood to countenance the resident's arguments. Nor was Lord Moira prepared to push him further, despite Tahsin Ali Khan's particular status as a Company dependent. Fearing additional delays to its program of administrative reforms (which the nawab had long avoided through debates with Baillie over "domestic" disputes), the governor-general ordered the resident to press for the support of Tahsin Ali Khan's survivors but to avoid threatening the nawab with overt Company interference.⁶⁴ The resident obeyed but, much as he would with Shams-un-nissa Begum's survivors, Baillie used every opportunity to advance the interest of Tahsin Ali Khan's family members, especially after Sa'adat Ali Khan's death. Finally, during negotiations over the terms of the First Oudh Loan, he successfully pressed Ghazi-ud-din Haidar to include them among *waṣīqa*'s pensioners—and at the amounts stipulated in the will.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., No. 48.

⁶⁴ Ibid., No. 51.

⁶⁵ FDPC, 13 Dec. 1814, Nos. 10 and 11.

c. Afarin Ali Khan and Darab Ali Khan

Able in the cases of both Shams-un-nissa and Tahsin Ali Khan to achieve the substance of their intended bequests without formally executing their wills, Resident Baillie nearly made a far-more more lasting contribution to the arbitration of *zabt* as well. Although he had disavowed any intention of creating a durable precedent for eunuchs to alienate their property from the sovereign, shortly before leaving Awadh in 1815, he signed and admitted into the residency's records the will of one Afarin Ali Khan, a eunuch who remarkably had served successive nawabs from Shuja-ud-daula to Ghazi-ud-din Haidar. In 1818, when the now ailing eunuch mentioned his will to the current resident, John Monckton, it presented the latter with a significant conundrum. As had his predecessor, Monckton also believed that "a Mussulman eunuch could not by the law be a slave [and thus] is at liberty to dispose of their property by will." Yet he also acknowledged that Sa'adat Ali Khan had adamantly opposed Tahsin Ali Khan's will, not only because it was a "violation of his rights of sovereignty," but because it also tended "to encourage others in similar practices."⁶⁶ Baillie had, of course, insisted on the contrary, but Afarin Ali Khan's letters to Monckton left no doubt that the eunuch saw a precedent having been established. Indeed, in framing the case for his will, Afarin Ali Khan referred not only to Tahsin Ali Khan but also to Shams-un-nissa Begum as examples of "dependents of the British government" who had been allowed to support their families through testamentary bequests.⁶⁷

In citing these examples, Afarin Ali Khan seemed to suggest that, despite declaring them invalid, the Company had rendered previous wills as legitimate by executing them through other

⁶⁶ FDPC, 2 Jan. 1819, No. 45.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Nos. 45-47.

means. Now, Monckton—far less zealous than Baillie in supporting Company dependents—invalidated Afarin Ali Khan’s will in a similar fashion, citing illegal bequests in favor of Hindus as the principal objection. The resident, however, also made no secret that his primary goal was to reverse the precedent established by Tahsin Ali Khan and to safeguard Ghazi-ud-din Haidar’s sovereign rights. Since Afarin Ali Khan had not played as singular a role in Vazir Ali Khan’s deposition, executing his will “was manifestly not required by any considerations of public equity or good faith.” Moreover, had he done so, it “would have been certainly viewed by His Excellency the Vizier...as imposing a degree of restraint upon the independent exercise of his authority over his own subjects and servants, unjust in itself and not sanctioned by any existing engagements.”⁶⁸ The governor-general concurred, approving the resident’s conduct and the nawab’s subsequent seizure of Afarin Ali Khan’s property.⁶⁹

Monckton’s willingness to invalidate eunuchs’ wills based on the religiously composite nature of their families was similarly instrumental in the case of Darab Ali Khan in 1819. The resident once again recommended the will be considered illegal based on the fact that all of Darab Ali Khan’s surviving kin and his proposed heir were Hindus, a point he made in letters soliciting the opinions of the governor-general and Ghazi-ud-din Haidar. As he wrote to the nawab, “I have always understood that by the Mahomedan Law, a difference of religion bars all inheritance. It is on this ground therefore that I am of opinion, Your Excellency’s claim can be best supported.”⁷⁰ Unsurprisingly, in his reply to the resident, the nawab did indeed support his claim on those grounds. He also took the opportunity to state unequivocally his opinions on the

⁶⁸ Ibid., No. 45.

⁶⁹ Ibid., No. 49.

⁷⁰ FDPC, 27 Feb. 1819, No. 32.

property of “ladies and slaves,” the nature of his sovereign authority, and the invidiousness of wills engineered by Baillie. Identifying the source of the present controversy, he began by stating “how seditiously [the former resident], with a view to injure my father...labored to lay the foundation of my late Grandmother [Bahu Begum]’s will.” However, recognizing that Bahu Begum had no legitimate claim to the property in her possession—which really belonged solely to Shuja-ud-daula and his lineal successors—the Company had justly transferred her property to “the head of the family” after her death. This property necessarily included Darab Ali Khan and all of Shuja-ud-daula’s other surviving slaves, along with anything in their possession.⁷¹

Ultimately, however, the question of Darab Ali Khan’s property was not one of Islamic law but the customary exercise of sovereignty, one for which “the rules and practice of government are alone sufficient.” “I invite the strictest enquiry,” he declared:

Whether, from the first establishment of the house of Timour [i.e., the Mughal dynasty] to the decline of the empire, an instance has ever occurred either in my family (which is remarkable for the number of eunuchs in its service) or in the families of other rulers, of the property of a deceased eunuch having been transferred either by inheritance or by will to an other person, whether relation or stranger, excepting to the government by which he was brought up.⁷²

Furthermore, underscoring the similar status of “ladies and slaves” as both subject to the sovereign and effectively propertyless, he argued that, “in like manner,” the British government had recognized his right to the property of Shams-un-nissa Begum and Bahu Begum, “agreeably to the usage of government, which has existed from time immemorial.” Executing wills, however, would undermine this ancient practice. Bahu Begum’s will, “clandestinely carried into execution by Lt. Col. Baillie,” had already begun this process. Now, he pleaded, if Darab Ali

⁷¹ Ibid., No. 40. Ghazi-ud-din Haidar seems to have forgotten that he also referred to his grandmother as the “head” (*ra’īsa*) of the family several years prior in other petitions to the governor-general.

⁷² Ibid.

Khan's will were to be executed, not only would he be disgraced but it would jeopardize his rights to his own hereditary dominions:

It would be assumed as a general practice by the dependents of this Government, *whether slaves or otherwise*, who may have no heirs but the sovereign, to constitute the British Government their executor, and thus deprive the prince of the country of his heirship.⁷³

Although Monckton disputed several of the nawab's contentions, he nevertheless approved the seizure of Darab Ali Khan's property in Faizabad. The episode, although unnoticed at the time, would mark the last time a high-ranking eunuch attempted to contest *zabt* by will. More importantly, it would be the last time Company officials seriously entertained honoring such an instrument, whether authored by a "lady" or a "slave," against the wishes of the Awadh sovereign.⁷⁴ Instead, the Awadh rulers themselves took increasing initiative in procuring Company guarantees for favored members of their own households. While they clung to *zabt* as a critical component of their sovereign authority, they nevertheless sought to protect select individuals from its future exercise. Much as the widowed *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums and elderly *nāzirs* had hoped to defeat escheat from the reigning sovereign, in the 1820s and 1830s, the kings of Awadh looked to the political and financial power Company to nourish their own current favorites and to protect them from their successors.

"The resources of the state": Company loans and *waṣīqa* expansion

Initially, however, it seemed highly unlikely that the *waṣīqa*—characterized by legal protections provided by the British government and pensions funded from interest on purchased

⁷³ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁷⁴ Ironically, even Sa'adat Ali Khan's own *khāṣṣ maḥal* was also denied the right to execute a will through Company officials, and her property was seized by Ghazi-ud-din Haidar after her death in 1826. FDPC, 23 Jun. 1826, Nos. 13-15.

