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CASTE, FAMILY AND POLITICS IN NORTHERN INDIA DURING THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Caste, Family and Politics in Northern India during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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My dissertation reconstructs the interlocking histories of family, caste and state-formation in colonial north India. I illustrate that eighteenth-century rulers of Banaras in north India established lineage-based states by forming multi-caste and polygynous marital networks. I argue that these practices were challenged as the establishment of colonial rule became tied to matters of inheritance in the Banaras polity. Eighteenth-century colonial rule, in collaboration with upper-caste patriarchal authorities, reshaped familial practices through intersecting articulations of patrilineality and endogamy. Such articulations shaped early colonial law.

Interventions in family matters through colonial law marginalized women’s access to property in the late eighteenth century. Eighteenth-century land-revenue policies, which were based upon colonial exigencies, led to widespread transfers of rights in land from traditional landed elites to literate service caste groups comprising of writers, clerks and merchants who had risen in power through service under the colonial state. I demonstrate that the same policies upheld upper-caste male control over land at the expense of female
kin who lost titles to land rights, thereby strengthening hierarchies between women and men. Nevertheless, I illustrate that age-based and caste hierarchies could enable upper-caste, elderly women from traditional landed elite families and upwardly mobile literate service caste households to harness the wealth and power of male kin. Colonial restructuring of the political economy therefore benefited upper-caste women at a subterranean level while simultaneously reinforcing caste hierarchies between women.

During the nineteenth century, literate service caste groups, who had benefited from colonial land-revenue policies, insinuated themselves into the higher echelons of the four-fold Varna order through elaborate patronage practices. These included sponsorship of public ceremonials, buildings and education. By the late nineteenth century, their caste-based competitive energies intersected with nationalist politics, which literate service caste groups came to lead. I demonstrate that nationalist and caste-based engagements were hinged upon normative and lived reconfigurations of households as endogamous units. This was to the marginalization of lower-caste kin who could only find representation and place in the upper-caste family as laboring, lower-caste servants. I therefore illustrate that such caste-based labor was politicized by nationalists as worthy of defense against the British.
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Introduction

My dissertation reconstructs the history of state-formation in Banaras between the eighteenth and early twentieth century to illustrate that political power was contingent upon the formation of lineage-based, polygynous, multi-caste and stratified households. Affinal and natal ties linked the ruling family to other complex households, and comprised of different hierarchical and intersecting relationships of gender, age, caste as well as other forms of rank and status. From the late eighteenth century, the officers of the English East India Company forced all these relationships to the mediation of colonial courts and administrative policies. These processes of mediation established the power of the Company in the region. Therefore, the ability to shift the structures of familial, service and worship relations were central to the emergence of new colonial service groups, castes and nationalism in the region by the early twentieth century. By studying representative households and individual relationships, I will offer a long-term history of the emergence of nationalist women in literati households in Banaras by the early twentieth century.

The dissertation builds upon an emergent corpus of historiography on the family and household in South Asia led by Indrani Chatterjee. She argues that the meanings and structures of the “family” should be located in changing temporal, spatial and socio-economic contexts.¹ Chatterjee insists that western liberal epistemologies should not constitute the starting point for a history of the family in pre-colonial South Asia.² Her

¹ Indrani Chatterjee, Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also Indrani Chatterjee ed., Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
² Ibid.
scholarship on family in the pre-colonial context has therefore drawn attention to the intersections between state and ruling families. Pre-colonial ruling households were complex, polygynous and stratified, made up of interlocking units constituted by relationships of affect, nurture, exchanges of commodities and power. Indrani Chatterjee further argues that under colonial rule in the course of the nineteenth century, multiple relationships of service, conjugality and worship were reconstituted or delegitimized. Mytheli Sreenivas draws upon Chatterjee’s insights to examine transformations in southern Indian families in the nineteenth century. Sreenivas points at the ways in which assertions of conjugality could be contextualized within the exigencies of nineteenth-century mercantile and industrial capitalism.

These insights have crucial implications for studies highlighting the centrality of the conjugal family to nationalist politics. Histories of the emergence of conjugality are important for understanding its role in nationalist politics, as well as for the marginalization of older forms of household and kinship in the history of state-formation in modern South Asia. My dissertation draws upon this scholarship to engage the historiography of eighteenth and nineteenth century northern India, and, more specifically, the Banaras region.

Scholarship on this region situates it within the context of two overlapping histories of modern India. One is of the transition from Mughal to colonial forms of rule in the Indo-Gangetic plains during the course of the eighteenth century. The other is of anti-colonial nationalist movements and the history of gender and religion in the late

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Chatterjee ed., *Unfamiliar Relations*, p. 4.
nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My study engages both from the perspective of shifting relations of conjugality, caste and class in the households of the region. In this, I seek to sharpen the historiography of a region from the perspective of women, and their relationships in the households of service groups. In trying to deepen our understanding of both colonialism and nationalism in Banaras, this dissertation engages a historiography of the region established since the early 1960s.

Beginning with the 1960’s, Bernard Cohn drew attention to the Banaras region as a local level political unit, integrated into a larger political system which tied Banaras with Imperial (Mughal center) and regional level political units in a graded hierarchy. Cohn’s work contested historical writing that characterized the eighteenth century as a period of decline and chaos after the dissolution of the Mughal Empire. Scholarship in this direction had emphasized that the eighteenth century marked the decline of a centralized empire and the rise of regional successor regimes. Banaras became a key site of analysis for scholars who challenged the centralization thesis and drew attention to regional and local powers.

This shift of focus away from the Mughal center was accompanied by examinations that highlighted the thriving political economies of regional and local powers during the eighteenth century. Christopher Bayly pointed to the rise of local

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8 Ibid.
9 Bernard Cohn, ‘The role of the Gosains in the economy of 18th and 19th century Upper India’ in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1 (1964), pp. 175-182.
landed elites in the Banaras kingdom during the eighteenth century. Both Bayly and Cohn elaborated upon the significance of client groups, such as the martial, trading gosains, in making Banaras an important trading center. These trading ascetics forged important ties with the Raja of Banaras and other major mercantile firms, forming a formidable triumvirate and consolidated regional polities and economies.

The services of these landed, mercantile and scribal groups were central to the establishment of early East India Company power. Muzaffar Alam deepened the understanding of a flourishing economic region by studying the place of Banaras in the wider Mughal North Indian economic trade networks of the seventeenth century. Others have pointed to the disruptions introduced by the British East India Company. In the 1980s, Bernard Cohn returned to debates on the impact of colonial rule on Indian societies when he highlighted widespread shifts in the agrarian structure under colonial rule. These shifts included the dispossession of landed elites between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dispossessed elites’ land was subsequently assumed by men from Hindu scribal and mercantile groups, many of whose descendants led nationalist struggles from the late nineteenth century.

In 1989, Sandria Freitag elaborated and consolidated the trend in scholarship represented by Cohn for late-nineteenth century Banaras. Freitag pointed out that by the

11 See Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, pp. 143-144. Cohn, ‘The role of the Gosains in the economy of 18th and 19th century Upper India’.
first decade of the nineteenth century, the colonial state reduced the power of traditional authorities like the Raja of Banaras. It curtailed the Raja of Banaras’ revenue-collecting powers over different landed groups. In the process, the colonial state compromised the Raja’s ability to act as an independent and sovereign authority in Banaras. This disrupted established state-community relations. Until the nineteenth century, the symbolic authority of the Raja of Banaras had integrated a diverse community - divided along religious, caste and socio-economic lines - and a shared public culture. Public processions during festivals, public ceremonials and protests were some of the sites of participation.

Colonial officials disrupted urban life further by intervening in established tax collection and town security policies. Leaders of Banaras’ residential neighborhoods levied certain taxes on residents. These taxes were used by leaders to hire watchmen for their neighborhoods. However, many neighborhoods did not appoint watchmen or levy taxes on this count. Freitag showed that in 1803 colonial officials imposed stringent measures to extract these taxes from neighborhoods in Banaras city. They called upon the kotwal to carry out their intentions. The kotwal was the police chief and urban administrator who maintained the “well-being of an urban central place” and was a “hinge figure in the political order.”

15 Ibid., p. 338.
18 Ibid., p. 37.
19 Ibid.
Freitag argued that the colonial state reduced the authority and power of the *kotwal* by assigning this role to him, and consequently alienated him from the urban community. Combined, these colonial policies disrupted state-community relations in Banaras, the breakdown of which was reflected in the polarization of Hindu and Muslim identities by the early twentieth century.\(^{20}\) Yet, Freitag noted that in the late nineteenth century, this imperiled public culture, a pre-British structure of community organization, provided a public space for popular protest against British regulations.

In the 1990s, Vasudha Dalmia underscored an identical Hinduization of Banaras under colonial rule during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, she contextualized this history within both processes of change and continuity. Dalmia emphasized that Banaras was Hinduized under colonial administrative regulations that reduced landholding Muslim elites in the region.\(^{21}\) Other factors intensified Hinduization. Colonial officials relieved the Rajas of Banaras of their administrative duties and subordinated them to the British. In response, the Rajas fostered Hinduization through investments in the religious and cultural life of the city and maintained their symbolic legitimacy.\(^{22}\)

Dalmia illustrated that prosperous Hindu merchants of Banaras who witnessed “strong continuities between the pre-colonial formation of business communities and the communities which exercised financial control through the early colonial period” participated in this specifically religious and cultural atmosphere.\(^{23}\) She noted that

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\(^{22}\) Ibid., pp. 76-82.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp. 82-83.
descendants of these mercantile groups created a new Hindu nationalist politics in the emergent literary public sphere of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{24} The new literary public sphere was constituted, among other things, by the vernacularization of western idioms propounded by British missionaries, officials and other civilians in Banaras. Unlike Freitag, Dalmia located nationalist politics in a new literary public sphere, which emerged under the exigencies of a liberal colonial state.

Whether they focused on continuity or change, or different publics, each of these studies elaborated on the ways in which the Rajas of Banaras fostered Hindu rituals and motifs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, Bayly largely elaborated on the ways in which the Rajas’ practices of “Hindu ritualism” secured them the allegiance of important client groups.\textsuperscript{25} While all these studies offer important insights on the intricate connections between state-formation, religiosity and economics in pre-colonial and colonial India, very few trace the implications of these processes to the world of households. To quote Mytheli Sreenivas, these histories of transitions from the Mughal to the colonial state have all “tended to view the “the family” as outside the realms of power and ruling authority that developed in the colonial and postcolonial eras.”\textsuperscript{26}

This dissertation contributes to regional historiography by challenging the \textit{a priori} privatization of family histories. In this, I draw upon, and extend, the feminist historiography of scholars such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall who trace the

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp. 338-429.
emergence of the British nation-state in the nineteenth century as premised upon the separation between work in the “public” and home in the “private”.\footnote{Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850 (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 82-83.} This division was based upon the ideological constructions of gender difference for “men were to be active in the world as citizens and entrepreneurs, women were to be dependent, as wives and mothers.”\footnote{Ibid., p.450.} It was based on the idea that men should be active in the public sphere, while women should be passive in the private sphere.\footnote{Temma Kaplan, Taking Back the Streets: Women, Youth, and Direct Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 13-14 and 45-54.} Feminist scholars of Latin America, Africa and South Asia have studied the centrality of motherhood, wifehood and femininity to the making of anti-colonial resistance movements in all three continents in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century. For instance, Temma Kaplan has drawn attention to women’s movements that used discourses on motherhood, wifehood and womanhood against the state in different public arenas, such as the streets of twentieth-century Chile.\footnote{Kathryn Hansen ed., African Encounters with Domesticity (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), Luise White, The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Tera W. Hunter, To ‘Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).} Luise White, Tera Hunter and Kathryn Hansen have elaborated on the ways in which gender, as it intersected with race and class hierarchies, was central to the social reproduction of relations of labor in different historical contexts.\footnote{Ibid., p.450.} There exists especially well developed analytic studies on South Asian nationalist anti-colonial discourses of femininity and motherhood are for the period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Partha Chatterjee signaled the ways in which middle-class nationalists in India challenged colonial hegemony by rallying around a “national culture” of an “inner domain of sovereignty” located in the
home. Nationalists countered colonial attacks on the ‘backwardness’ of Indian society by pointing to the spiritual superiority of the submissive, upper-caste wife in the nationalist home to the colonized and morally corrupt material world.

Tanika Sarkar has further complicated these arguments on the “interiority” of the nationalist home by elaborating the ways in which the management of the household, and the relations, within were political matters. Sarkar argues that processes of politicization of the nationalist home were related directly to the peculiarities of the liberal colonial state in India that was organized around a compact between the colonial state, and the caste and religion-based communities of colonized peoples. This compact guaranteed these communities sovereignty over matters relating to marriage, inheritance, gender relations and religion. Sarkar contends that within this compromise, the woman came to be entirely subsumed by her community; she was not allowed an “individual identity or self—separable from family-kin-community nexus—to which rights could adhere.”

Geraldine Forbes has explored the ways in which the centrality of women and the household in nationalist politics led to the emergence of women’s organizations, educational institutions and literary associations. By the early twentieth century, nationalist struggles and issues informed women’s public participation in the early twentieth century. Charu Gupta demonstrates that such participation and the opening of public spaces for women accompanied increased exhortations to control the sexuality of

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33 Ibid., pp. 230-231.
34 Ibid., p.227.
upper-caste women by reformist bodies such as the Arya Samaj.\textsuperscript{37} Educated, middle-class women’s political and social activism had coincided with mainstream nationalism as the colonial state marginalized their political and social concerns.\textsuperscript{38} During the interwar years, middle-class women who led newly formed national women’s organizations such as Women’s India Association (1917) and the National Council of Women in India (1925) challenged the legitimacy of the colonial state.