Company securities—would be embraced by the rulers of Awadh.⁷⁵ Indeed, apart from the large sum paid by Ghazi-ud-din Haidar for Bahu Begum’s bequest (which, as shown above, went to purchase the right to perform *zabt* upon her estate), the endowment for the first *waṣīqa* was essentially extorted from the same nawab in 1814-15. Pressed by a liquidity crisis during the Company’s war with Nepal, Lord Moira sought to secure a loan of one-*karor* (ten million) rupees from the recently crowned nawab. Since the nawab’s father, Sa’adat Ali Khan, was widely known to have amassed over fifteen-*karor* rupees in cash (much of it from the relentless application of *zabt*) Company officials assumed Ghazi-ud-din Haidar could be pressured into forfeiting the required amount. Their assumption was correct, but it was only after considerable negotiation that the nawab agreed to part with the money.⁷⁶

Since Lord Moira kept the negotiations from the official record, it is unclear how exactly they preceded. However, in his semi-annual letter to Company’s Court of Directors, he asserted that the nawab initially agreed to purchase the requisite amount of Company debt, then payable at six-percent interest. Some time later, “His Excellency’s consent was subsequently obtained to an arrangement for the permanent assignment of the interest on this loan to the payment of those pensions from His Excellency’s Treasury, which were under the guarantee of the British Government.”⁷⁷ Effectively, this meant that the pensions Baillie had pressured the nawab into granting shortly after his coronation (including those for the dependents of Tahsin Ali Khan and

⁷⁵ The word “*waṣīqa*,” generally connotes simply an agreement, engagement, treaty, etc. By the 1830s, however, the term specifically designated in Anglo-Awadh discourse permanent pensions endowed by interest on Company securities.

⁷⁶ NAI, Foreign Department, Miscellaneous [FD-Misc.], Vol. 7: “An Abstract of the British Intercourse between The British Gov’t and the Kingdom of Oude, From their first Contact in 1764 up to 1836, by Captain Paton, Assistant to the Resident, Lucknow,” 187-97.

⁷⁷ BL, India Office Records [IOR], F/4/507, 12259: Extract Political Letter from the Governor General.

Shams-un-nissa Begum, as well as the nawab's exiled uncles and brothers) would be paid in perpetuity by the Company, from interest accrued on the one-*karor* loan's principal. Such arrangement, the governor-general felt, would "put an end to a fruitless source of debate and vexatious discussion between the Vizier and the Resident, the evil effects of which have been so frequently lamented while their occurrence was almost unavoidable."⁷⁸

The arrangement also removed any vestiges of the nawab's authority over the pensioners, effectively transferring them to the resident's sphere of influence. Although many of the pensioners had been under British protection since 1798 (if not earlier), payment of their stipends and other emoluments through the nawab's treasury had allowed Sa'adat Ali Khan to retain a modicum of control over them, particularly by delaying payment and obliging them or their representatives to attend court. Now, as one later critic of Company guarantees put it, "the consequence of those arrangements has been the establishment of a most mischievous and separate jurisdiction under the resident," as the guaranteed pensioners sought to have their affairs arbitrated solely by the Company.⁷⁹ To accommodate them, the resident began holding a separate, weekly court audience (*darbār*) to hear the pensioners' grievances. Only in 1831 did Resident John Low abolish the pensioners' *darbār* and attempt to return the nawab's family members and hereditary servants to their "proper and natural position" of subservience to their sovereign.⁸⁰

The fact that guaranteed pensions and "intra-territorial" protections clearly divided the Awadh rulers' supposedly unitary sovereignty by establishing a formal jurisdiction headed by the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ FD-Misc, Vol. 7, 287-89.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

resident was not lost on Company officials. Lord Moira's extortion of two *karor* rupees (the equivalent of two million pounds sterling) in the space of less than a year was controversial enough and quickly occasioned hand-wringing and internal recriminations among British administrators in India and among the Company's Court of Directors in London.⁸¹ Almost as quickly, the inflated number of individuals, particularly from among the ruling dynasty, enjoying British guaranteed pensions, either from Bahu Begum's bequest or the so-called "First Oudh Loan" *waṣīqa*, generated far more disputes between the Company dependents and Ghazi-ud-din Haidar than had been the case even with Sa'adat Ali Khan.⁸² While some residents found the conflicts to be a source of illicit enrichment, with various parties offering lucrative "gifts" for favorable rulings, a consensus soon emerged among Company officials that guarantees were both a violation of local sovereignty and a distracting nuisance from more lofty diplomatic duties.

Given the contentiousness of Lord Moira's exactions, the Awadh ruler's loss of authority over an emergent class of "*waṣīqadārs*," and British officials' resentment at the need to arbitrate incessant intra-dynastic disputes, it is not surprising that a decade passed before another "loan"-financed pension fund was established. Yet Awadh's seemingly limitless supply of liquid wealth, as well as a growing sense that the Awadh rulers were the sole beneficiaries of the Anglo-Awadh alliance, eventually led Company administrators to seek, once again, significant financial assistance from their loyal ally. Thus in 1825, facing the ballooning cost of campaigns in

⁸¹ Ibid., 187-97. In 1815, shortly after the first one-*karor* "loan," Lord Moira request a second *karor*. That amount, however, was not to be repaid through perpetual interest but through conquered territory in the Nepali *terā'ī* that was subsequently annexed to the Awadh dominions.

⁸² This is the terminology employed by the British government's Wasika Department, which was formed to manage guaranteed pensions after the annexation of Awadh in 1856 and the Rebellion of 1857/8. For a history of the institution and its nomenclature, see Uttar Pradesh State Archives (Lucknow), Box 129, No. 1: L.C. Porter, "Draft of a Handbook for the Wasika and Pension Department, Lucknow" (1895).

Bharatpur and Burma, Governor-General Lord Amherst ordered Resident Mordaunt Ricketts to approach Ghazi-ud-din Haidar for an additional loan, which he secured with little difficulty.⁸³

As had its demands for military subsidy payments in the late eighteenth century, the Company's ability to secure in the nineteenth century massive "loans" of cash underscored that the Anglo-Awadh relationship was not an alliance between equals but rather a tributary dynamic between the hegemonic Company state and its wealthy client. Consequently, such exactions have often been portrayed as emblematic of the Company's unilateral expansion of indirect rule over Awadh.⁸⁴ Certainly the Company's relative power, and the essentially extorted nature of loans made by Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, cannot be denied. Yet framing the loans as simply blunt coercion obscures the ambivalence of Company officialdom towards such overtly imperial demands, which starkly contradicted the liberal principles upon which many in the early decades of the nineteenth century hoped to situate Britain's empire in India.⁸⁵ More significantly, it ignores the ways in which the Awadh rulers were eventually able to turn the terms of the loans to their relative advantage and to accommodate them within their particular visions of sovereignty, dynastic authority, and the politics of *parwarish*.

This shift can be traced to Resident Rickett's negotiations with Ghazi-ud-din Haidar for the "Third Oudh Loan" in 1825. Unlike the deliberations with Lord Moira and then-Resident Baillie, the now-king of Awadh and his domineering *wazīr* Agha Mir were determined to use the

⁸³ FD-Misc, Vol. 7, 203-4.

⁸⁴ Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, 181-2, and *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System, 1764-1858* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 382.

⁸⁵ A far-reaching liberal critique of Anglo-Awadh relations in general, and of "loans" and guaranteed pensions in particular, is to be found throughout the 1836 account of James Paton, assistant to Resident John Low: FD-Misc, Vol. 7, later published as J. Paton and B. Prasad, ed., *The British Government and the Kingdom of Oudh, 1764-1835* (Allahabad: Univ. of Allahabad, 1944).

situation to their advantage.⁸⁶ This was especially true for Agha Mir, who feared retaliation from Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's *khāṣṣ maḥal*, Badshah Begum, and heir-apparent Nasir-ud-din Haidar once the present king died and the latter assumed the throne. Consequently, he hoped to use the loan negotiations not only to attain a British guarantee to protect himself and his family, but also to profit handsomely while doing so. Skillfully exploiting the rift between Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, Badshah Begum, and Nasir-ud-din Haidar, the *wazīr* persuaded the reluctant king (now sliding deeply into severe opium and alcohol addiction) to grant the loan and devise a new *waṣīqa*, one that would now support individuals of the king's choosing rather than familial rivals and Company dependents.⁸⁷

The principal beneficiaries of the "Third Oudh Loan" *waṣīqa* were, of course, Agha Mir and his family, who were to receive, cumulatively, twenty-five thousand rupees (or just over sixty percent) of the loan's Rs. 41,666 monthly interest payment.⁸⁸ The king, however, also made sure that the *waṣīqa* would provide for vulnerable members of his own household, "who he [knew would] not be taken care of by his son."⁸⁹ In particular, he assigned a large monthly stipend of ten thousand rupees to Mubarak Mahal, his second, Anglo-Indian *mankūḥa* wife, as well as smaller pensions to three of his *mamtū'a* wives. Just as importantly, through the language of the *waṣīqa*, he made clear that the beneficiaries would possess a distinctly elevated status

⁸⁶ Following Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's elevation as "king" (*bādshāh*) of Awadh, much of the regime's administrative terminology and official titles were altered to imitate Mughal imperial usage. Accordingly, the nawab's "deputy" (*nā'ib*) became the king's *wazīr*. Like previous *nā'ibs*, however, the *wazīrs* often served as the manager of the heir apparent's household. Agha Mir, for instance, had been the steward (*khānsāmān*) of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's princely *sarkār* before the latter's accession in 1814. For a close examination of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's coronation, see M.H. Fisher, "The Imperial Coronation of 1819: Awadh, the British and the Mughals," *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1985): 239–77, and *A Clash of Cultures*, Chapter 4.

⁸⁷ FD-Misc, Vol. 7, 203-4.

⁸⁸ Aitchison, II, 132-35.

⁸⁹ FDPC, 16 Sep. 1825, No. 44.

within the Awadh dynasty and its dominions, explicitly granting them the very privileges the present king had spent much of his reign denying others. According to terms of the *waṣīqa*, each of the four specified wives, as well as Agha Mir, were permitted to bequeath up to a legally permissible third of their pensions in perpetuity to any individuals they so chose. More importantly, the fourth article of the *waṣīqa* stipulated that the Company:

will always protect the honor (*‘izzat wa ābrū*) of the stipendiaries...and it will be the protector of their possessions, such as houses and gardens, whether bestowed by the King of Oude (*bakhshīda-yi bādshāh*), or purchased or built by themselves, from the hands of the sovereigns and their enemies (*az dast-i ḥukkām wa muta‘anadān-i khūd*), and that in whatever city or country they may be, their allowance will be paid to them there.⁹⁰

In a single clause, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar thus managed to confer upon select wives the very rights to property and freedom of movement that he and his father had insistently denied other women of the royal family as a matter of sovereign prerogative. In particular, by exempting from *zabt* “presents” (*bakhshīda*) bestowed by the sovereign, the king upheld the very category of spousal gifting employed by *khāṣṣ mahals* like Bahu Begum and, later, his own chief consort Badshah Begum to defend their property and which he and his father had staunchly denied. The gift of the sovereign spouse, however, was not to be a blanket exemption. Rather, it was to be a selective designation at the discretion of the ruler. At the same time, by framing *parwarish* as a discretionary privilege, rather than an obligation of kinship or affect, he underscored how the Awadh rulers’ expansive authority had generated increasingly fractious forms of dynastic politics. Moreover, by equating Awadh’s future “sovereigns” with the *waṣīqa* stipendiaries’ enemies, he admitted the stakes of sovereign authority had rendered successions as zero-sum

⁹⁰ Aitchison, II, 132-35. For the Persian, see Kamal-ud-din Haidar, *Tawārikh-i awadh*, (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1879), 262.

conflicts between the chosen intimates of the previous ruler and his successor. For the king, only by reluctantly embracing the Company's system of guarantees—and by continuing to alienate his political authority and material wealth to institute them—could he and future rulers protect their favorites from the expansive sovereignty and dynastic authority they had themselves created in conversation with British officials.

The irony of this was more than apparent to Resident Ricketts. Although enjoined to procure the loan as quickly as possible, he was not unconcerned about the *waṣīqa*'s implications, namely that, solely for the personal security of the *wazīr* and the king's wives, a massive sum would be “forever...alienated from the *reigning* King of Oude.”⁹¹ Yet between the Company's repeated support for the nawab's sovereign proprietorship and the precedents established by previous British guarantees, the resident had little rhetorical ground on which to stand. Indeed, he himself continued to avow the king's exclusive proprietary rights, stating that “it would appear but just and proper that His Majesty should dispose of his property as he may deem proper.”⁹² As a result, when the resident objected to extraterritorial protections promised by the fourth article, the king replied that:

if [the British] government were not authorized to protect the property of individuals in another State, [the resident and his] predecessors had no right...to shield the persons and estates of many of his subjects because they were pensioners of our government, and if the rulers of Oude had no right or power to give away the houses and lands of their kingdom, *our government ought in justice to give back the half of his country which his father had alienated from him.*⁹³

Unable to answer the king's arguments and keen to finalize the loan, Ricketts conceded the point.

⁹¹ FDPC, 16 Sep. 1825, No. 44.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, No. 50. Emphasis added.

While Lord Amherst only agreed to give the new pensioners protections equal to those conferred on Bahu Begum's beneficiaries, Agha Mir and the king clearly saw the new *waṣīqa* as a victory.⁹⁴ Indeed, for the *wazīr*, it was such a success that attempting to expand upon it proved irresistible. When the king's health began to fail in the fall of 1827, he and the king proposed, as part of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's last will and testament, an additional perpetual loan of fifty *lakhs* to provide for those not covered by the previous *waṣīqa*. In addition to the king's elder sister and grandson, most of those proposed were trusted servants and officials who had worked closely with Agha Mir while the latter had run the state nearly independently of the king. Critically for the *wazīr*, the king's will reminded the Company of its previous guarantee and declared that, despite Agha Mir's numerous and notorious embezzlements, the state had no claims upon him or any of his relatives.⁹⁵

Resident Ricketts—affirming the king's proprietary authority over his kingdom and his “right to do with the money, which is his own, as he chooses without reference to what his successor may like”—consented verbally to the will's provisions and accepted the fifty *lakhs* shortly before the king's death.⁹⁶ However, since the king had been nearly incoherent while dictating the will, Ricketts remained unsure of the bequests's ultimate legality and sought confirmation from Lord Amherst before proceeding further. Company officials, however, were now neither in need of the money nor willing to bear the burden of additional guarantees. After more observing more than a decade of incessant dispute between the Faizabad *waṣīqadārs* and Ghazi-ud-din Haidar, the Company's Court of Directors in London had chastised the governor-

⁹⁴ Ibid., No. 40.

⁹⁵ FDPC, 16 Nov. 1827, 12-14

⁹⁶ Ibid., No. 12.

general for taking on unnecessary guarantees, which had eroded the “the legitimate rights of the native government of Oude.” Consequently, Lord Amherst informed the resident that he could not guarantee “the domestic concerns and private interests of individuals who...should look to their natural sovereign alone for justice, protection, advancement in the world, and security of life and property.”⁹⁷ Instead, considering the fifty *lakhs* as a temporary loan, the resident was to pay the pensions as per the late king’s will, but only so long as the money remained in his possession and the present king did not object to its disbursement.

Unsurprisingly, the present king *did* object. Yet rather than take the money back, Nasir-ud-din Haidar hoped instead to expand the sum and convert it into another permanent *waṣīqa* for several of his favored wives. Expressing surprise that the king would extend “the system of guarantees by a foreign government in behalf of subjects of Oude,” the Calcutta authorities declined to provide the guarantees or accept a permanent loan.⁹⁸ Instead, Governor-General William Bentinck proposed to exchange cash held by the resident for Company promissory notes, which could be distributed by the king as he saw fit, their recipients collecting the interest either through their own or the Company’s agents. Such an arrangement would allow the Company—unlike with the fixed rates promised by the *waṣīqa*—to regularly adjust downward the interest rate of its financed debt, as well as to avoid a guarantee’s political entanglements by treating the king’s wives and favorites in the same manner as its numerous other bondholders.⁹⁹

The proposal, however, was completely unsatisfactory to Nasir-ud-din Haidar, who wanted to signify the singular status of select wives by bestowing the same protections and

⁹⁷ Ibid., No. 25.