During the early twentieth century, women activists’ found themselves in a particularly favorable position to shape such politics at specific historical conjunctures when the policies of the British colonial state came under scrutiny within a trans-Atlantic context.\textsuperscript{39} Mrinalini Sinha illustrates that women used the potent political climate to reshape state-society relations in India. Their activities compromised colonial state-community formulations and, instead, legitimate a nationalist state that guaranteed the rights of individuals.\textsuperscript{40} Sinha points out that as women activists demanded state agency in social reform, such as legislation against child marriage and progressive social change in India, they exposed the “externality” of the colonial state.\textsuperscript{41} Simultaneously, they were able to lobby support from nationalists by asserting that issues of women’s social reform were national priorities.\textsuperscript{42} She argues that “the mobilization of gender identity as women,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., pp. 66-108.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., p. 161 and 169.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., pp. 165-166.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., p. 165.
\end{thebibliography}
beyond the collective identities of communities” by women activists led to the emergence of a universalized citizen-subject, one that was above caste and creed.43

This feminist historiography established that under colonial rule, “family” was a constant object of legislative authority. In other words, families were public property, where the colonial state constituted the realm of “public”. Second, this historiography also established that a specific category of women was a participant in, or at least had the cultural capital and superior authority, in the production of a universalized category of “women” in this period.44 In reality, caste hierarchies fractured the category of “women” in the nationalist public sphere. Even as the early twentieth century marked the onset of mass politics, hierarchical differentiations among higher and lower castes continued to be discursively reproduced.45 Therefore, the question that this feminist historiography raises for future histories of gender and nation was the extent to which the nineteenth-century idealization of motherhood rested on shifts in familial structures and practices that predated the nineteenth century.

Other feminist ethnohistorians have also raised, and sought to answer, similar questions. Karen Leonard’s reconstruction of a social history of north Indian Kayasthas in Hyderabad is a significant example of such an endeavor. When Kayasthas made structural adaptations in patterns of marriage and kinship networks, she demonstrates, they were able to hold on to lucrative offices across generations.46 Leonard argues that a focus on structural adaptations by service gentry groups complicate arguments that

43 Ibid., p. 161
45 Ibid., p. 54.
foreground dramatic ruptures under colonial rule. Furthermore, she too shows that reformulations in kinship and household practices remained key to understanding the history of caste, power and authority in colonial India.\textsuperscript{47}

Leonard’s emphasis on the significance of kinship relationships in the making of ‘caste-class’ fortunes informs my own exploration of the households of the service-gentry of the Banaras region in northern India between the eighteenth and the early twentieth century. In this dissertation, I use a broad definition of the term “service gentry”.\textsuperscript{48} My use of the term “service gentry” draws on Bayly’s formulation, to refer mainly to literate mercantile and scribal groups who provided essential services under emergent early modern states and polities.\textsuperscript{49} In making the history of certain service gentry groups in northern India a central focus of historical inquiry, I follow scholarship that highlights the role of scribal communities as historical agents.\textsuperscript{50} This has established the ways in which scribal communities used and expanded their knowledge for acquiring lucrative positions in the administrations of states.\textsuperscript{51} Sumit Guha’s study of Maratha Brahmans’ command of literary production for a Persianate administration in the peninsula establishes the flexibility of such service groups.\textsuperscript{52} I use “service” in this way to connote more than government employment.

Service groups in this dissertation include the mercantile and scribal groups called Khatri, Agarwala, Kayastha and Brahman in the records dateable between the late

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., pp. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{48} Bayly, \textit{Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars}, pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} See Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, ‘Introduction’ in \textit{Indian Economic and Social History Review}, October/December 2010; 47 (4), pp. 441-443.
eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. I focus especially on the family formations among some representative groups to demonstrate the contradictory ways in which some successfully claimed upper-caste status by remaking their own families. I, thus, demonstrate the significance of both discursive and lived familial practices to the constitution of a nationalist politics dominated by upper-castes.

**Methods and Sources**

In this dissertation, I examine records from the period between the 1750s to the 1940s with an eye for the history of family and kinship. The sources used include published and archival records, as well as other textual material. These archival sources are unpublished official records from different administrative, land-revenue, political and judicial departments collected from six archives: National Archives of India in Delhi, Regional State Archives in Allahabad and Varanasi, Board of Revenue Archives, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh State Archives in Lucknow and India Office Records, London. The bulk of my eighteenth century records are from the Regional State Archives of Allahabad. I have examined records from the Pre-Mutiny period [prior to the 1857 Rebellion in India]. They are the Commissioner’s Office Duncan Records 1785-1792; Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, 1791-1795; Banaras Collectorate Records (beginning in 1796); and Letters Issued by the Agent to the Governor General (begin in 1795). These records primarily comprise local-level correspondence between officials posted in the districts of Banaras; correspondence between the British Resident at Banaras and the Governor General of the East India Company; correspondence between colonial officials and indigenous actors;

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52 Sumit Guha, ‘Serving the barbarian to preserve the dharma: The ideology and training of a clerical elite in Peninsular India c. 1300-1800’ in Indian Economic and Social History Review, 47, 4 (2010), 497-525.
detailed reports on trade in the region; revenue reports of the different landed estates; and proceedings of court cases that were presided by the British Resident.

Documents from the National Archives of India, Delhi and India Office Records, London supplement the eighteenth century records from the Regional State Archives in Allahabad. I use records from the Foreign Department, Foreign and Political Department and Home Department from 1759 to 1794. They comprise correspondence between British officials appointed at local and regional levels of the colonial bureaucracy and the East India Company’s executive bodies in India, as well as correspondence within and between the executive bodies of the East India Company in India and London. These documents provide important histories on the East India Company’s strategic investments in Banaras, and contextualize the region within a wider political economy. Other official eighteenth century sources include translations of correspondence by Indian rulers and other indigenous actors between 1759 and 1795 in the *Calendar of Persian Correspondence* series published by the National Archives of India.

Frederick Curwen’s, *The Bulwuntnamah*, an English translation of the eighteenth century Persian history, *Tuhfa-i-Taza* (The Fresh Gift) by Khair-ud-din Khan is one of the most significant sources I use for a reconstruction of family histories in eighteenth-century Banaras.53 The original Persian chronicle was compiled by Maulavi Khair-ud-din Khan, a Shi’i scholar who wrote several treatises at the behest of his patrons. Among his patrons were notable eighteenth century rulers such as Asaf-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Awadh, Chait Singh, the Raja of Banaras and other high ranking officials of the East

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India Company. He compiled this chronicle only after he lost the favor of the Awadh court and had begun working for an English judge at Jaunpur towards the end of the eighteenth century. The author provides intricate details on the late eighteenth century politics in Banaras due to his intimate connections with key players of the politics in this period. Since these details relate significantly to the kinship practices of the Rajas of Banaras, the text is crucial for understanding kinship and familial structures in Banaras.

Aside from written texts, I use eighteenth and early nineteenth-century paintings from the Ames Library of South Asia at the University of Minnesota, the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi and the British Library. The paintings offer critical evidence on the cultural and social investments of historical actors in the eighteenth century.

My nineteenth and early twentieth century sources combine unpublished official sources from the archives, listed earlier, with contemporaneous sources published officially. I also use other sources, such as family memoirs and vernacular texts. The archival sources include pre- and post-mutiny records. To reconstruct histories of ruling and service gentry families, I use records such as the Varanasi Collectorate Records, 1893-1927; the Varanasi Division Records, 1876-1923 from the Regional State Archives of Varanasi: Letters Issued by the Agent to the Governor General, 1795-1844; Collectorate Records, 1796-1855 from the Regional State Archives of Allahabad. More records from Allahabad, such as the Court of Ward Records, North Western Provinces,

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54 This account on Khair-ud-din Khan’s life has been taken from Khair-ud-din Khan, Tazkirat-ul-Ulama (A Memoir of the Learned Men of Jaunpur) translated by Muhammad Sana Ulla (Calcutta: Abul Faiz and Co., 1934), pp. 76-80. Incidentally, Khair-ud-din Khan dedicated and presented this book to Governor-General Wellesley (1798-1805), see preface, pp. I and 80. Also see Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, p. 148.

55 Khan, Tazkirat-ul-Ulama, pp. 79-80. This may be inferred from Khair-ud-din Khan’s dedication of the Tazkirat-ul-Ulama to Governor-General Wellesley. In the same text, Khair-ud-din Khan listed, The Bulwuntnamah among the works he had already compiled.

56 See, for instance, Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, pp. 115 and 156.
Other records include published official ethnographic texts like Wilton Oldham’s, *Historical and Statistical Memoir of the Ghazeepoor District: History of Ghazeepoor and the Benares Province* and F. H. Fisher and J. P. Hewitt’s, *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical account of the North-Western Provinces*. These texts were produced in the nineteenth century when the colonial state undertook massive ethnographic surveys. Besides official published sources, I examine family memoirs in English and vernacular languages from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; nineteenth-century lithographed vernacular texts such as school textbooks and instructional texts and an early twentieth-century journal. These sources were produced in an emergent literary public sphere by literati groups who had a history in service under Indian rulers and the colonial state.

**Overview of Chapters**

In the first chapter, ‘Reshaping Family and Inheritance in Eighteenth-Century Banaras’, I examine state-formation under the Rajas of Banaras. I consider the relationship between the polygynous intra and inter-caste marriage patterns of the Rajas of Banaras and the emergence of a lineage-based polity. Marriage patterns became key sites of interrogation and change under the exigencies of colonial rule and competition between family
members. I consider the relationship between these processes and the articulation of colonial law in the eighteenth century.

In the second chapter, ‘Cosmologies of Power: Patron-Client Relationships and State-Formation in Eighteenth-Century Banaras’, I examine the histories of worship relations and the political economy in Banaras. I use a wide analytical frame that includes Islamicate Mughal and Nawabi orders and the Banaras Raj to examine patronage practices that connected states and polities, patrons and clients in this period. I consider the ways in which these explorations reshape prevalent understandings of Banaras as a Hindu kingdom. I then demonstrate how patron-client relationships informed state-formation under the Rajas of Banaras and the English East India Company.

In the third chapter, ‘Kinship, Gender Relations, and Rights in Land: Colonial Land-Revenue Policies, 1775-1818’, I query the histories of eighteenth-century land revenue structures and colonial reforms as histories of kinship networks and gender relations. In reconstructing this history, I engage with scholarship that has examined land-revenue shifts during the eighteenth century. This continues with the themes elaborated in chapter one to demonstrate how gender hierarchies intersected with those of caste to create distinct and often opposed experiences among women. Consequently, I argue that even as colonial reforms fostered male rights in land, the state’s support of upper-caste men allowed upper-caste female kin to harness the power of their male kin, particularly if these women were older than their landed male relatives.

In the fourth chapter, ‘Locating Mercantile Households in Making of Colonialism: Caste, Gender, Religiosity and Capital in Late Eighteenth-Century
Banaras’, I focus on large and small mercantile households from the eighteenth century, and elaborate on their role in the making of colonialism in Banaras. I examine familial disputes within these households and consider the ways in which the intersecting hierarchies of age, gender, caste and other forms of rank organized kinship ties, business and community relations. I consider the ways in which this complex nexus of relationships, and the tensions emerging from it, strengthened colonial structures. I then investigate how colonial interventions in familial disputes buttressed upper-caste male authority.

In the fifth chapter, ‘Fading Mughal Orders or Restoration of Hierarchy: Literati Contests about Caste and Gender’ I look at the ways in which male merchants and scribal agents were able to take advantage of political and economic shifts under colonial rule, and replace ruling landed families. I proceed to consider how these men refashioned themselves and their families to claim upper-caste, nationalist middle class status in colonial northern India from the nineteenth century onwards. Further, I analyze the ways in which caste-based nationalist politics in northern India hinged upon the reconfiguration of upper-caste families as endogamous households. Subsequently, I engage with the connections between discursive constructions of the upper-caste, wife and the laboring, lower-caste servant as well as reconfigurations of upper-caste households.
Chapter 1:
Reshaping Family and Inheritance in Eighteenth-Century Banaras

Introduction

In this chapter, I trace the interlocking shifts in family, caste and state-formation in eighteenth-century Banaras. I consider multiple networks of marriage to elaborate upon the processual and decentralized nature of state-formation. The main import of this chapter, however, is to understand the complex practices that went into forming family in pre-colonial India. By tracing the ways in which patterns of inheritance and access to resources and power were singularly dependent on kinship ties and their formation, this chapter departs from earlier studies on the Banaras Raj that have ignored such processes.¹

The Rajas of Banaras formed polygynous households. Powerful landlords some of whom were upper-caste Bhumihar Brahmans and others from Rajput caste married their daughters into the Banaras household.² Through these marriages local landlords were subordinated to the Rajas in a lineage-based state. But the presence of Bhumihar Brahmans and the somewhat lower in caste Rajputs in the Banaras house spurred competition between the women within the household and their kinsmen without.

¹ See for example the seminal studies of Christopher Bayly and Muzaffar Alam. Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars. Alam, The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India.
² Rajputs were caste groups that were the archetype of the Kshatriya Varna. Kshatriya denoted a person of lordly virtues. It was the second highest caste category in the four-fold Varna system. Bhumihar Brahmans were caste groups of north Indian Brahmans with histories of landholding and soldiering. Rajput and Bhumihar groups may be categorized within the widest ideological Varna system under Kshatriya and Brahman, respectively. Rajput and Bhumihars are categorized as jatis or sub-castes. Jatis are composed of “groups of people who are by kinship and marriage tied into endogamous sections” that were nonetheless fluid in nature incorporating women from lower-jati groups. See Milton Singer and Bernard Cohn eds., Structure and Change in Indian Society (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1968), p. 24 and 40.
I will outline four key arguments in this chapter. The first is that the political economy of eighteenth-century Banaras Raj rested centrally on the inter-twined relation of caste and family. Second, early colonial interventions shaped both caste identities and the sphere of the family. Both interventions aided the East India Company in establishing its commercial and political power in Banaras. Third, these early colonial interventions comprised of a coincidence of interests between local indigenous actors and colonial officials. This in turn shaped Hindu Law. Finally, I argue that these processes set the backdrop for the intersection of caste with gender relations in the region from the start. Upper-caste Bhumihar Brahman women, their offspring, and supporters were able to marginalize Rajput women and their offspring in these contestations by acceding to colonial and other re-definitions of family. By examining the tensions between women of the royal household, this chapter marks the beginning of an important investigation on gender relations and caste hierarchies which will be examined in more detail in subsequent chapters.