⁹⁸ FDPC, 1 Aug. 1828, No. 22

⁹⁹ Ibid.

privileges enjoyed by other guaranteed *waṣīqadārs*. To this end, he argued that promissory notes were too complex an instrument for women to manage. Despite the fact that all the wives he proposed to enroll in the *waṣīqa* held *jāgīrs* managed by their own agents, the king claimed that it was “impossible for chaste ladies” to meet the requirements of the notes.¹⁰⁰ Their sex similarly obviated the Company’s concerns regarding the guarantee. Although the political influence of his wives and his mother Badshah Begum would become a contentious issue several years later, the king—reflecting the entrenched, gendered division between “political” and “domestic”-cum-dynastic affairs—maintained that since women have “nothing to do with the offices of state,” “there can be no difficulty in protecting them, which is merely to guard their person and property, and to save them from oppression of others.”¹⁰¹ Significantly, he argued that the Company, having initiated such guarantees, could not abandon them now that they had become integral to dynastic practice. “Had the discussion of the present question originated with myself,” he claimed, “the point would have been one fairly open to consideration.” However, he asserted, “I am only following in my late father’s footsteps, for he obtained for the ladies of this family the guaranteed protection of the British government.” “As such has heretofore been the practice,” the king thus considered himself “entitled” to the Company’s indulgence and to the perpetuation of *parwarish* via Company securities.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, perceiving the king and “the government of Awadh” as possessing distinct (and, increasingly, opposing) interests, Bentinck refused the current guarantee. Writing to Ricketts, he explained that, although “such guarantees have certainly been afforded in former

¹⁰⁰ FDPC, 13 Sep. 1828, No. 36.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² FDPC, 8 Nov. 1828, No. 23.

times,” they had operated in an “embarrassing” fashion and created “perpetual infringement of the rights and interests of the government of Oude.” Conscious of the ways in which the authority of “the government” of Awadh, rather than its sovereign, had been subverted, the governor-general was “decidedly opposed to the continuance of a system so plainly at variance with every just principle of policy.”¹⁰³ As a result, the king was compelled to accept that, in the language of the finalized *waṣīqa*, his wives would only receive “the special favor and kindness of the British government.”¹⁰⁴

Even this meagre standard, however, would create new benchmarks and further incentives for additional *waṣīqas*. Following his father’s example, Nasir-ud-din Haidar had come to see much of his sovereign authority as rooted in his ability to distribute not only “traditional” forms of material patronage but also, through the *waṣīqa*, hereditary pensions and perpetual British protection from future sovereigns. Moreover, the *waṣīqa* held out the promise that the king could subvert and refashion established hierarchies among women of the royal household according to his personal favor. Conspicuously absent from Nasir-ud-din Haidar’s *waṣīqa* were his mother (Badshah Begum), his *khāṣṣ maḥal* wife (Nawab Sultan Begum), and the mother of the heir apparent (Afzal Mahal), i.e., the women who would have dominated the household and dynastic politics under earlier dispensations. Rather, the four beneficiaries were: Malika Zamaniya, the mother of Kaiwan Jah, the king’s other purported son and a potential heir; Zeb-un-nissa, Malika Zamaniya’s daughter by a previous husband; and two other wives, Mukhadira-i Aliya and Taj Mahal, the daughters of courtesans (*ṭawā’ifs*) who had married Nasir-ud-din

¹⁰³ Ibid., No. 24.

¹⁰⁴ Aitchison, II, 135.

Haidar shortly before he had assumed the throne.¹⁰⁵ While the conflict between the king and his mother had not fully erupted by the time of the *waṣīqa*'s creation, it seems clear that the endowment was an initial attempt to attenuate the power of Badshah Begum's *sarkār*. By establishing several rival households that—unlike Badshah Begum's—would be guaranteed by the Company and funded by both *jāgīrs* and *waṣīqa* stipends, the king could create competing centers of patronage and influence in Lucknow. Furthermore, by elevating and protecting Malika Zamaniya, he left open the possibility of his challenging the succession of Munna Jan (who had been taken into the custody of Badshah Begum) in favor of Kaiwan Jah.

However, the inclusion of Mukhadira-i Aliya and Taj Mahal also suggested to others that the king's intense but fleeting affections could be converted into permanent financial security and legal protection—particularly if the woman in question could provide the king a biological heir, or at least one more credible than Munna Jan or Kaiwan Jah. Such was the case with Qudsiya Begum, for whom the king proposed an entirely separate *waṣīqa* in 1832. A married servant in Badshah Begum's household, Qudsiya Begum had begun an affair with the king several years earlier. When she informed the king that she was pregnant with his son, the king grew especially enamored of her. Although Qudsiya Begum was initially close to Badshah Begum (who likely intended to seize any male child born to Qudsiya Begum), the two soon grew estranged, particularly when the former pressed the king to publicly disinherit Munna Jan in favor of her expected son. At the same time, Qudsiya Begum also formed an alliance with the then-*wazīr*,

¹⁰⁵ *Akhhārāt-i hind*, fols. 365a-366a.

Hakim Mahdi Ali Khan, who hoped to limit the influence of Malika Zamaniya and Badshah Begum.¹⁰⁶

In the beginning of 1832, when Qudsiya Begum and Hakim Mahdi Ali Khan were at the height of their influence, the king proposed an additional *waṣīqa* of thirty *lakh* rupees. The subsequent discussions with Resident John Low illustrate not only how contentious guarantees had become for the Company but also how critical they had become for determining the status of women married into the royal family. Having been recently embroiled in a dispute over the king's right to seize the property of a deceased dependent of Mubarak Mahal, one of Ghazi-ud-din Haidar's *waṣīqadār* wives, Low was eager to define any future guarantee as narrowly as possible. To this end, he proposed that the guarantee either be limited to individuals living in British territory, or that it take effect only after the death of the king, its extent to be determined on a case by case basis by the current resident.¹⁰⁷

As before, Nasir-ud-din Haidar refused to accept any limitations to the guarantee. For the king, this was in part to enact his sovereign authority by distributing British protection in the same manner as his father. At the same time, Qudsiya Begum demanded the king prove his singular affection, and her commensurate status, by securing her a written guarantee equal to that of previous *waṣīqadār* wives. When the king seemed unable to do so, she “upbraid[ed] him for his injustice towards her.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, when the king himself wrote to complain of qualifications to the guarantee, he noted that the begum considered them “injurious” to her rank. Moreover, correlating status within the ruling family with degrees of British protection, the king maintained

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 366a-367a; Abd-ul-ahad ‘Rabit,’ *Waqā‘i-i dilpazīr*, tr. by M.T. Ahmad as *Tarikh Badshah Begum* (repr.) (New Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Dilli, 1977), 59-61.

¹⁰⁷ FDPC, 9 Jul. 1832, No. 19.

¹⁰⁸ FDPC, 19 Mar. 1832, No. 57.

that the Company's officials should consider his particular sentiments in determining their agreement for the begum. "The very great esteem I have for the begum," he claimed "should induce [the governor-general] to have more consideration for her than others."¹⁰⁹ Hence the king continued to insist that the guarantee for Qudsiya Begum should be couched in terms equal not only to his earlier *waṣīqadār* wives but also to those of his father, terms which included both unlimited Company protection for her and her household, and the right to dispose of her stipend by will.¹¹⁰

The debates over the terms of the guarantee might have gone on indefinitely had Qudsiya Begum not committed suicide in fall 1834 after it was discovered that her pregnancy had been faked.¹¹¹ Moreover, had it not set in motion a series of events that culminated in Badshah Begum's coup attempt in 1837, her death might have signaled the immediate demise of the *waṣīqa* as well. Instead, following Badshah Begum's defeat and Muhammad Ali Shah's coronation, Resident Low approved a final *waṣīqa*. Having compelled the elderly king to sign a harsh new treaty before assuming the throne, Low was eager to conciliate Muhammad Ali Shah in the early days of his reign. Thus, when the king requested the resident accept seventeen-*lakh* rupees for a new pension fund, Low found the offer difficult to decline. In relaying the proposal, Low, alluding to objections which were "too well known" to bear repeating, made the now axiomatic condemnation of guarantees. Noting, however, that since guarantees had been given at the request of rulers "less deserving" than the present (and complacent) king, the resident argued that Muhammad Ali Shah deserved a measure of Company largesse. Moreover, by limiting the

¹⁰⁹ FDPC, 14 Jan. 1833, No. 31.

¹¹⁰ FDPC, 24 Jul. 1834, No. 57.

¹¹¹ FDPC, 4 Sep. 1834, No. 40.

guarantee solely to individuals specifically mentioned in the *waṣīqa*—rather than encompassing their ill-defined households, as had earlier agreements—Low thought he could guard against “the embarrassments” of previous guarantees. The governor-general concurred, and the deed was executed in November 1838.¹¹²

The Company’s Court of Directors, however, had had enough of the Awadh guarantees. In 1843, it ordered the governor-general to ratify no additional guarantees unless approved of by the Court itself.¹¹³ However, while Company officials in London, Calcutta, and Lucknow had long lamented the political entanglements and “embarrassments” created by guarantees, the Court of Directors’ letter indicated an important shift official thinking, particularly with regard to the “well known” objections it considered most insuperable. Less concerned with undermining local sovereignty and creating a “mischievous and separate jurisdiction” under the resident, the directors now feared the Company’s becoming complicit in the Awadh rulers’ misappropriation of “the resources of the state to the advantage of individuals.”¹¹⁴

The directors’ concerns reflected, in part, the conceptual divisions jointly constructed by Company officials and the Awadh rulers between their households, “the state,” and the dynasty as whole. At the same time, it illustrated the growing influence of liberal-utilitarian thinking on

¹¹² FDPC 14 Nov. 1838, No. 49, and 27 Feb. 1839, Nos. 115 and 116; Aitchison, II, 141-42.

¹¹³ W.T. Sleeman, *Journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849-56*, Vol. I (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), 331-32.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 332.

Company discourse, if not necessarily in policy.¹¹⁵ Such thinking posited the state not as extension or an instrument of the sovereign but as an increasingly impersonal institution designed to safeguard natural rights and the welfare of “the people” through the application of social-scientific principles. Seen through this evolving ideological lens, the rulers of Awadh—seemingly determined to forestall all administrative reforms and, through instruments like the *waṣīqa*, to plunder the state for their own personal interests—appeared not only increasingly embarrassing and anachronistic but also as growing threats to the legitimacy of the British imperial project in India. Put differently, where once it had perceived its legitimacy to depend upon upholding the Awadh ruler’s authority over his state, his family, and his dominions, the Company now saw itself obliged to defend the Awadh state and its subjects from the very sovereign it had created.

Conclusion

Beginning with Bahu Begum’s bequest in 1813 and ending with Muhammad Ali Shah’s *waṣīqa* in 1837, permanent pensions evolved from a means of rewarding the Company’s most influential supporters to an exclusive instrument by which the Awadh rulers could deliver perpetual protection and *parwarish* to select individuals. Upholding seizures of familial property as an accepted perquisite of Oriental despotism, and unwilling to undermine territorial

¹¹⁵ For differing views of liberal-utilitarianism’s impact on Company policy, see: E. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) and “The First Century of British Colonial Rule: Social Revolution or Social Stagnation?” in *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and D. Washbrook, “India, 1816-1860: The Two Faces of Colonialism” in A.N. Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume Three: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For liberal-utilitarianism in within the larger context of imperial ideology, see T.R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and U.S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

sovereignty by permanently alienating *jāgīr* revenue, British officials encouraged its dependents to purchase Company securities and to fund permanent pensions from the interest for their survivors and dependents in perpetuity. Yet not long after the Company had executed Bahu Begum's will, it withdrew from its position. Facing accusations from the Awadh rulers that such bequests undermined their sovereign authority, Company officials found numerous excuses to nullify wills authored by the dynasty's wealthy widows and enslaved eunuchs. At the same time, as compensation for a series of forced loans, *waṣīqas* were gradually instituted for the benefit Awadh rulers themselves. Although initially established to transfer payment of pensions for Company dependents from the Awadh *sarkār* to the residency, *waṣīqas* were eventually created to pay stipends to individuals of the ruler's choosing as well. By the 1830s, rulers had begun to solicit *waṣīqas* of their own accord, as awarding guaranteed stipends and "intra-territorial" protection had become integral to the ruler's ability to reshape household and dynastic hierarchies.

Yet no sooner had this system of pensions and protections been assembled than Company officials—lamenting endless jurisdictional entanglements and fearing complicity in Awadh's maladministration—sought to dismantle it. The reign of Nasir-ud-din Haidar (1828-37)—who had very nearly been deposed for his alleged misrule and disregard of administrative reform—occasioned considerable reflection on the development and effects of permanent pensions and guarantees. For example his 1835 history of Anglo-Awadh relations, Assistant Resident James Paton noted that "the Lucknow guarantees teach political and instructive lessons, and may form a beacon to warn us against entering into further engagements of this kind."¹¹⁶ For Paton, the

¹¹⁶ FD-Misc, Vol. 7, 282.

principal lesson to be learned was that, since they obliged him to arbitrate between the protected pensioners and the sovereign, guarantees necessitated the resident's "meddling and unjustifiable interference with the proper authority of the king's government," which prevented him from retaining "influence in matters of moment to the kingdom at large."¹¹⁷

Implicit in Paton's assessment was that the administration of Awadh was a collaborative effort between the Company, on one and, on the other, the Awadh kings, who would remain responsible partners so long as their sovereign rights and domestic supremacy were duly respected. Yet other British officials perceived the Awadh rulers to be implacable opponents of good governance and the state, a situation encouraged both by undue regard for their particular rights and by the guarantees themselves. Revising Paton's narrative in 1844, G.E. Hollings, another residency official, summarized the long history of Anglo-Awadh relations through the narrow lens of the recently devised *waṣīqa*:

From the death of Soojahool Dowlah the history of Oude records a series of intrigues, the sole object of which was to obtain, under the protection of British influence, a permanent provision for certain members of the ruling family and favorites of the court the continued engagement of certain grants, pensions and communities bestowed with a reckless prodigality, involving the sacrifice of the interests of the governed and the rights of the succeeding governors.¹¹⁸

That the country was able to endure such "reckless prodigality" Hollings attributed solely to massive transfers of cash—in the form of interest payment on Company securities, as well as remittances for British sepoys living in Awadh—from Company territories into the residency's treasury in Lucknow.¹¹⁹ Hollings conveniently ignored the fact that these transfers were

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 297.

¹¹⁸ BL, Eur. MSS D 312, 10-11.

¹¹⁹ BL, Eur. MSS D 314, 218-19.

necessitated by “loans” often coerced from the Awadh rulers. Nevertheless, his views were eagerly taken up in the 1850s by pro-interventionists, who saw the unfavorable balance of payments as a threat to Company finances and a powerful incentive to assume control of the Awadh state.