**Region, Geography and Broad Outline of the Political Economy**

The region of Banaras is located in the eastern Gangetic plains of north India. During the eighteenth century it was a part of the Mughal province of Awadh that encompassed much of the Gangetic plains. The province of Awadh comprised of vast tracts of fertile and well-irrigated lands. Sixteenth-century Mughal chronicles elaborated upon its flourishing agriculture.³ Awadh continued to witness agricultural growth through the seventeenth century to the effect that the revenue demands by the Mughal Empire from

Awadh had almost doubled. Agricultural prosperity was linked to the increased commodity production, emergence of flourishing markets, towns and trade routes.

Illustration 1: India around 1785. Reproduced with the permission of Oxford University Press, India.

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4 Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India*. 
The commercial growth experienced in the province shaped political and social organizations in profound ways. By the eighteenth century, caste-based clans of landlords that had fostered the growth of commercial networks and benefited considerably from them, had been able to increase their land base through continued warfare with neighboring clans and uprisings against the Mughal authorities. Rajput and Bhumihar Brahman clans emerged as the predominant landowners in the province. Meanwhile, the Mughal governor of the province of Awadh had managed to take advantage of the weakening of Mughal administrative networks and redirected them to serve him; declaring sovereignty from the Mughal Empire and establishing dominance over local zamindars with the same move.

The emergence of Awadh as an independent kingdom realigned established hierarchies of control over the region. The Banaras region comprised of the districts of Banaras, Ghaziapur, Chunar and Jaunpur. The Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah had originally assigned it as jagir to one of his dependents, Nawab Murtaza Khan, in the early eighteenth century. Murtaza Khan then appointed his relative Mir Rustam Ali as governor of the region for annual revenue of 500,000 rupees in 1703. By 1722, the emergent ruler of Awadh, Burhan-ul-Mulk, took charge of the Banaras region from Murtaza Khan. He maintained Rustam Ali as the tax collector provided the latter agreed to pay an additional sum of 100,000 rupees to the revenue payment collected from the Banaras

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5 Ibid., pp. 98-106.  
6 Ibid., pp. 56-73.  
7 Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 2.  
Illustration 2: Banaras and surrounding region, 1785. Reproduced with the permission of Oxford University Press, India.

Rustam Ali’s role as tax collector of Banaras was dependent upon careful management of the powerful landlords of the region. The Banaras potentate, Mansaram’s rise to power was located within the networks of alliances Rustam Ali established.

Networks of Brotherhood and Mughal Hierarchies of Deference at the Provincial Mughal Court

During the eighteenth century, local landlords from the Awadh countryside instigated revolts against the authority of the Mughals and subsequently, the Awadh court. Muzaffar Alam has pointed out that these uprisings were related to the region-wide economic

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9 Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 8
growth experienced during the late seventeenth century. Enrichment from increased agricultural productivity and trade in the period is said to have led to the militarization of local landlords. These processes then emboldened local potentates to resist officials of the Mughal and Awadh court in demand for greater political power in their localities and control over resources.

The noble Rustam Ali offset the threat of these revolts by making dependents out of some local militarized landlords and using their power to subordinate other recalcitrant landlords. In particular, as has been pointed out by other historians, Rustam Ali deployed dominant landholding groups against each other. In Banaras, Bhumihar Brahman and Rajput landlords controlled most of the land between them. These landlords were organized into exogamous local caste groups called biradaris which traced ties of descent from a common ancestor. Biradaris were patrilinages that were “open and fluid social networks” that incorporated people for different castes through matrimonial alliances etc. They wielded military, political and land-holding powers in their local areas and had portions or shares in territories controlled.

Rustam Ali recruited such patrilineages of Bhumihar landlords. According to The Bulwuntnamah, Mansaram, a Bhumihar by caste and the eldest of four brothers, decided against his father’s occupation as cultivator to join other kinsmen in military service at Rustam Ali’s court. Mansaram’s kinsmen were extremely powerful and occupied an esteemed position at Rustam Ali’s court as risaladars. Mansaram was so inspired by them that he outfitted himself with a retinue and joined Rustam Ali.

Mansaram’s recruitment and patronage at Rustam Ali’s court had been shaped by his kinship networks in his Bhumihar biradari. However, it is unlikely that he came from a petty cultivating background. He would have to wield military might in order to find a position at Rustam Ali’s court and militarization was expensive. Indeed, Mansaram’s example is indicative of how processes such as the commercialization of agriculture and the establishment of local markets had enriched local landlords. This would explain why Mansaram and his kinsmen were able to outfit themselves with a retinue.

The strategies which Mansaram deployed to succeed are significant. He drew upon kinship ties to insinuate himself at Rustam Ali’s court. However, when Mansaram rose higher in the noble’s court, his relations with his aforementioned biradari members became fraught with rivalry and competition. Ultimately, he was able to reduce them by using Rustam Ali’s armies. These engagements offer a counterpoint to nineteenth-century interpretations of the biradari. Although M. A. Sherring argued that Rajputs and Bhumihars in the Banaras region lived in “strong and pugnacious brotherhoods”, histories

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17 Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, p. 2.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, p. 96-109.
21 Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, p. 5.
from the eighteenth-century show how the solidarity of these brotherhoods was compromised through competition for resources.\(^{22}\)

By reducing other biradari members, Mansaram concentrated commercial and political power unto himself. He had been able to amass annually 2,000,000 rupees in the form of revenue and taxes as Rustam Ali’s agent between the late 1720s and early 1730s. However, he paid only 500,000 rupees to Rustam Ali.\(^{23}\) Mansaram’s commercial success and military might made him indispensable to Rustam Ali. Rustam Ali therefore bestowed titles in the name of the Mughal Emperor to him.\(^{24}\) Although the Mughal center had weakened considerably by this period, Mughal authority remained a source of legitimacy and prestige.

Mansaram was offered the title of Raja Bahadur [usually connoting a little king] but he requested that it be bestowed upon his son Balwant Singh.\(^{25}\) After reducing competing biradari members, securing honorific titles, Mansaram and Balwant Singh were able to use Rustam Ali’s political networks and usurp the rights to revenue collection entirely. According to The Bulwuntnamah, Mansaram won these rights by offering to pay the Awadh ruler 500,000 rupees more than the revenue offered by Rustam Ali.\(^{26}\) As I will show later, other practices such as exchange of women too played an important role in this shift in power.

\(^{22}\) M.A. Sherring, Hindu Tribes and Castes, as Represented in Benares (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1872), p. 41.
\(^{24}\) Khan, The Bulwuntamah, pp. 5-6.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 8.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 10. Also see Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Volume V, Letter no. 1407 dated March 23, 1779, p. 307.


Competing and Collaborating Kin in the Lineage-Based State

The dynasty of Banaras emerged in collaboration with agnatic and collateral kin. However, the imperatives of establishing a lineage-based state determined the modes of collaboration. The same processes may be examined to reveal the fragmented nature of kingship under the Rajas of Banaras. Mansaram was the eldest of four brothers. His younger brothers were Dusaram, Dayaram and Mayaram. Both Mansaram and his successor Balwant Singh enlisted the support of male kin such as Mansaram’s brothers and their descendants. According to The Bulwuntamah, Mansaram even appointed Dusaram, his chief aide, as governor of certain parganas when the former gained dominion over the zamindari.27 Dusaram, however, used this opportunity to create a land base for himself in these regions.

Collaborative kin-based mobilizations could create competition between brothers especially as structures of inheritance were devised to favor lineal heirs instead of agnates. The Bulwuntamah revealed that Rustam Ali cultivated Balwant Singh’s career at his court – so much so that Balwant Singh became his favorite.28 In the previous section, I noted how Mansaram ensured that the honorific title of Raja Bahadur was bestowed upon his son. It is possible that Mansaram preempted competition from his brothers. In promoting Balwant Singh at Rustam Ali’s court, he therefore created a lineage-based form of succession that denied his younger brothers a chance at the zamindari.

27 See Khan, The Bulwuntamah, p. 3, 35. Also see a family member’s [Ausan Singh’s] narrative of this history which largely corresponds to that of Khair-ud-din Khan, Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, March 1795, Basta no. 41, Volume no. 89, pp. 163-166.
28 For Balwant Singh’s position as favorite at Rustam Ali’s court see Khan, The Bulwuntamah, p. 7.
Mansaram’s strategems explain why Balwant Singh and Dusaram entered into conflict after his death. Dusaram resisted Balwant Singh’s authority and around 1749, allied with the latter’s enemy Daim Khan, a powerful landlord in the region. Later eighteenth-century records signaled the contested nature of rights in land and authority between the agnates and their descendants. Surviving petitions by collateral family members and descendants of Mansaram’s brothers which were addressed to East India Company officials, who had emerged as the dominant authority in the region by that period, continued to stress how the brothers had brought the Banaras zamindari under their collective control through collaborative labor. Therefore, they asserted that descendants had as much a right to the Banaras zamindari as Mansaram’s lineal descendants. Other records, such as a petition by the widow of one such descendant, went so far as to suggest that Mansaram and Dusaram had both received revenue collecting rights in different territories of the Banaras zamindari by the Nawab of Awadh.

Unlike The Bulwuntnamah which traced Dusaram’s early rise to power to his relationship and patronage under Mansaram, the widow offered alternative narratives. She emphasized collectivity or shared rights and Mansaram’s dependence on his brothers. Petitions by the descendants placed their discourses on shares in land resources beyond the purview of the Rajas’ authority. It appears that agnates such as Dusaram were not entirely dependent upon their deference/subordination to Mansaram and his lineal heir Balwant Singh for rights in land. According to The Bulwuntnamah, when Dusaram allied

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29 Ibid., p. 3 and pp. 34-35.
30 Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, February 1795, Basta no. 41, Volume no. 88, pp. 241-268.
31 Banaras Duncan, May 1790, Basta no. 7, Volume no. 36, pp. 89-91.
with Balwant Singh’s enemy, Daim Khan, the latter “procured for him [for Dusaram] the lease of Chinpoor and other *pariganas* by the use of his own personal influence.”

Dusaram’s new patron, Daim Khan had no doubt been able to call upon the Nawab of Awadh, Safdar Jang’s authority to intercede on Dusaram’s behalf following the latter’s fall-out with Balwant Singh. These developments were themselves informed by the complex ties of deference between the Nawab of Awadh and Balwant Singh, the Raja of Banaras. Between the late 1740s and early 1750s, these relations had been fraught with conflict. As Balwant Singh expanded his power in the eastern Gangetic region by subordinating local landlords, he became bold enough to stop payments of revenue due to the Nawab Safdar Jang and oust his appointed officials from the region. To make matters worse, Balwant Singh switched allegiances from the Nawab Safdar Jang to the Afghan ruler Ahmed Khan Bangash when Afghans from the emergent regional state of Farrukhabad briefly defeated the armies of Awadh and occupied its territories. The Bangash Nawabs waged war against Safdar Jang, the Nawab of Awadh until 1752, with the support of the Rohilla Afghans of the regional kingdom of Rohillkhand. However, they were soundly defeated by Safdar Jang.

Following the defeat of the Afghans, the Nawab of Awadh set out to reduce Balwant Singh but the Raja managed to redeem himself by making substantial gifts of money to the former. However, Balwant Singh was also successful in pacifying the

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32 Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 35.
33 Sanyal, *Banaras and the English East India Company*, p. 3.
Awadh ruler because of his ability to control a territory replete with fractious and recalcitrant landlords.

The exigencies of overlapping sovereignties between the Nawab of Awadh, Rajas of Banaras and local landlords thereby framed the contentions between agnates and collateral relations. They point to the fractious nature of kinship ties. However, they also explain why the Banaras Rajas continued to draw upon them. Kingship was dependent upon such resource pools. Thus, shortly afterwards, Balwant Singh allied with his uncle Dusaram to overthrow Daim Khan, the refractory landlord.\textsuperscript{37} In turn, Dusaram and his sons were reinstated to the \textit{parganas} they had enjoyed in Mansaram’s period.\textsuperscript{38}

Contentions aligned and then realigned kinship ties along relations of rivalry and solidarity. They shaped the processes through which the Rajas engaged with collateral family members. Balwant Singh had been aware of both the dangers posed to his rule from collateral family members and their indispensability to its sustenance. Therefore, he subordinated collateral kin to his authority even as he continued to make them his dependents. A careful reading of \textit{The Bulwuntnamah} shows that processes of incorporation corresponded with age-based hierarchies. The Raja incorporated the sons of his paternal cousin who had rebelled against him.\textsuperscript{39} This resource pool of young, male relatives could be used further to secure lineal heirs through practices of adoption. Thus

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 35. This narrative broadly corresponds to the accounts of Dusaram’s descendants mentioned earlier.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Balwant Singh made dependents of his cousin Surnam Singh’s sons, Dirgbijai and Juggerdeo Singh, and assigned them the \textit{parganas} of Shadiabad and Zafurabad. See Khan, \textit{The Bulwuntnamah}, p. 3.
\end{itemize}
Balwant Singh adopted one of his paternal cousin’s sons, Maniyar Singh, who became a prospective successor. 40

These processes demonstrate how kingship was a multi-centered institution, based upon the careful selection of partners among kinsmen within the sovereignty of the potentate. The contestations for rights reveal the dangers of intimacy between brothers and their descendants. However, the exigencies of state-formation necessitated that potentates share power with collateral kin. Rulers offset threats emerging from such power-sharing through strategic management along age-based hierarchies.