Others worried less about exploitation of the state and more that guarantees and Company paper had corrupted the characters of the pensioners and rulers alike. Moral decline among the *waṣīqadārs* was a particular concern of mid-century Indo-Persian chroniclers, many of whom held administrative positions in the residency. One notable critic castigated the entire class of *waṣīqadārs* as effete, effeminate voluptuaries who, despite their ample incomes, were nevertheless perpetually in debt to local moneylenders. Their wealth also permitted female *waṣīqadārs* to engage in outrageous and publicly indecent behavior.¹²⁰ Such criticism was particularly acute for widowed female pensioners. Although dependence upon guaranteed pensions and Company securities was thought to have prevented widespread support for Badshah Begum’s coup in 1837, nevertheless Muhammad Ali Shah repeatedly asserted that, shielded by British protection, Nasir-ud-din Haidar’s *waṣīqadār* widows were using their wealth to aid the exiled begum in intriguing against him.¹²¹ Conveniently for the king, these same women also found themselves accused of frequent sexual impropriety and were subsequently subjected to intrusive surveillance by the residency, ostensibly “to protect the memory of the late king.”¹²²

Yet if these moralizing critiques appear dubious, it is clear that guaranteed pensions and Company securities had in fact destabilized existing hierarchies within the ruling dynasty. For all

¹²⁰ Rampur Raza Library, MS 2416, Lal-ji, *Mir’āt-ul-auzā’*, 91-98.

¹²¹ FDPC, 1 Jun. 1842, No. 60.

¹²² Sleeman, *Journey*, II, 148, 332-34; *Akhbārāt-i hind*, fols. 365b-366a.

the Company's avowed commitment to respecting the Awadh ruler's domestic authority and applying greater scrutiny to the behavior of widowed *waṣīqadārs*, lower-ranking *mankūha* and *mamtū'a* wives, no longer dependent solely upon living rulers and *khāṣṣ maḥal* begums, could enjoy much greater autonomy than they had in the previous century. Moreover, in cases pertaining to the inheritance of its promissory notes and securities during the 1840s and 1850s, the Company increasingly adverted to Islamic personal law, favoring the rights of the bearer's close kin rather than those of the sovereign.¹²³ At the same time, the existing gap between the close relatives and favorites of reigning and recently deceased sovereigns widened considerably. With guaranteed pensions and promissory notes becoming the preferred means of distributing *parwarish* and conferring status, stipends from the king's treasury were paid even less punctually. Consequently, more distant branches of the royal family suffered increasing hardship as their nominal stipends fell into considerable arrears; by the middle of Wajid Ali Shah's reign (1847-56), many of them had not been paid for three years or more. As a result, such individuals had begun, in the words of William Sleeman, a former resident and an influential critic of the regime, to "pray for the day when [the British] Government may interpose in the [Awadh] administration."¹²⁴

Drawing upon indigenous norms of patrimonial obligation, as well as evolving ideals of liberal governance, Sleeman's caricature of the regime permitted Company critics to condemn the Awadh rulers while obscuring the ways in which its own policy had dramatically reshaped the politics of *parwarish*. Vacillating between upholding the ideals of sovereign proprietorship and mitigating the effects of domestic despotism, the Company had exacerbated intra-dynastic

¹²³ For example, Sleeman, *Journey*, II, 144-45.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 337.

antagonism by increasing the political and economic stakes of patriarchal supremacy—an outcome that was itself a product of the long-term conceptual consensus between British officials and the Awadh rulers on the expansiveness and exclusivity of local sovereignty. More deliberately, British officialdom manifested ambivalence and opportunism in the creation of *waṣīqa*, a device that initially provided cost-effective subsidies for the Company’s dependents in Awadh, a means for accessing the regime’s liquid wealth, and a check upon the nawabs’ “tyrannical” tendencies. Yet when its package of guarantees and securitized *parwarish* outgrew its usefulness and appeared in danger of being fully appropriated by the Awadh rulers themselves, the *waṣīqa* was repurposed once again. In the writings of Henry Lawrence, William Sleeman, and others, a new generation of Company critics—building upon the discursive differentiation, and presumed divergence of interests, between the sovereign household, the ruling dynasty, and the state—soon transformed the *waṣīqa* into a persuasive rhetorical vehicle for discrediting the regime and advancing the cause of British annexation of Awadh and the assumption of the state.

Conclusion

More than any of its contemporaries among the Mughal successor states, the Awadh regime, and the political culture of its ruling dynasty, were made and unmade by its relationship with the British East India Company. Bound together for nearly a century, the Awadh regime and the Company, as part of their broader diplomatic engagements, participated in a shifting series of multivalent, conceptual conversations regarding the nature of political sovereignty and dynastic authority, the boundaries between political and domestic affairs, and the relationship between ruling household(s), the dynasty, and the state. While creating occasional moments of consensus between the Company and members of the regime, as well as a shared conceptual vocabulary for diplomatic debate, these conversations, along with attendant policy decisions, heightened intra-dynastic tensions and generated new fissures within Awadh's ruling family. Pushed into Awadh's internal politics by its own strategic, economic, and ideological objectives, the Company was also pulled by the familial cleavages it had helped generate, as legal and financial instruments designed to mitigate such conflict further entangled British officials in dynastic disputes. Ultimately, however, the conversations that had propelled these disputes provided the Company with the rhetorical means necessary to sever its political and financial obligations, as the conceptual vocabulary forged in concert with the regime permitted pro-interventionist officials to frame the interests of Awadh's rulers in stark opposition to its wider ruling dynasty, the state, and "the people" and to lay the groundwork for Awadh's complete annexation in 1856.

Yet in spite of the long-term trajectory toward increasing British intervention in Awadh, there was nothing inevitable about the annexation of 1856. Although Company officials had contemplated assuming control of the regime on several occasions between 1764 and 1856 (the

most serious deliberations occurring in the mid-1830s), the Anglo-Awadh alliance proved surprisingly resilient, as its lengthy existence often became the most persuasive argument for its perpetuation. Indeed, it was the durable and intimate nature of the Company's connection with Awadh that made it, in the words of Henry Lawrence, the "portion of India most discussed in England."¹ Longevity, however was not its sole virtue: The relationship was constitutive—materially and ideologically—to the Company state and the Awadh regime alike. Following the treaty of Allahabad in 1765, its connection to Awadh, and its hold over Shah Alam, allowed the Company to assert itself as "the strong arm of the [Mughal] *saltanat*" and a crucial member of a new imperial confederacy. Later, Awadh was critical to the Company's emergence as a consciously imperial power in its own right, providing much of the money and manpower for the Company's defeat its most powerful Indian rivals and serving as a glowing advertisement for the benefits of submission to a benevolent British imperium. Even after the partial annexation of 1801, Awadh remained for many Company officials an important metaphor for the rigorous adherence to treaty and "good faith" that characterized British relations with India's "native" states. Only in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, as Awadh not only failed to meet the growing demands of liberal-imperial reform but also outgrew its financial utility, did the regime become an insuperable ideological encumbrance.

The regime's seeming intractability, however, toward administrative reform—frequently symbolized by the Awadh rulers' refusal to disentangle their household finances and personnel from the state and the persistent "interference" of "domestic" actors in government—was also a product of the mutually constitutive relationship between Awadh and the Company. Ironically,

¹ "The Kingdom of Oude," in H.M. Lawrence, *Essays, Military and Political, Written in India*. (London: W.H. Allen, 1859), 61.

perhaps, for the bureaucratizing Company, the Anglo-Awadh relationship created a deeply patrimonial regime, as Shuja-ud-daula used the Company alliance to accelerate an on-going process of dynastic consolidation and further centralize provincial administration around a tight cluster of interwoven *sarkārs*. The fusing of “executive” and “revenue” powers in the provinces (the offices of *ṣūbadār* and *dīwān*, respectively) characterized the process of regional centralization and the emergence of imperial successor states elsewhere.² Yet with the assistance of the Company, the process seems to have proceeded much further in Awadh, as evidenced by the showdown between Asaf-ud-daula and John Bristow over whether the *dīwān*’s office was to remain located inside the nawab’s household. On the one hand, Awadh’s intensely patrimonial character helped shield it from Company intrusion: The concentration of the administration within, and the identification of “the state” with, the ruling household meant that, unlike contemporary Hyderabad, for example, where the comparably discrete *dīwānī* provided a focal point for British intervention, Awadh’s governing institutions remained relatively insulated from direct manipulation.³ On the other hand, the imbrication of household and state, and its importance to local conceptions of sovereign authority, prevented the kinds of concessions to liberal-imperial reformers that might have permitted the regime to survive past 1856. Where successive *nizāms* of Hyderabad effectively ceded the state (through the office of the *dīwānī*) to Company officials for much of the nineteenth century, Awadh’s last king, Wajid Ali Shah (r.

² C. A Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 19.

³ For Company control of administration in pre-1858 Hyderabad, see M.F. Khan, *A History of Administrative Reforms in Hyderabad State* (Secunderabad: New Hyderabad Press, 1935) and Z. Yazdani, *Hyderabad during the Residency of Henry Russell, 1811-1820: A Case Study of the Subsidiary Alliance System* (Hyderabad: Yazdani, 1976).

1848-56), refused to accept a similar arrangement, preferring to abdicate the throne and force the Company's formal annexation.⁴

The patrimonial character of the regime also meant that dynastic politics and matters of state could never be fully disaggregated, theoretically or in practice, despite concerted efforts on the part of Company officials, and occasionally Awadh's rulers, to do so. As a result, many of the contradictions at the heart of the Company's ideological commitments and its relationship with Awadh were laid bare. Foremost among these was that between its stated commitment to maintaining "good faith" by upholding the sovereign authority of client rulers, and its insistence on expanding its influence through administrative reform and competing alliances with dynastic rivals. Thus, while Company officials asserted the theoretically unitary sovereignty of Awadh's rulers over their families and dominions, they also systematically undercut that authority by securing the support of other influential members of the dynasty through guarantees of protection and maintenance for themselves and their dependents. In so doing, the Company created a web of opposing treaty obligations and legal jurisdictions, the hierarchy and precedence of which was not easy to determine. At the same time, by supporting the Awadh rulers' sovereignty and dynastic supremacy, Company administrators hoped to encourage them to delegate their authority over a discrete governmental apparatus to mutually acceptable ministers and British officials. Yet encouraged to view sovereignty as entailing patriarchal supremacy and domestic proprietorship, the Awadh rulers were reluctant to see "the state" as distinct from their *sarkārs*, or to view *riyāsat* solely as an institution divorced from the exercise of personal authority, on any

⁴ For a comparison of the Company's relationship with Awadh and Hyderabad in the nineteenth century, see M.H. Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System, 1764-1858* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 376-402.

but their own terms. Moreover, in their determination to actualize patriarchal authority over their household(-states) and families, the rulers of Awadh frequently deepened dynastic cleavages and inadvertently invited further British intercession.

Crucially, then, the contradictions and entanglements of the Anglo-Awadh relationship were not solely of the Company's making. Apart from Awadh's male rulers, other members of the ruling dynasty also played multiple and at times competing roles in shaping the regime's political culture and its engagement with the Company. Yet despite pursuing often mutually exclusive objectives, these individuals all sought British assistance in defining, protecting, and sometimes expanding rights and privileges they presumed to enjoy through "custom," dynastic precedent, and particularly the *Shujā'ī* dispensation. Although characterized by generational conflict and indeterminate political and financial co-sharing, the reign of Shuja-ud-daula provided a common reference point for articulating claims to dynastic property and familio-political authority. This was especially true for the two groups most discussed in this dissertation, the Awadh rulers and their chief consorts and widowed mothers, the *khāṣṣ mahāl* begums: Where the nawabs strove to actualize an exclusive, patriarchal sovereignty rooted in Indo-Islamic theories of governance and elaborated through Shuja-ud-daula's engagement with the Company, *khāṣṣ mahāls* like Bahu Begum hoped to preserve, if not broad political co-sharing of the *Shujā'ī* dispensation, then at least expansive authority over their own households and concretized, hereditary estates. How—and when—their endeavors intersected with the Company's own evolving agenda significantly affected the contours of British intervention in Awadh, as diplomatic debate and policy responses shifted from larger questions about the extent of

sovereignty and the mechanics of succession to specific concerns about dynastic property relations, the nature of domestic authority, and the limits of British arbitration and protection.

In using the Anglo-Awadh alliance to contest rights to power and property, the ruling dynasty displayed not only considerable political flexibility but also a remarkable ability to accommodate shifting modes of discourse dominated, but not dictated, by the Company. Whether binaries between the political and the domestic or between ruling households and the state, members of the Awadh ruling dynasty frequently repurposed the conceptual frameworks underpinning British efforts at intervention and reform to advance their respective claims. Their efforts—whether by Sa’adat Ali Khan to isolate the ruling family in a capacious “domestic” realm, or by Badshah Begum to frame the *khāṣṣ maḥal* as an “integral part of the state”—were not always successful, but their deliberate redeployment of Company categories frequently shifted not only the terms of diplomatic debate but also the ways in which the dynasty engaged with itself and the colonial state.

Within the larger Anglo-Awadh conceptual conversation, and in the context of the regime’s evolving political culture, it was the Awadh dynasty’s intellectual sensitivity and continued inventiveness that most clearly illustrate how ideas of state and sovereignty shaped the expansion of British colonial rule in India. Far from the caricature of politically disengaged, voluptuary solipsists, the rulers of Awadh and the members of their families remained committed throughout the regime’s history to debating, with Company officials and one another, the nature of hereditary political sovereignty, the extent of dynastic authority, and the notional boundaries between household, family, and “the state.” Shifting the discursive parameters of the regime’s relationship with the Company, these on-going debates in turn established many of the channels

by which British influence could and did advance into Awadh. Recognizing the impact of these debates upon the form of indirect rule in North India, it seems clear, then, that the most important and influential conversations about Britain's burgeoning Asian empire were not taking place solely between London and Calcutta or among the Company's administrative cadres in India. Rather, complementing and contradicting those conversations were debates with and within the Company's client dynasties.

Awadh's prolonged and intimate relationship with the Company was undoubtedly exceptional but the questions that drove its ruling dynasty's complex engagement with the colonial state were not unique. The distinct trajectories of local and regional state formation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century created often widely divergent patterns of interaction with the Company. Yet a common set of concerns, with the limits of sovereign authority, the ambiguity of dynastic property, and the relationship between ruling families and "governmental" institutions, animated the Company's relations with nearly all the polities that fell under its sway. With the Awadh regime as a reference point, we can begin to see how these questions, and the broader struggle of the Company's dynasties to define themselves and their states, were a vital element of colonial state formation in South Asia.