State-Formation and Inter and Intra-Caste Marriage Networks

State-formation under the Rajas of Banaras was informed by the creation of marital alliances. 41 The histories of these marital alliances have been overlooked by historians of eighteenth-century Banaras. 42 I argue that marital practices served two main objectives, to subordinate powerful landlords in the region through ties of marriage, and to ensure the production of a lineage-based state. These objectives underlay the formation of a multi-caste household involving intra and inter-caste marriages under the Rajas of Banaras. They illustrate that the royal household comprised of competing affinal relations who nurtured different lineal heirs in order to partake in greater shares of wealth and resources.

40 Ibid., p. 4 and p. 63.
41 For earlier studies that have shown how state and family formation were implicated in each other, see Sumit Guha, ‘The Family Feud as a Political Resource in Eighteenth-century India’ in Chatterjee ed., Unfamiliar Relations, pp. 73-94.
42 See for instance Muzaffar Alam’s otherwise seminal study on eighteenth-century regional rulers and landlords in the region, Alam, The Crisis of Empire.
The exchange of women through marriage and practices of slavery was central to state-formation under the Rajas of Banaras. *The Bulwuntnamah* provides extensive details which illustrate how marital relations shaped accumulations of land resources, wealth and prestige. For instance, Balwant Singh’s enemy, Daim Khan, had been able to regain rights in land, which he had lost by rebelling against officials of the Mughal Emperor, by marrying his daughter to the Mughal noble Rustam Ali’s son Farzan Ali.43 This explains why Daim Khan resented Mansaram and his son, Balwant Singh, when they overthrew Rustam Ali. Such relations also secured powerful clients to Rustam Ali.

The Rajas of Banaras used similar strategies to those deployed by Rustam Ali. Mansaram and his son, Balwant Singh reduced recalcitrant landlords in the Benares zamindari. They reinforced their domination over subordinated landlords by taking brides from their families. The author of *The Bulwuntnamah* thus pointed to how Mansaram reinforced ties of subordination with landlords such as Burriar Singh, a Bhumihar Brahman zamindar of the substantial pargana of Kol Asla by marrying his [Mansaram’s] son Balwant Singh to Burriar Singh’s daughter, Gulab Kuar.44

Orchestrated by Mansaram, Balwant Singh’s marriage to Gulab Kuar had played a key role in marking the subservience of the latter’s natal kin group to the authority of the Rajas. Indeed, the implications of such marriages as forms of subordination for bride-giving families is evident from Burriar Singh’s brother’s displeasure at, and subsequent suicide in protest of, the match.45 Such marriages made the bride and her natal kin group vulnerable at the court. In the case of Gulab Kuar, vulnerabilities were exacerbated when

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43 Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 34.
44 Ibid., pp. 11-12.
45 Ibid.
the marriage resulted in the birth of only one child – a female. This is corroborated further in Burriar Singh’s resentment when Balwant Singh married again. Balwant Singh is said to have married one Bishen Kuar, the daughter of one of Burriar Singh’s dependents in hope of a son. As the prospective mother of Balwant Singh’s son, Bishen Kuar and her natal kin threatened Gulab Kuar and Burriar Singh’s interests, which were already reduced in the absence of a male child. Moreover, the rise of the new bride’s family at the court would have challenged extant hierarchies between Burriar Singh’s powerful family and that of Bishen Kuar in Kote Asla. When Burriar Singh came to know about this match, he threw the new bride’s natal family out of his zamindari. Balwant Singh later gave them jagirs in compensation.

Balwant Singh entered into more marriages. However, we only have details on his marriage with Panna, a Rajput woman. She was the daughter of a Chandel Rajput landlord of Bijaigarh in Banaras whom Balwant Singh had defeated in battle. The circumstances under which she was married to the Raja suggest that she may have been taken into the family as a slave and then later elevated to the status of a wife.

Female slaves played an important role in pre-colonial political economies. For example, Ramya Sreenivasan has demonstrated that slave dancing girls emerged as critical signifiers of prestige and status for emergent Rajput rulers in sixteenth-century

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46 For an earlier study on such competition between different wives and their respective natal kin see Pamela G. Price, ‘Kin, Clan, and Power in Colonial South India’, in Chatterjee ed., Unfamiliar Relations, pp. 202-205
47 Ibid., p.11.
48 Gabriel Harper to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 4 October 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December 1770, p. 717. For Balwant Singh’s reduction of Bijaigarh see Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, pp. 32-34.
Rajasthan.\textsuperscript{49} Indrani Chatterjee has drawn attention to the significance of exchanges of female slaves in state-formation. She has pointed to the ways in which Mansaram, the founder of the Banaras dynasty, ingratiated himself with Muhammad Quli Khan, a high ranking official in Awadh by giving him a slave girl.\textsuperscript{50} Subsequently, Muhammad Quli Khan interceded on Mansaram’s behalf at the Awadh leading to his accession to the Banaras principality.

The Banaras rulers also consolidated their power through the incorporation of female slaves into their household. Women like Panna were taken into the household and given new identities by their mistresses and masters, and roles to perform in the household. Each slave occupied a position within the household hierarchy. However, women like Panna who were enslaved could rise in the hierarchy to become powerful concubines, wives of the ruler, and their sons, future rulers. These practices were directly to the exigencies of a lineage-based state.

Balwant Singh’s marital strategies were aimed at concentrating power in his household and ensuring the reproduction of a lineage. However, the ruler’s polygynous practices generated factions and competition within the household as competing parties supported different lineal descendants in the struggle for succession to the throne. Different competing factions with prospective lineal heirs represented the multiple centers of power in the household.

\textsuperscript{50} Chatterjee, \textit{Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India}, p. 23. See also \textit{Calendar of Persian Correspondence}, Volume V, Letter no. 407 dated March 23, 1779, p. 306.
Producing Lineages and Concentrating Power through Control over Prospective Lineal Heirs

Balwant Singh established a stratified household comprising of affinal and natal relations of the brides which competed for representation and power at the court. The connections between lineage production and state power led to competition between different kin groups as they created, upheld, and fostered alternate successors. The rivalry between prospective lineal heirs became the focal point of discussion and debate amongst factions that defined and debated over family and rights of inheritance. This politics of succession was complicated by the involvement of the East India Company that had emerged as the dominant political power in India during the latter half of the eighteenth century.

We have already seen that Balwant Singh’s marriages generated animosity and competition between the natal kin of his first wife Gulab Kuar and the kin of his other wife Bishen Kuar. Neither of these marriages provided male offspring. However, Gulab Kuar, who had powerful natal kin, was able to maintain a stake in the politics of succession through the marriage of her daughter [name unknown]. Gulab Kuar gave birth to one daughter who was married to another Bhumihar landlord, Drigbijai Singh. Drigbijai Singh and Gulab Kuar’s daughter had two sons. Gulab Kuar supported the rights of her eldest grandson Mahipnarain to her husband’s throne.\(^{51}\) However, Balwant Singh’s third wife Panna gave birth to two sons. Panna and her supporters promoted the interests of her elder son, Chait Singh. The third contender was Maniyar Singh, a nephew whom Balwant Singh adopted.

\(^{51}\) Khan, *The Bulwunnamah*, p. 63.
According to the author of *The Bulwuntnamah*, Maniyar Singh was a favorite of Balwant Singh who supported his succession to the throne.\textsuperscript{52} However, with old age and illness, the Raja’s hold over his dependents declined, which provided an opportunity for Chait Singh’s and Mahipnarain’s supporters. Both worked independently to marginalize Maniyar Singh’s succession. Maniyar Singh lost the contest when he was unable to rally enough support from powerful groups like those that backed Chait Singh and Mahipnarain.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Illustration 3}: Balwant Singh’s Heirs
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\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 4, 63.
Meharban Singh, the father of Maniyar Singh, remained at Balwant Singh’s side as a counselor during periods of conflict with the Nawab of Awadh Safdar Jung in 1749. Meharban Singh persuaded Balwant Singh to adopt Maniyar Singh when Balwant Singh’s wives had not produced male offspring. However, Meharban Singh was not influential or powerful enough to maintain Maniyar Singh’s claims in the contest with other heirs.

The author of *The Bulwuntnamah* noted that Gulab Kuar contested Maniyar Singh’s right to succession when Balwant Singh was on his deathbed. Gulab Kuar and her supporters argued that her grandson was the rightful heir. She strengthened Mahipnarain’s claims by rights of the adopted Maniyar Singh. This process unwittingly called into question the practices of adoption that underlay state-formation in pre-colonial India.

To complicate matters, Balwant Singh had another adopted son, Ausan Singh, who became involved in the politics of succession. According to Khairuddin Khan, the author of the *Bulwuntnamah*, Balwant Singh had adopted Ausan Singh, Bhumihar Brahman landless laborer, during the early years of his reign when Ausan Singh was just a child. In pre-colonial and colonial India, children from poor families were often sold

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53 Ibid., p. 23. There is an error here as Meharban Singh is listed as Ausan Singh’s father. However on page 4 of the same text, Khair-ud-din Khan states that Meharban Singh was Maniyar Singh’s father. The latter is further corroborated by a genealogical table of the Rajas of Banaras dated February 1795, where too Meharban Singh is listed as Maniyar Singh’s father. See Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, February 1795, Basta no. 41, Volume no. 88, p. 268.
54 Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 63.
55 Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*.
57 Ibid., p.13, 31. It may be inferred that Ausan Singh was adopted in the early years of the Raja’s reign. Khair-ud-din Khan noted that Ausan Singh was working as a mere laborer during the construction of Balwant Singh’s fort at Gangapur. Balwant Singh is said to have seen him and taken him in to the household. Elsewhere Khair-ud-din Khan pointed out that in 1752 Balwant Singh shifted capitals to
or given away as slaves to rich families or corporate sects in times of famine or hardship.\textsuperscript{58} These children were entirely dependent on their adoptive families for identification, wealth and power.\textsuperscript{59} Significantly, their dependence sometimes made them more desirable as kin over other blood-related descendants who posed a constant threat to the authority of the ruler. Blood-related kin could claim rights to the throne based upon their descent.\textsuperscript{60} Isogamous wives and other affinal relatives presented more threats as they could further the interests of natal kin to the detriment of the ruling household. These contingencies surely informed the ways in which Ausan Singh was able to occupy key positions of authority in the household including that of Balwant Singh’s deputy.\textsuperscript{61}

Ausan Singh continued to wield an influential position in the household by supporting Chait Singh’s succession.\textsuperscript{62} Ausan Singh was attached to Chait Singh since Chait Singh’s childhood. Balwant Singh entrusted Ausan Singh with Chait Singh’s education.\textsuperscript{63} When Balwant Singh assigned a zamindari to Panna, Chait Singh’s mother, he appointed Ausan Singh as the manager.\textsuperscript{64} Further, upon Chait Singh’s birth, Ausan Singh was entrusted with his education.\textsuperscript{65}

As Balwant Singh’s deputy,Aus an Singh had access to all the important offices and was able to draw important officials to his side immediately after Balwant Singh’s


\textsuperscript{59} See Chatterjee, \textit{Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India}, pp. 36-44. Also see, Indrani Chatterjee and Sumit Guha, ‘Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince: Slavery and Social Capital in Eighteenth-century India’ in \textit{Indian Economic and Social History Review}, 36, no. 2, 1999, pp. 165-186.

\textsuperscript{60} See Chatterjee, \textit{Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India}, pp. 36-44.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p.13. See also Public Department Records, O.C., 1 Aug., No. 3, Year 1788.

\textsuperscript{62} Khan, \textit{The Bulwuntnamah}, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 13

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
death. He was able to use resources from the Banaras treasuries to begin negotiations on Chait Singh’s behalf with high-ranking officials in the Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-daulah’s service. In this, he faced competition from Gulab Kuar’s supporters: Gulab Kuar’s natal kin groups and her daughter’s affinal kinship networks. There were reports that Gulab Kuar had made offers of large sums of money to Shuja-ud-daulah in order to acquire the zamindari for Mahipnarain.

Together Gulab Kuar and Ausan Singh were powerful enough to remove Maniyar Singh from the politics of succession. Similar to Gulab Kuar, Ausan Singh’s arguments supporting Chait Singh underscored direct descent thereby challenging the very practices of adoption that had ensured his position in the household. Maniyar Singh was unable to pursue his cause as his greatest supporter and most powerful person in the household, Raja Balwant Singh, grew sick and weak with age. However, Ausan Singh went a step further. He challenged Gulab Kuar’s claims by championing patrilineality. His arguments aligned questions on inheritance along gendered lines between patrilineal and descent through the female line.

In 1770, the factions headed by Gulab Kuar and Ausan Singh were powerful enough to remain in the contest for succession. Gulab Kuar was unable to succeed against Ausan Singh when Ausan Singh brought the political and economic networks he had cultivated as Balwant Singh’s chief minister to bear on Chait Singh’s succession. These

\[^{65}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{66}\text{Ibid., p. 64.}\]
\[^{67}\text{Ibid. See also Gabriel Harper to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 4 September 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December 1770, pp. 690-691. Here it is stated that the Nawab had agreed to recognize Chait Singh as Balwant Singh's heir in exchange for a sum of 2,000,000 rupees as nazarana and an increase of 500,000 rupees in the annual revenue.}\]
networks included the support of the East India Company which looked favorably upon Ausan Singh’s firm hold over the political economy of the region and decided to support Chait Singh’s succession in 1770. \(^{70}\) Top ranking East India Company officials agreed that under Ausan Singh’s continued guardianship, revenue payments would not be disrupted.

**Colonial Interventions in the Political Economy of Banaras, 1756-1770**

By the early 1760s, the East India Company had effectively defeated the allied powers of the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, the Nawab of Awadh Shuja-ud-daulah and the Nazim of Bengal Mir Qasim. It had attained the *diwani* rights to the province of Bengal which included Bihar and Orissa. The emergence of the East India Company as the dominant power in the latter half of the eighteenth century had a critical impact on the political economy of Banaras.

After the conclusion of the battle of Buxar in 1764, the East India Company took control of the Nawab’s territories which included the *zamindari* of Banaras. However, as scholars such as Richard Barnett have shown, they were restored to the Nawab for strategic reasons. \(^{71}\) Exchanges between the East India Company officials reveal that the Company was wary of the effort and expense in expanding their direct administration in territories beyond the newly acquired regions in the east. By returning the territories to

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\(^{68}\) Gabriel Harper to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 4 October 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December 1770, p. 717.