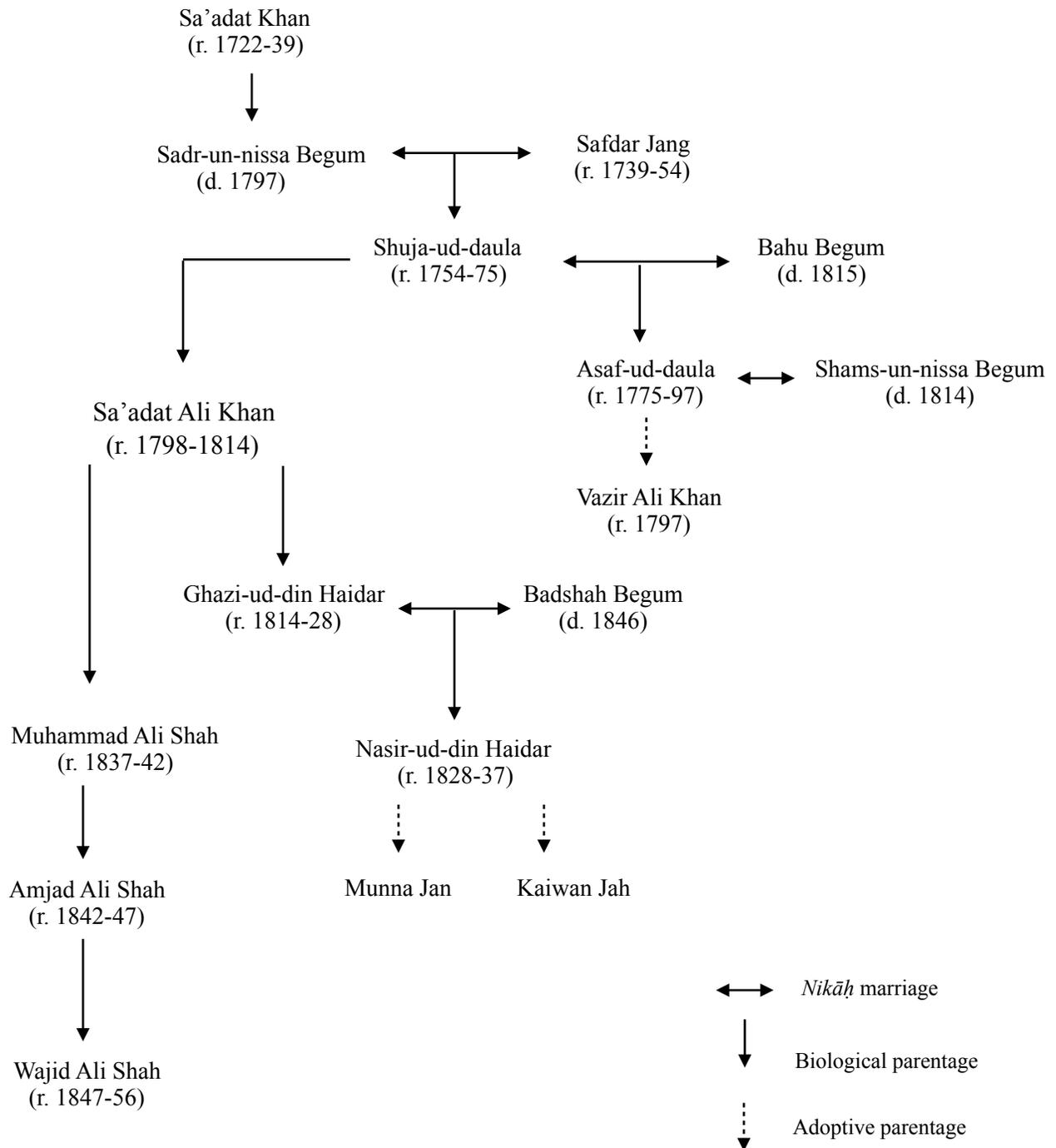
Glossary

<i>‘ahadnāma</i>	treaty
<i>ahlkār</i>	staff
<i>akhbār(āt)</i>	news report
<i>akhbār nawīs</i>	news writer
<i>altamghā</i>	perpetual grant
<i>‘amaldārī</i>	tax farmer
<i>‘āmil</i>	tax farmer
<i>amūr-i khānagī</i>	“domestic” affairs
<i>amūr-i riyāsat</i>	affairs of state
<i>bakhshī</i>	paymaster
<i>barādarzāda</i>	nephew (brother’s son)
<i>bārahdarī</i>	open-air pavilion
<i>bēgum</i>	married woman of rank
<i>chēla</i>	disciple, adopted son
<i>daftar</i>	office
<i>dāmād</i>	son-in-law
<i>darbār</i>	court, court audience
<i>dārōgha</i>	superintendent
<i>dārōghagī</i>	superintendency
<i>dīwān</i>	chief revenue official
<i>dīwānī</i>	office, records of <i>dīwān</i>
<i>farrāsh</i>	carpet spreader
<i>farmān</i>	imperial mandate
<i>faujdār</i>	district-level governor
<i>faujdārī</i>	district-level governorship
<i>ghulām</i>	slave
<i>harkāra</i>	spy, runner, factotum
<i>hamrāhī</i>	companion
<i>havēlī</i>	mansion
<i>ḥaqq</i>	right
<i>ijāra(dārī)</i>	revenue farm
<i>ijāradār</i>	revenue farmer
<i>‘ilāqa</i>	(proprietary) interest
<i>istihqāq</i>	claim
<i>jāgīr</i>	prebendal revenue grant
<i>jāgīrdār</i>	holder of a <i>jāgīr</i>
<i>jahīz</i>	bridal trousseau
<i>jā`idād</i>	ear-marked revenue grant
<i>kārkhāna</i>	department, workshop
<i>karor</i>	one hundred <i>lakh</i> , ten million
<i>khāliṣa</i>	royal demesne
<i>khāna</i>	house

<i>khānagī</i>	domestic
<i>khāndān</i>	“family,” dynasty
<i>khāṣṣ maḥal</i>	chief consort
<i>khil`at</i>	robe of honor
<i>khizāna</i>	treasury
<i>khizānchī</i>	treasurer
<i>khord maḥal</i>	<i>mamtū`a</i> wives, concubines
<i>khwāharzāda</i>	nephew (sister’s son)
<i>khwājasarā</i>	eunuch
<i>lakh</i>	one hundred thousand
<i>madad-i ma`āsh</i>	revenue grant for religious functionaries
<i>mahr</i>	dower
<i>mālik</i>	master, proprietor
<i>mamtū`a</i>	married by <i>mut`a</i> rite
<i>mankūḥa</i>	married by <i>nikāḥ</i> rite
<i>masnad</i>	throne
<i>mirās</i>	inheritance
<i>muhr</i>	seal
<i>muhrāna</i>	duty for affixing seal
<i>mulk</i>	country, dominion
<i>mutasaddī</i>	clerk
<i>mutawassil</i>	dependent
<i>mumālik-i maḥrūsa</i>	sovereign dominions
<i>mumālik-i maurūṣī</i>	hereditary dominions
<i>mushrif</i>	accountant, comptroller
<i>mut`a</i>	temporary marriage rite
<i>mutabanna</i>	adoptee
<i>nā`ib</i>	deputy, minister
<i>nawwāb</i>	colloquial title for Mughal nobles and independent satraps
<i>nāmūs</i>	women, familial honor
<i>nazr</i>	symbolic tribute
<i>nāẓim</i>	provincial governor
<i>nāẓir</i>	household overseer
<i>nikāḥ</i>	formal marriage rite
<i>niyābat</i>	office of <i>nā`ib</i>
<i>nizāmat</i>	provincial governorship
<i>nizārat</i>	office of <i>nāẓir</i>
<i>pargana</i>	district
<i>parwarish</i>	nourishment, care, upbringing
<i>qaulnāma</i>	agreement
<i>qibla</i>	direction of prayer, term of respect
<i>ra`īs(a)</i>	head, chief, sovereign
<i>riyāsat</i>	headmanship, chieftaincy, sovereignty; governance; “the state”
<i>ṣāhibzāda/ī</i>	son/daughter

<i>sardār</i>	commander
<i>salṭanat</i>	imperium, kingship, sovereignty; “the state”
<i>sanad</i>	deed
<i>sarkār</i>	noble household; “the state”
<i>sarkārī</i>	of, belonging to “the state”
<i>shāgirdpēsha</i>	servant
<i>shāhzāda/ī</i>	prince, princess
<i>ṣūba</i>	province
<i>ṣūbadār</i>	provincial governor
<i>ṣūbadārī</i>	provincial governorship
<i>ta‘alluqa</i>	proprietary interest, estate
<i>tankhwāh</i>	stipend
<i>tankhwāhdār</i>	stipendiary
<i>wakīl</i>	representative
<i>wārīṣ</i>	heir, custodian
<i>wazīr</i>	emperor’s chief official, minister
<i>walī ‘ahad</i>	heir-apparent
<i>waṣīyat(nāma)</i>	will and testament
<i>warṣa</i>	inheritance, patrimony
<i>waṣīqa</i>	permanent pensions funded by interest on purchased debt
<i>waṣīqadār</i>	recipient of stipend paid from a <i>waṣīqa</i>
<i>wirāṣat</i>	inheritance
<i>wizārat</i>	office of <i>wazīr</i>
<i>zabt</i>	escheat, seizure of property by “the state”
<i>zamīndār</i>	local king, “landlord”
<i>zanāna</i>	household’s female quarters

Appendix A: Genealogical table of the Awadh ruling dynasty, 1722-1856¹



¹ NB: The above table includes only those members of the dynasty most frequently noticed in the preceding narrative.

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Muhtasham Khan, *Tārīkh-i muhtasham*, I.O. Islamic 4090

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