\(^{69}\) Khan, *The Bulwunnamah*, p. 63.

\(^{70}\) Jas Alexander to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 26 August 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December, 1770, p. 622.

\(^{71}\) Barnett, *North India between Empires*, p. 72.
the Nawab, the British hoped to create a buffer zone to protect the Company’s territories, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, against Maratha incursions.\textsuperscript{72}

This alliance was conditioned upon the Nawab’s political and economic subservience to the Company. In August 1765, the East India Company entered into a treaty with Shuja-ud-daulah which restored the latter in almost all his territories as sovereign. The Nawab was asked to pay 5,000,000 rupees to the Company to compensate it for war expenses. The treaty included another clause which would allow the Company to trade duty-free in the territories of Awadh including Banaras.\textsuperscript{73}

This treaty had significant implications for the fledgling Banaras dynasty. During the period of the ascendance of the East India Company, Balwant Singh had managed to strengthen his hold over the Banaras region by strategically allying with the emergent power.\textsuperscript{74} Thus one of the other major conditions of the treaty applied by the British was that Balwant Singh be maintained in the zamindari of the regions of Banaras, Ghazipur, Bijaigarh and Jaunpur as a revenue-paying dependent of Shuja-ud-daulah.

The Company’s decision to maintain Balwant Singh in the zamindari was strategic. It maintained Balwant Singh as a useful ally who could be used against the Nawab if the need arose. Further, Banaras occupied considerable commercial significance for the Company. Company and other British traders drew upon Banaras’ trading networks and merchant capital for the purchase of luxury goods and their trade

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Barnett, \textit{North India between Empires}, pp. 72-73.
\textsuperscript{74} Extract of Proceedings, 6 September 1759, Foreign and Political Department, Select Committee, Year 1759, SC 58-59 (100); Select Committee to Major Carnac, 13 February 1761, Foreign and Political Department, Select Committee, Year 1761, SC 61 (7, 45, 8, 48), \textit{Calendar of Persian Correspondence}, Volume I, Letter no. 2459 and 2468.
from north India to their newly acquired territories in Bengal. The abolition of duties on company trade in the Nawab’s territories after the treaty of Allahabad allowed for a much more favorable use of Banaras’ trade networks. The political and economic significance of the region made it imperative for company officials to secure it in the hands of an ally.

The extent of the Company’s influence and investment in the Banaras region is apparent from colonial records on the question of succession after Balwant Singh’s death. Shortly before his death in September 1770, Balwant Singh expressed his loyalty to the English in a letter and requested that his son Chait Singh be allowed to take over the affairs of the state. According to Khair-ud-din Khan’s account in The Bulwuntnamah, Ausan Singh had managed to coerce the Raja into recognizing Chait Singh as his heir. Company officials looked upon this request favorably as they were apprehensive that the Nawab of Awadh would seize the opportunity to replace Balwant Singh’s family in the Banaras zamindari with a loyal dependent of his own. Officials discussed how such a shift in the zamindari would make the territories of the Company vulnerable to the Nawab if he sought to wage war against them in the future. The effects of such political shifts on Company commerce were also considered.

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75 Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, pp. 231-232.
76 See for example a letter from Balwant Singh to Governor Verelst dated May 8, 1768 in which the Raja refutes allegations against his imposing duties on company trade boats and of impeding the diamond trade of British traders for the same. The letter further reveals that the Company traders used the remission of duties in the territories of the Nawab of Awadh to their best advantages. See, Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Volume II, Letter no. 942 dated May 8, 1768, p. 266. See also Barnett, North India between Empires, pp. 83-90 in which Barnett points to Shuja-ud-daulah’s resistance against the duty-free trade of company and other British traders carrying Company permits with them.
77 Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Volume III, Letter no. 320 dated August 6, 1770.
78 Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, p. 63.
79 Extract of Proceedings, 9 September 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December, 1770, pp. 603-604. Jas Alexander to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 26 August 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December, 1770, pp. 620-622.
In 1770, the East India Company was concerned that the Nawab of Awadh might place one of his dependents in charge of the Banaras zamindari. The correspondence between high ranking officials of the East India Company and the Nawab of Awadh illustrate that the Company wanted to establish the zamindari of Banaras as an inheritable right of the family of the Banaras Rajas. In their letters to the Nawab of Awadh, the British supported Chait Singh’s succession. They stated, “it is the principle of the English sardars that when they form friendship with a person, they treat as friends his children and his children’s children. Consequently, the English sardars are favorably disposed towards the son of Raja Balvant [sic] Singh....”80 This set of letters underscore British support for patrilineal forms of inheritance and reveal how the British persuaded the Nawab to pass the deeds and titles held by Balwant Singh to his son Chait Singh.81

These processes were bolstered by Ausan Singh’s efforts to negotiate with the Nawab on behalf of Chait Singh. At the end of the negotiations, it was agreed that Chait Singh would pay 2,200,000 rupees to the Nawab as nazarana and the Nawab would install him as Raja of the Banaras zamindari.82 These negotiations with the Nawab were, as we have seen earlier, directed towards marginalizing other competing lineal heirs at the local level. Ausan Singh’s complicated negotiations with both the Nawab and the East India Company were used to marginalize the claims of other competitors.

80 Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Volume III, Letter no. 350 dated September 4, 1770.
81 Ibid.
82 Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, p. 64. See also Gabriel Harper to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 4 September 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December 1770, pp. 690-691. Here it is stated that the Nawab had agreed to recognize Chait Singh as Balwant Singh’s heir in exchange for a sum of 2,000,000 rupees as nazarana and an increase of 500,000 rupees in the annual revenue.
The Nawab of Awadh was keen on ensuring that the zamindari remained under his control. Remembering Balwant Singh’s treacherous behavior, he was reluctant to let the rights to revenue collection and overlordship in the region become a hereditary possession in the hands of the Banaras family. This explains the Nawab’s assertions that when Balwant Singh was maintained as the revenue collector and Raja of the Banaras territories under the Treaty of Allahabad in 1765 at the behest of the East India Company, the titles and deeds were bestowed upon Balwant Singh only and did not include his posterity.  

Political and economic exigencies informed the ways in which East India Company officials heralded Chait Singh’s rights to the Banaras zamindari. Defined by the Company’s relationship with Awadh and its rulers on the one hand and their investments in Banaras, these exigencies strengthened Ausan Singh’s efforts to ensure that Chait Singh succeeded to the throne. This coincidence of interests allowed the East India Company’s discourses on patrilineality to converge with those of Ausan Singh.

**Defining Family and Shaping Hindu Law in 1770**

When the East India Company officials ruled in favor of Chait Singh in 1770, they agreed with Ausan Singh that the direct son had the first right to succession. In doing so, however, they had to contend with the arguments of Chait Singh’s competitors which were hinged upon caste hierarchies. The articulations of Chait Singh’s competitors made inter-jati marital practices a key site for competition.

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83 Hastings to Fort William Council 4 October 1773, Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 21 June to 30 December 1773, p. 548.
To reiterate, Balwant Singh’s familial practices produced three contenders for the throne (see Illustration 3). The first was Chait Singh, Balwant Singh’s son with the Rajput woman Panna. The second contender was Mahipnarain, the grandson of Balwant Singh and his Bhumihar wife Gulab Kuar. Mahipnarain’s mother was the only child borne of this same-jati marriage. The third contender was Balwant Singh’s adopted son, Maniyar Singh. When Ausan Singh asserted Chait Singh’s rights based upon direct patrilineal descent, competing factions raised ritualized ideals of brahmanhood and endogamy to convince local officials that Chait Singh was an interloper.

In 1770, Captain Gabriel Harper, a colonial official who was deputed to Banaras to witness the coronation of Chait Singh wrote to the Select Committee about the rivalries surrounding the question of succession. He stated,

There is a grandson of Bulwand Sing’s who appears to be the rightful heir, for the present Chaet Sing his son is not the issue of his wife but of a Rajpoot woman whom for her beauty he took into his house. The difference of their sect, for the raja was a bramin has been productive of great disputes in the family and at this time the stricter bramins will not permit Chaet Sing the son of a Rajpoot woman to associate with them..... There is also an adopted son [Maniyar Singh] the nephew of the deceased Raja who puts in his claim.

A close examination of Harper’s letter illustrates that Harper challenged Chait Singh’s right to the throne by asserting that his mother, Panna, was a concubine. However, Harper’s argument elided the plural forms of marriages that were extant in societies which practiced slavery. Marriages, in which at least one of the couple was a slave, were inferior in rank to endogamous marriages between non-slaves. Such marriages were also quiet affairs. Unlike endogamous marriages in which non-slave husbands and wives and their respective kin participated in ceremonies, marriages with slaves did not require the performance of rituals due to the slave woman’s lack of kin.

British officials like Harper challenged the legitimacy of these marriages which, though inferior, were central to the reproduction of a lineage-based state. Panna and her son, Chait Singh’s example demonstrates the significance to polities of male heirs born to women who were incorporated into the household through practices of slavery.

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84 Extract of Proceedings, 19 October 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December 1770, p. 704. This was reported by Gabriel Harper to the Secret Committee on 4 October 1770.
85 Gabriel Harper to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 4 October 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 Jun to 29 December 1770, pp. 716-717.
86 See Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*, p. 27.
In categorizing Chait Singh as the son of a Rajput woman whom Balwant Singh did not marry, Harper flattened the multiple forms of marriage and wifehood, which ensured the continuation of lineage-based states, along binaries of wife and non-wife. Such elisions were reinforced by discourses on caste and endogamy as Harper drew attention to Panna’s status as a Rajput woman. I argue that Chait Singh’s Bhumihar Brahman competitors’ discourses on caste played a central role in this process.

The significance of the official’s report then lay in the ways it seemed to innocuously suggest connections between Panna’s Rajput caste and non-wife status. By foregrounding caste-based ideas of purity and pollution, upper-caste competing family members in collusion with Harper erased practices of marriage that enabled the hierarchical incorporation of slave and non-slave women of different castes into the household. These discourses negated important complex histories of state-formation under Mansaram and Balwant Singh.

In 1770, higher-ranking officials on the Select Committee, however, supported Chait Singh’s right to succession by responding,

When it is considered that by the tenets of the gentoo [sic] laws the right of inheritance descends to issue male, to the utter exclusion of the female line, it is evident the pretensions of the grandson can only be waged by Bramins [sic], who are ever partial to their own sect.

By evoking the tenets of Hindu law to support Chait Singh’s rights to rule, high-ranking East India Company officials on the Select Committee, including the Governor-General

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87 Ibid.
88 See Chatterjee, Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India, p.78-89.
89 Ibid., p. 27 and pp. 78-124.
90 Extract of Proceedings, 19 October 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December 1770, p. 704.
Warren Hastings, disagreed with Harper. In doing so, they added Hindu law as a new authority to their support of his succession. Invocations of Hindu law enabled officials to move beyond the contingencies of the debates regarding succession that were grounded in the specifics of Balwant Singh’s familial practices. In particular, as seen from the quote, they dismissed Chait Singh’s upper-jati competitors whom Harper had alluded to as the stricter Brahmans in his letter. High-ranking officials rejected the caste-based articulations of Chait Singh’s competitors and instead used *shastric* norms. By evoking Hindu law, colonial officials supported Chait Singh who suited the needs of the East India Company.

When colonial officials on the Select Committee invoked arguments under Hindu Law, they were drawing upon a growing body of Orientalist scholarship that was being fostered under colonial enterprise in the latter half of the eighteenth century. This scholarship had been engaged with the examination and translation of Indian texts. Rosane Rocher has traced how Orientalist knowledge was used under the Judicial Plan of 1772 implemented by Governor-General Warren Hastings. According to the Judicial Plan, all cases regarding marriage, inheritance, caste and other religious issues would be judged according to the *shastras* for Hindus and the Quran for Muslims.\(^91\) Three decisions underlay this plan: first, to administer Indians according to their own laws rather than British Common law; second, to model these laws pertaining to religious usage and institutions upon the British ecclesiastical law and the Bishop’s courts by focusing on religious usage and institutions, all other lay matters were to be judged under

British laws; third, to find the sources of these laws in antiquated books to the complete negation of local custom.

It may be argued that in October 1770, before Hastings announced the Judicial Plan, colonial officials were already recognizing the advantages of invoking Hindu law in familial matters. In providing abstract rules from Hindu law to support Chait Singh’s succession, high ranking officials failed to engage with the historical practices that forged ruling families. They thus failed to engage with the ways in which Gulab Kuar and others were interlinking specific articulations of caste with wifehood/non-wifehood. Indeed, their gendered response that was based upon patriliny under an abstract Hindu law too therefore flattened complex structures of family.

The abstraction of patrilineal forms of inheritance from politico-familial structures paved the way for discourses on Hindu law which overlooked practice. Consequently, the complex and contingent processes of family formation were elided in these discourses.

Interestingly, the recourse to Hindu law by the officials of the Select Committee in 1770, which was deployed in support of their own designs, provided a new authoritative language and source to Chait Singh’s contenders and local colonial officials. For if the Select Committee had foregrounded gendered difference (male vs. female) and patriarchal authority inherent in their formulations of Hindu law, their opponents too drew upon Hindu law to evince ritualized discourses on purity-pollution and marriage that inflected gendered norms on patriliny with those of caste. In the arguments of upper-jati competing family members, Hindu Law was defined foremost by brahmanical norms.
of purity and pollution and ritualized same-caste marriages. This becomes evident from Harper’s response to the Select Committee,

…yet in particular cases I believe their [Hindus’] tenet admit the Right of Inheritance falling unto the descendants of the female, and it so happens in the case of the Descendants of Bulwand Sing [sic]; for the legitimacy of his grandson, by the Female, is the superiority He has over Chaet Sing [sic], who is illegitimate, and moreover, he is the Issue of a woman of a different Sect from the deceased Rajah.92

Colonial responses to the controversy surrounding succession were thus anything but homogenous. In 1770, officials of the Select Committee ignored the arguments of Harper in support of Chait Singh. I argue that the debates ensuing from such differences amongst the East India Company officials may be examined as early colonial engagements with Hindu law. As colonial officials invoked family and inheritance to suit political and economic exigencies, they unwittingly became a part of the ongoing contest for inheritance that was itself testament to the shifting, fluid and metamorphic nature of familial practices in the period. When arguments on patriliny failed to suffice, high ranking officials deployed tenets of Hindu law to quell challenges to their decision. However, this shift created further problems as competing family members and local officials rendered alternative interpretations and judgments which exposed the pitfalls of using antiquated shastric texts. The Dharmashastras were capacious texts which offered a multiplicity of commentaries and thereby accommodated a variety of conflicting statements.93 Harper’s rendering of Hindu law on the question of inheritance created a problem for the Select Committee even as they ignored it. However, the recourse to

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92 Gabriel Harper to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 6 November 1770, Foreign and Political Department Records, Branch: Select Committee India Office, 25 September 1769 to 29 December 1770, SCIO 70 (362-363), Fort William 23 November 1770.
Hindu law rather than familial practice and the plurality of commentaries under Hindu law in the early period proved crucial in 1781 when the Governor-General Warren Hastings sought to get rid of the Raja.

**Intimate Connections, Contingent Practices of Caste and Abstract Hindu Law, 1770-1781**

Succession politics in 1770 were defined by specific renderings of caste hierarchies that were used to shape familial boundaries. An examination of the interlocking fields of caste and family illuminates how questions of inheritance and family were punctuated by discourses on caste status. As I have shown already, high-ranking colonial officials and their local counterparts resolved contentions by eliciting distinct judgments under Hindu law. These judgments were based upon abstract rules rather than practice. However, as I will show here, Chait Singh, the emergent ruler, and his competitors for the throne continued to invest in caste-based practices to respectively appropriate and deny caste status. These practices and the disruptions surrounding them sustained the debate over Chait Singh’s familial status even after he assumed kingship. I argue that ongoing caste and familial practices provided the context in which colonial officials could deploy the tenets of Hindu law to suit their own political and economic exigencies.

There had been many challenges to Chait Singh’s reign as Banaras came under the control of the East India Company. In 1775, the Company had signed a new treaty with Asaf-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Awadh, according to which the *zamindari* of Banaras

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passed from the latter to the East India Company. At that time, the Company gave Chait Singh uncontested authority over revenue collection and administration in the Banaras zamindari provided he paid the annual revenue, which remained the same as that under Shuja-ud-daulah, to the Company and maintained a regular cavalry of 2000 men for their service.

Records show how the East India Company made increasing demands of money on the Raja as it competed with the French for dominion in India. In combination with other factors which will be discussed in the next chapter, repeated demands for war subsidies ultimately led to Chait Singh’s rebellion against the Company and his subsequent removal from the zamindari in 1781. In the aftermath of Chait Singh’s rebellion, succession to the zamindari once again hinged upon the question of legitimacy. Interpretations of Hindu law, invoked first by Harper, were now used to support Chait Singh’s removal from the zamindari and appoint Mahipnarain with the stipulation that he double the annual revenue payment to the Company.

Hastings employed arguments based on Hindu law again in 1781. This time however, colonial officials were anxious to remove Chait Singh from the throne. They used arguments which Harper had made at the beginning of Chait Singh’s reign to

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94 Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Volume IV, Letter no. 1701, p. 296.  
95 Hastings to Fort William Council, Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 12 June 1775, no. 2, S 12 Jun. 75 (2).  
97 Hastings to Edward Wheler and Fort William Council, 5 November 1781, Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch, 19 November 1781, S 19 Nov. 81 (5).
remove the Raja from the zamindari and throne of Banaras. According to Khair-ud-din Khan, who was in Banaras at the time of Chait Singh’s expulsion, Hastings called upon the learned pandits of the city. Hastings asked them to determine

…who was the legal heir, according to their religion, after the death of Balwant Singh. The Pandits all agreed in declaring that if a man had a daughter by his wedded wife, and a son by a woman to whom he was not legally married, the daughter would be his lawful heir and not the son, and if a son was born to the daughter, he would be the rightful heir of his grandfather, and entitled to inherit his property.98

These pandits supported the legitimacy of ritualized marriage under Hindu law. Like Harper’s argument on Hindu law in 1770, their judgment upheld the rights of female descendants. A legitimate daughter and her male progeny had greater rights over an illegitimate son. This alignment of questions of inheritance could only emerge through processes such as the discursive reconstitutions of family along ideals of endogamy in 1770. Discursive processes were however accompanied by specific caste-based practices of competing familial members which were used to challenge Chait Singh’s position in the family. I argue that upper-jati family members brought caste-based practices of commensality to bear on Chait Singh’s status as a member of the family. Furthermore, these practices must be located within histories of caste formation.

Susan Bayly has emphasized that caste hierarchies became entrenched in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.99 This period was characterized by the rise of several small kingdoms and petty chiefdoms as processes of commercialization led to the concentration of wealth and resources under local landlords and potentates. According to

Bayly, as new rulers sought to establish their power and legitimacy, they drew upon caste hierarchies and symbols to claim an exalted status for themselves. As they incorporated dependents, rulers ranked them by assigning and/or recognizing jati and caste statuses. The processes of consolidating caste status and hierarchies fostered ritualized brahmanical authority.

Bayly argues that beginning with the Mughal period, kingship became symbolized with the exalted Varna archetype of the Kshatriya status.\textsuperscript{100} As Sumit Guha has shown, military service under the Mughals was intimately linked to the reconstitution of caste-jati norms.\textsuperscript{101} However, Guha has demonstrated in the context of forest polities in central and western India, that appropriation of Rajput caste identities were strategic practices shaped by historical contingencies. Such appropriations were not uniform across forest polities nor were they irreversible.\textsuperscript{102}

When rulers aspired to Kshatriya status, they constructed narratives of exalted descent and appropriated symbols which underscored their Kshatriya-like qualities.\textsuperscript{103} They bolstered claims to exalted status by recruiting Brahman priests and literati “with the necessary ritual and genealogical skills”.\textsuperscript{104} Furthermore, according to ritualized models of kingship, the king could sanction his power by linking it to the Brahman’s authority which the latter had achieved by renouncing the world and its corruptions.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Guha, Environment and Ethnicity in India, pp. 85-88.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Heesterman, ‘The Conundrum of the King’s Authority’, pp. 1-27.
With the expansion of Maratha dominions in the eighteenth century, Brahman families rose to prominence through service in their courts. Prior to the Marathas, non-priestly Brahman communities had served in administrative capacities under the Sultanate states in the Deccan, which had emerged under the leadership of Turkic Sultans by the end of the fourteenth century. Their recruitment in state bureaucracies was accelerated when one of the Brahman lineages from the service gentry of the Maratha Bhonsle rulers rose to power in the 1740s under the title of the Peshwas. The success of the Peshwas created new opportunities for priestly and non-priestly Brahman communities in the Deccan and beyond.

As networks of Brahman service specialists arose in a number of important post-Mughal realms, most notably in the Maratha domains, Brahmans “took the lead in projecting norms of purity-consciousness onto an all-India plane”. These shifts served to emphasize ideals of “purity and ritualized status differentials” within Brahman communities as much as between different castes. As Brahmans became the focus of patronage and recruitment under rulers, questions over brahmanhood became urgent. Reflecting on Brahman subcastes in the Konkan during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Rosalind O’Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski discussed the growing

110 Ibid., pp. 25-63.
importance of Brahmans as ritual specialists, scribes and other administrative officials in fostering norms of ritual purity in Brahmans.  

These processes centered on Banaras since the city had been a major center for brahmanical learning since the sixteenth century. Communities of Brahmans from different parts of India had migrated to the holy city of Banaras from the sixteenth century. Migrant Brahman families and communities in Banaras maintained ties with their place of migration as is evident from late eighteenth-century cases on inheritance disputes.  

Significantly, these networks of migrations and ties were based upon the substantial networks of royal patronage.  

Banaras pandits presided over dharmic disputes for Brahman communities across north and south India from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries when other juridical centers arose under the Marathas.

The debates over brahmanhood and emergent ideals of purity and pollution framed the self-fashioning of the Rajas of Banaras. The genealogical narrative of the Rajas of Banaras shows that the rulers traced their origins to a pious Brahman rather than a martial king. This account traced the origins of the Rajas to a Brahman called Kuthu Misra “who spent day and night at his devotions and discarded completely all consideration of worldly affairs”. However, Kuthu Misra and his sons became vested in worldly affairs when his patron Raja Banar, unbeknownst to him, made over the deed

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111 Rosalind O’Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski, ‘What makes people who they are? Pandit networks and the problem of livelihoods in Early Modern Western India’ in *Indian Economic and Social History*, 45, no. 3, 2008, p. 386 and 400.

112 Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, August 1792, Basta no. 35, Volume no. 58, pp. 183-210, Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, September 1792, Basta no. 35, Volume no. 59, pp. 18-21, 26-28, Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, September 1792, Basta no. 35, Volume no. 60, pp. 92-100.

113 Bayly, *Caste, Politics and Society*, pp. 68-70,


of a revenue-free land grant to him. Furious upon finding that he had been so deceptively engaged in the polluting affairs of the world, Kuthu Misra avenged himself by prophesying that the Raja’s kingdom would pass to his [Kuthu’s] sons.116

By tracing their genealogy to a renunciant Brahman whose progeny’s rights to kingship or ties to land had been a matter of prophecy, borne out of an unfortunate circumstance, the Rajas of Banaras were able to claim the highest caste status of brahmanhood. Furthermore, they could justify their investment in kingship – and the practices necessitated by the demands of kingship – which violated the rituals of purity and pollution that had become so central to brahmanhood in the period. This process involved, as we have seen, the formation of marriage ties with rivals from different jati groups which allowed for their incorporation and subordination to the Raja’s rule.117 Moreover, an examination of the patronage patterns of the early rajas of Banaras reveals how kingship was hardly confined to the dharmic brahmanical model that was pivoted upon the relationship between the worldly king and renunciant Brahman. Thus records show how Balwant Singh and Chait Singh’s repertoire of patronage included Saiva gosains, pirs and Brahman priests.118

The patronage styles of the Rajas will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. Here I want to draw attention to how Chait Singh’s upper-jati competitors such as Mahipnarain and Maniyar Singh manipulated patterns of patronage to foster

116 Ibid.
117 For an analysis of the relationship between conflict and marriage in other contexts which I have drawn upon here, see Norbert Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Pre-colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 35-37.
brahmanical authority and ritualized norms of purity and pollution. Maniyar Singh strengthened his claims to succeed to the throne by making land grants to Brahmans who in turn were obligated to pray for his spiritual and material well-being.\textsuperscript{119} There are eight records of land grants made by Maniyar Singh and his younger brother available to us. All of these were made to Brahmans. The same records show how Mahipnarain and his father, Drigbijai Singh, made grants of land exclusively to Brahmans.

Competing family members then drew upon other practices such as commensality to use norms of purity and pollution to challenge Chait Singh’s authority in the family. Eighteenth-century records elaborate upon a particularly disruptive event. In 1773, Chait Singh invited his kinsmen including his competitors to eat with him at a feast.\textsuperscript{120} However, members claiming an upper-jati status to Chait Singh refused to attend. This included kin such as Ausan Singh, who had supported Chait Singh’s succession in 1770 but had since shifted allegiances.

The significance of the feast as a turning point in Banaras politics may be attested from the fact that the author of \textit{The Bulwuntnamah} devoted considerable attention to it.\textsuperscript{121} A brief narrative of the proceedings of the event will be helpful to our analysis here. According to Khair-ud-din Khan, Chait Singh invited several of his kinsmen at Ausan Singh’s instigation. Ausan Singh is said to have reassured the Raja that if any of them refused to attend and eat with him, they would be brought to the court under duress. At the time of the feast, however, when other kinsmen were present, Ausan Singh excused himself from the proceedings because of a headache.

\textsuperscript{119} Commissioners Office Banaras, August 1785, Basta no. 2, Volume no. 6, p. 9, 10, 11, 25.
Ausan Singh’s performance at the feast was shaped by emergent tensions in his relationship with Chait Singh. He had been the key player in the succession politics of 1770. As has been mentioned before, colonial officials had placed significant emphasis on Ausan Singh’s support of the Raja in determining succession. They argued that while Chait Singh was young, the support of key ministers led by Ausan Singh made it expedient for the Company to choose him as Balwant Singh’s successor. By 1773, however, relations between Ausan Singh and the new Raja had soured. The precise reasons for this conflict are not known. It may be interpolated that the age-based hierarchies in their relationship, fostered by East India Company officials, are likely to have caused friction between Chait Singh and Ausan Singh. Further, it is possible that there was a falling out over demand for rights in land.

Ausan Singh was a prominent member of the family and yet apart from a small land grant made by him to a dargah in 1764, we do not have evidence to suggest that he had a land base during Balwant Singh’s reign. It is probable that as Ausan Singh was one of the powerful authorities during Balwant Singh’s reign, the Raja sought to control him through curtailment of his rights in land. It appears that Chait Singh followed the same policies for he granted a substantial jagir to his former guardian only after the mediation of colonial authorities.

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120 Khan, *The Balwattatnamah*, pp. 71-74 and Commissioners Office Banaras, December 1776, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 2, pp. 45-49.
122 Jas Alexander to John Cartier, President Select Committee, 26 August 1770, Foreign Department, Select Committee Proceedings, 18 June to 29 December 1770, p. 622.
123 See *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, Volume V, Letter no. 825 dated 1778 from Ausan Singh to the Governor General informing him that due to his [Governor General’s] intervention, he had been awarded the zamindari of the pargana of Saidpur by Chait Singh.
124 Banaras Duncan, December 1789, Basta no. 5, Volume no. 29, p. 102.
125 See *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, Volume V, Letter no. 825 dated 1778.
If the feast afforded an opportunity to Ausan Singh to express his discontent, it allowed collateral kin of the Bhumihar Brahman jati to increase their rights in land and accumulate titles by agreeing to feast with the Raja. The political and economic significance of such participation is evident from the ways in which participation guaranteed awards of rights in land and other honors. Conversely, it also became the basis for rescinding of those rights after Chait Singh’s expulsion from the Banaras zamindari in 1781 and Mahipnarain’s subsequent accession to the throne.

Chait Singh aspired to a Bhumihar Brahman status. He established commensality with his Bhumihar Brahman collateral relations by bestowing titles and rights in land upon them. The Raja’s aspirations and practices to consolidate an upper-caste status became key sites through which Ausan Singh challenged his authority. In his letter to Resident at Banaras Thomas Graham, Governor-General Hastings wrote that Ausan Singh would no longer “associate with the raja at his religious festivals and acknowledge his pretensions to rank as a bramin [sic].” This letter provides an important and alternative interpretation to the proceedings of the feast. While Khair-ud-din Khan noted that Ausan Singh instigated Chait Singh to organize the feast with the sole purpose of humiliating him, Hasting’s letter suggests that the Raja was actively involved in asserting a Bhumihar Brahman status. This argument is supported by other colonial records in

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126 Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 72.
127 Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 72 for evidence on collateral descendants’ participation in the feast. See Banaras Duncan, May 1790, Basta no. 7, Volume no. 36, pp. 89-91, 93-94, 97-98 for evidence showing how descendants denied eating with Chait Singh and Mahipnarain’s assertions that they did.
128 Commissioners Office Banaras, December 1776, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 2, pp. 45-49.
129 Hastings to Thomas Graham, Resident at Banaras, 10 July 1777, Commissioners Office Banaras, December 1776, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 2, pp. 45-46.
which references were made of Chait Singh’s efforts on several other occasions to entice his Bhumihar Brahman kinsmen to eat with him.  

The Raja of Banaras specifically engaged in practices to consolidate an upper-caste identity. Such investments indicate how caste identities were historically contingent in the eighteenth century even as Chait Singh’s upper-jati competitors sought to stabilize them. They further illustrate how potentates were dependent upon the multiple networks of power that simultaneously fragmented their authority. In the stratified inter-caste household of colonial India these fragmentations had become particularly dangerous. They were being galvanized by upper-jati family members to create exclusive intra-caste families that challenged the rights to inheritance of lower-jati members. In the period between 1770 and 1781, colonial officials reinforced such marginalizations by either refusing to recognize the familial practices of the Rajas Mansaram and Balwant Singh in 1770, or by supporting the cause of upper-jati members in 1781.

Conclusion

These engagements with the family in late eighteenth-century Banaras demonstrate how family was shaped at the interstices of emergent ritualized caste-based practices, colonial discourses on family and colonial articulations regarding tenets of antiquated shastric literature on inheritance. Such reconstructions, for example, enabled direct upper-jati female offspring of ritualized, isogamous marriages that were recognized as legitimate under colonial law to inherit over lower-jati sons who were born in non-ritualized unions between upper-caste males and women of a slave background and different caste status. Although patrilineal inheritance remained the norm, my aim here is to show how the

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130 Banaras Duncan, April 1795, Basta no. 41, Volume no. 90, pp. 25-26.
analysis of temporal shifts in understandings of family provides a textured and historical narrative of patriliny that was shaped by marriage and other co-habitational practices, caste hierarchies and the exigencies of the political economy.
Chapter 2:

Cosmologies of Power: Patron-Client Relationships and State-Formation in

Eighteenth-Century Banaras

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the connections between the Islamicate polities and the Banaras Raj. I will pay specific attention to the hierarchies of deference between the Nawabs of Awadh, local Mughal nobles and the Rajas of Banaras; the patronage practices of the Mughal noble Mir Rustam Ali and Raja Balwant Singh; and the reorientation of key resources such as patron-client relationships from the provincial Mughal court at Banaras to the Banaras Raj.

Eighteenth-century local rulers in northern India established lordships by participating in complex systems of usufruct rights over land. Rulers shared authority and rights over lands, villages, and labor with client groups such as peasants, clan-based brotherhoods, mercantile corporations, trading cults and devotional sects.1 In this chapter, I examine the patron-client relationships between the Banaras Rajas, merchant-bankers, and gosain sects to illustrate how they were forged through overlapping ties of piety, commerce, and politics. I tie analysis in this direction to another set of interrelated issues: the emergence of Company rule and the subsequent reconstitution of relationships between the Rajas of Banaras, merchant-bankers, and gosains; the complete subordination of the Rajas of Banaras to Company rule and reorientation of resources of client groups into the colonial administration; the ensuing shifts in epistemologies of
sovereignty and religiosity that had shaped erstwhile patron-client relationships under the Rajas of Banaras; and the role of early colonial law in producing and reinforcing those shifts.

The Banaras Raj constituted a complex and multicentered nexus of relationships of deference, service, and piety that had in turn shaped the movement of goods, money, and authority. Relationships within this nexus were shaped by multiple cosmological beliefs and practices. Colonial interventions reordered politico-cosmological identities and practices in Banaras.

**Banaras as a Commercial Capital during the Eighteenth Century**

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Gangetic region in North India witnessed agricultural and commercial expansion. Rulers sponsored clearing of forested lands for cultivation and construction of tanks to facilitate irrigation. They promoted agriculture by giving cultivating rights to skilled farming groups who flocked to the fertile areas of the Gangetic plains. Ruling lineages dispensed land-use rights to key client groups whose collective labor, skills and capital produced vibrant political and economic centers in the region.

The concentration of cultivating labor and increase in agricultural land enhanced agricultural productivity and revenues in the region of Awadh. Agricultural prosperity led to the establishment of grain markets or *ganjs*, bazaars and towns in Banaras and other

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regions in Awadh. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Banaras region witnessed the growth of trade centers such as the city of Mirzapur. Subsequently, Banaras became a locus of widespread trade networks that stretched from the Deccan to the Himalayan regions, attracting merchant capital and traders from various parts of the Indian subcontinent.

Merchants maintained banking houses in different cities which linked trade routes spanning vast distances. Mercantile firms provided commercial insurance to traders who were otherwise susceptible to the hazards of inland transport which ranged from robbery to dealing with landlords who demanded tolls. Large merchant-banking houses in Banaras developed wide networks of branches and maintained a system of credit that was fundamental to the smooth functioning of economic exchange and trade. These branches issued mercantile notes of credit which provided traders temporary loans. These factors facilitated an increase in movement of goods and the circulation of money leading to Banaras’ emergence as the inland commercial capital of the Indian subcontinent.

The Banaras Raj and Islamicate Networks of Power, 1720s-1770s

State-formation under the Rajas of Banaras had been dependent upon networks of piety which overlapped with political and economic networks. In eighteenth-century Banaras,

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5 Alam, ‘Aspects of Agrarian Uprisings in North India in the Early Eighteenth Century’, p. 97. This point is corroborated by the British Resident Francis Fowkes’ report in 1776 on trade duties in Banaras in which he alluded to the popularity of the mart at Mirzapur before the 1770s. See Francis Fowke, Resident at Banaras, to Warren Hastings, 7 March 1776, Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 3 April 1776, S 3 Apr. 76 (1).
7 Ibid, p. 415.
networks of piety operated within a shared Indo-Persianate culture that had been nurtured in the Islamicate court of Mir Rustam Ali, the Mughal revenue farmer.\textsuperscript{10} When the Rajas Mansaram and Balwant Singh came to power, they insinuated themselves within such networks and fostered their growth.

An examination of the patronage styles of the Rajas of Banaras complicates the categorization of Banaras as a “Hindu kingdom”.\textsuperscript{11} In the context of Banaras, Bayly has pointed to the accounts of the descendants of prominent eighteenth-century merchant-bankers which suggest that important merchant-bankers lent their support to Balwant Singh in order to reduce Muslim influence in the region.\textsuperscript{12} According to these accounts, merchant-bankers combined their capital to enable Balwant Singh and his father to make a larger bid in revenue payment than their patron and Mughal noble, Mir Rustam Ali Khan. However, as Bayly has noted, these accounts are unverifiable. However, the emphasis on the Hindu identity of the Rajas of Banaras obfuscates the ways in which the Rajas of Banaras, Mughal nobles and client groups participated in a shared Indo-Persianate culture and political economy.

Records show how the Nawabs of Awadh were called upon to intercede on issues of piety and disputes over temples and idols. For instance, the Raja of Jaipur wrote to Shuja-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Awadh, on the subject of the Vaisnava idol of Shri Bindumadhav [manifestation of Lord Vishnu] in 1793. The Rajas of Jaipur had been


\textsuperscript{11} Bayly, \textit{Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars}, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 177-178.
patrons of Bindumadhav. To this end, they had built a temple dedicated to the idol on the banks of the Ganges. A Brahman priest and his family were maintained as dependents to perform rituals and prayers in the temple. However, a local merchant had usurped the idol. When Raja Madho Singh sought to recover the idol, he approached Shuja-ud-daulah and an East India Company official to resolve the matter. Subsequently, Shuja-ud-daulah directed Balwant Singh to ensure that the idol was returned to Madho Singh’s dependent.

This narrative shows that Balwant Singh’s management of temples could be mediated by the authority of the Muslim Nawabs. Historically contingent political hierarchies of deference therefore shaped piety. These histories puncture the substantivism implicit in conceptualizations of the Banaras Raj as a Hindu kingdom.

The rulers of Banaras created more complex networks of patronage than can be categorized within homogenized understandings of Islam or Hinduism. Thus an eighteenth-century sketch from the Mughal School of painting (see Illustration 5) shows Mir Rustam Ali celebrating Holi, a festival that would be categorized as a Hindu festival in the nineteenth century. The sketch is revealing of the ways in which eighteenth-century rulers fostered public practices of cultural consumption. Rustam Ali is seen celebrating Holi in a courtyard with his chief consort and an entourage of Holi revelers and onlookers including courtesans and musicians who dance and play with color.

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13 Banaras Duncan, July 1793, Basta no. 37, Volume no. 68, pp. 70-75.
14 Banaras Duncan, July 1793, Basta no. 37, Volume no. 68, p. 71.
15 Holi is the festival of springtime during which people celebrate by playing with color. It is celebrated to mark the occasion when the mythological Vishnu devotee Prahlad defeated the witch Holika. See Diana L. Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 277.

According to the British Orientalist James Prinsep, celebrations of Holi in Banaras took place on an even larger public scale during the Budhwa Mangal festival, translated as ‘Old (budhwa) Tuesday (mangal in the Hindi calendar)’. Budhwa Mangal was a glittering river festival that was celebrated on the first Tuesday after Holi. The festival is said to have attracted large numbers of people including rich merchants of the region who participated in the celebrations by setting out on the river in boats.

Celebrations included a fair in which shopkeepers sold delicacies and courtesans and musicians performed for people.


Prinsep narrated that Raja Balwant Singh inaugurated Budhwa Mangal in order to create an appealing sight for Mir Rustam Ali who lived in a palace on the banks of the Ganges River. In late nineteenth-century sources, this account, which locates the festival of holi within the patronage ties between Mir Rustam Ali and Balwant Singh, disappears. An official report from the period therefore claimed that Balwant Singh or Chait Singh started this festival as an offering to the Ganges River in order to repent for

17 Ibid.
the murder of a “poor, innocent brahmin [sic]”. However, it may also be suggested that ‘Budhwa Mangal’ could have actually connoted Gautama Buddha’s birthday as in ‘the auspicious (literally mangal in Hindi) event of Buddha’s birth’ which was always celebrated on a Wednesday. As I will show later, eighteenth-century Rajas of Banaras fostered ties with Himalayan Buddhists who traveled to Banaras on pilgrimages. It is possible that the festival was inaugurated by the Rajas to celebrate Buddha’s birthday, and that such histories of the festival were elided in nineteenth-century narratives in which the Banaras Raj was characterized as a Hindu kingdom.

Notwithstanding the ambiguities regarding the Budhwa Mangal festival, Mir Rustam Ali’s sketch provides critical insights into the ways in which eighteenth-century rulers fostered Indo-Persianate patronage patterns. It appears that the Rajas Mansaram and Balwant Singh drew upon the patronage styles of Mir Rustam Ali. Like Mir Rustam Ali, they lent support to learned men of piety including Sufi saints. For example, records show that Mansaram and later Balwant Singh continued a grant of rent-free land in Nasirpur, *pargana* Dhoos, made earlier by Mir Rustam Ali to the descendants of Shaikh Fateh Mohammad.

The Rajas also established new ties of piety. In 1748 they gave a grant of land comprising of the villages of Sehujuware and Chuk Govindpur in the *pargana* of Kerakut in Jaunpur to Rahamat Ullah, a descendant of Pir Muhammad. It is most likely that this Pir Muhammad was one and the same as the Sufi sheikh of the Chisti silsilla who had been a native of Jaunpur and was a prominent saint and teacher of mysticism and

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19 Commissioners Office Banaras, August 1785, Basta no. 2, Volume no. 6, p. 18.
theology in Lucknow during the seventeenth century.\footnote{Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, \textit{A History of Sufism in India}, Volume II (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2003), pp. 290-291.} This suggests that the Rajas sought to channel the authority and power of Sufi saints and shrines towards the legitimization and consolidation of their political power. Sufi devotion was able to command religious authority as devotees sought out the saint’s \textit{baraka} to “intercede with god on the devotee’s behalf.”\footnote{Richard Eaton, \textit{Essays on Islam and Indian History} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 204.} As a Sufi shrine became a locus of spiritual authority and Sufi intellectuals and schools integrated populations into its activities, it also came to wield political power and authority. Sufi orders were therefore sought after by rulers through patronage ties in an attempt to channel the shrine’s religious and political authority towards their own efforts at state building.\footnote{Richard Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States” in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence eds. \textit{Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia} (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2000), p. 252.}

Patronage patterns and piety were necessarily wide-ranging as they intertwined with political and economic exigencies of state-formation. Balwant Singh and Chait Singh’s patronage of Shaikh Muhammad Hazin, a renowned Shiite scholar from Isfahan, is particularly revealing in this regard.\footnote{Khan, \textit{The Bulwuntnamah}, p. 52.} As a renowned Isfahani Shia cleric and scholar, Shaikh Muhammad Hazin contributed to the emergence of Awadh as a center of Shiite learning.\footnote{Juan Cole, \textit{Roots of North Indian Shi’ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859} (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), pp. 54-55.} He was revered for his scholarship, political astuteness and powers of prediction by key political figures including the Mughal Emperor, Muhammad Shah, the Nawab of Bengal, Mir Qasim, and the Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-daulah.\footnote{See Seid Gholam Hossein Khan, \textit{Seir Mutaqherin; or Review of Modern Times}, trans. Nota Manus (nom de plume for M. Raymond, also known as Hajee Mustapha), Volume 2 (Calcutta: Oriental publishers and booksellers, 1789), pp. 176-178, 433-435, 525.} The Rajas of
Banaras developed close ties with Hazin because of his power and clout. Both Balwant Singh and Chait Singh patronized Hazin when he chose to settle in the territories of Banaras in 1750. He was provided considerable patronage by Balwant Singh in the form of land grants and money. Chait Singh is said to have continued this patronage through substantial cash grants.

This patronage proved crucial for Balwant Singh. In 1756, the Shaikh interceded on the Raja’s behalf when Shuja-ud-daulah sought to oust him from the zamindari. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Balwant Singh’s engagements with the emergent Afghan threat in the 1740s and early 1750s and his campaigns to extend his territories had set the Nawabs of Awadh against him. However, Balwant Singh was maintained in the zamindari. To be sure, the decision to keep Balwant Singh must be contextualized within broader political and economic processes that will be discussed later in this chapter. However, the significance of clients with divine and political powers such as Hazin to the well-being of the Raja and his kingdom cannot be underestimated.

The practices of patronage underlined in this section affirm the arguments made by scholars in the context of Islamicate polities, which are useful to recall in the context of Banaras too. They argued that polities were based upon “the interplay between the universal and the everyday – and the tensions it generated”. In such polities, states “stood at the nexus between the universal and the particular, between the legitimizing language

29 See Introduction in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu*. 
of civilizational allegiance and local structures of power”.30 Understood thus, the oppositional identities of Hindu/Muslim, Shia/Sunni and Vaisnava/Saiva could be blurred within the ideology of universal kingship, which was “rooted in the pragmatic ability to maintain order and prosperity by balancing the interests of all groups, whatever their particular identities”, and devotion towards specific holy men who appealed to people from different religious backgrounds.31

**Trade and Pilgrimage during the Reigns of Balwant Singh and Chait Singh**

The emergence of Banaras as the inland commercial capital was interconnected with increased pilgrimage activities during the eighteenth century, a period of economic growth and prosperity. The city and its surrounding regions drew thousands of devotees from all parts of India who brought wealth and patronage to the city. Overlapping pilgrimage and trade networks solidified Banaras’ position as an important political and economic center.

Diana Eck maintains that pilgrimages constituted a strand of Hindu tradition that

…one might call the “locative” strand of Hindu piety. Its traditions of ritual and reverence are linked primarily to place – to hill tops and rock outcroppings, to the headwaters and confluences of rivers, to the pools and groves of the forests, and to the boundaries of towns and villages. In this locative form of religiousness, the place is the primary locus of devotion.32

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 17-18.
32 Diana L. Eck, ‘India’s Tirthas: “Crossings” in Sacred Geography’ in *History of Religions*, 20, no. 4, 1981, pp. 323-324. Such a place is called *tirtha* which is “a holy site because it marks the spot where a divine being descended to the mundane world and impregnated the substances and atmosphere of the site with the essence of the divine.” Katherine Prior, *The British Administration of Hinduism in North India, 1780-1900* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cambridge University, 1990), p. 10.
Banaras’s position as an important pilgrimage center was consolidated under the patronage activities of emergent eighteenth-century Maratha polities during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Maratha rulers performed acts of piety through pilgrimage, temple-building, building of stone ghats along the Ganges, the establishment of patshalas and other centers of learning for dependent Brahmans. For instance, late eighteenth-century colonial records on a familial dispute reveal how Maratha Chitpavan Brahman priests and their families were maintained under patron-client relationships that stretched between the Deccan and Banaras. These relationships thereby established trans-local communities in the Banaras region.

To be sure, rulers from different parts of the country had undertaken temple-building in Banaras before the Marathas, and appointed Brahman priests to perform rituals and make offerings to gods on their behalf. For example, the Rajas of Jaipur had patronized the Vaisnava Bindumadhav temple located on the ghats of the Banaras city since the seventeenth century. Under the Marathas, such patronage reached new heights. A letter to the Resident at Banaras Jonathan Duncan is comments on the large number of people moving into the city with Maratha nobles. It revealed that a couple of relatives of the Peshwas were traveling to Banaras on a pilgrimage and that the official had issued 14,000 passports for pilgrims who were to accompany them. A state-

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34 Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, August 1792, Basta no. 35, Volume no. 58, pp. 183-210 and Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, September 1792, Basta no. 35, Volume no. 59, pp. 18-21, 26-28, Resident’s Proceedings Banaras, September 1792, Basta no. 35, Volume no. 60, pp. 92-100.
35 Banaras Duncan, July 1793, Basta no. 37, Volume no. 68, pp. 70-75.
36 Palmer to Jonathan Duncan, Resident at Banaras, 28 June 1789, Commissioners Office Banaras, June-July 1789, Basta no. 4, Volume no. 25, p. 441. It must be remarked, however, that the official expected only half of 14,000 passports to be used by pilgrims. See also Secretary to the Govt. to Jonathan Duncan, Resident at Banaras, Commissioners Office Banaras, January 1788, Basta no. 2, Volume no. 9, pp. 363-364
sponsored elite pilgrimage was usually a large entourage of pilgrims, an army to protect against bandits, priest to perform rituals for the ruler at holy sites, and camp followers.37

Prior has argued that such pilgrimages along with extensive temple-building projects were essential to state-formation under the Marathas.38 They enabled rulers to accumulate social and political prestige while ensuring political recognition and respect from rulers within whose territories pilgrimage sites lay. Furthermore, such performances of piety were essential to the well-being of the ruler and state.

Illustration 7: ‘The Raja of Benares’s palace at Ramnagar from the river, with the Raja’s state boat’. Source: British Library.

for another letter granting Balaji Rao of Kalpi and his 3,000 followers passage on their pilgrimage to Banaras.
37 Prior, *The British Administration of Hinduism in North India, 1780-1900*, pp. 24-44.
38 Ibid., pp. 16-24.
Accounts of conspicuous piety in Banaras highlight the movement of people and resources to the region. The Rajas of Banaras also participated in such practices of piety. Balwant Singh and his successor Chait Singh provided important patronage to temples and maths to attract pilgrims. Although eighteenth-century records do not provide details of the Banaras Rajas’ patronage of temples, examples may be gleaned from nineteenth-century writings of European missionaries and scholars traveling through Banaras. M. A. Sherring, a protestant missionary, wrote an extensive account of Chait Singh’s temple building activities in Ramnagar.\(^{39}\) In particular, Sherring drew attention to how the garden, tank, temples, and ghats in and around the Ramnagar fort were designed to accommodate the crowds of pilgrims who visited Banaras each year. Another missionary, Horace Wilson reported that Balwant Singh and Chait Singh patronized the Kabirpanthi sect. The Kabirpanthi sect was based on the teachings of Kabir who was a Nirguna Bhakti [devotion towards a god without form or attributes] saint.\(^{40}\) Wilson mentioned that the Kabirpanthi sect in Banaras received a monthly allowance from Balwant Singh and Chait Singh to support and feed mendicants whose numbers sometimes reached 35,000. Yet another record, an inscription shows that Chait Singh’s mother Panna patronized the construction of a well at a Kabir math.\(^{41}\)

Pilgrim routes linked Banaras to the networks of labor migration, piety, the exchange of goods and movement of money that stretched across northern India and from


\(^{41}\) See Inscription, ‘Inscribed stone by mother of King Chet Singh’ in the Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi.
Deccan to Bengal. Merchant-bankers at Banaras benefited immensely from the city’s renown as a holy site. Pilgrims who carried credit notes cashed these at Banaras with merchant-bankers who made immense profits through lucrative exchange rates. Pre-colonial principalities had multiple currencies in circulation that were largely based upon regional differences. Merchant-banking houses integrated regional economies through systems of exchange in currencies. By controlling rates of exchange, these merchant-bankers became rich from pilgrim traffic.

Enriched by pilgrim traffic, merchant-bankers undertook pilgrimages to various tirthas. A contemporary history by one of the descendants of Gopal Das, a merchant-banker who advanced huge sums of money to the Rajas of Banaras, the Nawabs of Awadh and the East India Company at various points during the eighteenth century, underscores the links between religiosity and trade in his family. descendants of Gopal Das examined eighteenth and early nineteenth-century account books of pandits, which recorded lists of pilgrims, their origins, caste, details of gifts given to the shrine, at important pilgrimage sites between the Deccan and Bengal to highlight the merchant-banking family’s practices of piety. Descendants highlighted that as Gopal Das’ business increased and more branches of his banking house were opened, they were accompanied by acts of piety directed specifically towards Vaisnava and Saiva shrines in important

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44 Mul Alok and Shrinath Shah, Kashi ka Shah Gharana: Ithas avam Vartaman (Varanasi: Pilgrims Publishing, 2007), p. xii, pp. 14-15 and p. 147. These details have been derived from the preserved account books of the pandits at Baidyanath dham, one of the principal Saiva pilgrim sites in contemporary Jharkhand.
pilgrimage sites including the Banaras city, and Chunar and Mirzapur, which were part of the Banaras zamindari.\textsuperscript{45}

The politico-socio and economic returns of practices of piety were critical to state-formation under the Rajas of Banaras.\textsuperscript{46} A later report by the Resident of Banaras Jonathan Duncan pointed to how Maratha building activities during Balwant Singh’s reign created a vibrant market in \textit{kunker chunam}, which was “lime prepared from a sort of hard gravel”.\textsuperscript{47} Several merchants and dealers supplying the much-in-demand material to Banaras city from the Chunar region competed with each other leading to violence and riots.\textsuperscript{48} In order to counter such violence, Balwant Singh established a monopoly on the sale of stone and firewood by farming it out as a revenue farm to one person for assessed revenue of 1,000 rupees in the first year, which increased to 22,000 rupees per annum by the end of Chait Singh’s reign.\textsuperscript{49} This increase in the assessed revenue in turn increased the price of \textit{chunam}. Duncan informed Hastings that before Banaras was ceded to the Company, the commander of Chunar, who was a dependent of the Nawab of Awadh, and the Raja of Banaras shared in this revenue.\textsuperscript{50}

The Rajas of Banaras therefore capitalized on the building activities in Banaras through the imposition and collection of duties and revenues. By establishing a monopoly over \textit{chunam}, the Rajas benefited economically and gained political significance.

\textsuperscript{46} See Francis Fowke, Resident at Banaras, to Warren Hastings, 7 March 1776, Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 3 April 1776, S 3 Apr. 76 (1), pp. 6-7. In this document, Frances Fowkes refers to duties paid by pilgrims to the rulers.
\textsuperscript{47} Report of Resident at Banaras to Governor General in Council, 3 October 1789, Banaras Duncan, 1782-1788, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 4, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 188. Report of Resident at Banaras to Governor General in Council, 19 November 1788, Banaras Duncan, 1782-1788, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 4, pp. 179-180.
Moreover, Rajas Balwant Singh and Chait Singh had unmediated access to materials to fund their own patronage activities. They were able to procure stone for a quarter the price that merchants were made to pay.\textsuperscript{51} When the East India Company tightened its control over the region in 1781 and doubled the revenue demands after Chait Singh’s removal, these privileges were withheld from the new Raja Mahipnarain despite his protests.\textsuperscript{52}

**Patron-Client Relationships between the Rajas of Banaras and the Naupatti Merchant-Bankers**

The emergence of local potentates such as the Rajas of Banaras can be traced to the ways in which they forged relationships with the merchant-bankers of Banaras. The Naupatti Sabha comprised of nine leading merchant-banking families from different backgrounds and castes who helped the Rajas of Banaras to meet their financial obligations to the Nawabs of Awadh.\textsuperscript{53} In utilizing the services of merchant-bankers, the early rajas of Banaras imitated the practices of the Mughal noble Rustam Ali. Rustam Ali was dependent upon the merchants Gowaldas and Gopaldas for the payment of revenues.\textsuperscript{54} In Rustam Ali’s period, these two merchants oversaw most of his monetary transactions. Mansaram and Balwant Singh who had gained prominence at Rustam Ali’s court in the 1720s came to power by promising a substantial increase over the amount Rustam Ali paid to the Nawab of Awadh in revenue payments.\textsuperscript{55} Aside from other factors, the Rajas

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{50} Report of Resident at Banaras to Governor General in Council, 19 November 1788, Banaras Duncan, 1782-1788, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 4, pp. 179-180.
  \item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., pp. 178-170.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 177.
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Alam, ‘Aspects of Agrarian Uprisings in North India in the Early Eighteenth Century’, pp. 97-98.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, pp. 9-10.
\end{itemize}
managed this feat by redirecting mercantile networks established by Rustam Ali to their advantage.  

It may be interpolated that the Rajas were able to create patron-client relationships with merchant-bankers when they emerged as the superior military power at Rustam Ali’s court. Both Mansaram and Balwant Singh had reduced several powerful zamindars in the region and brought them under their control. These political conditions, which formed the backdrop to the creation of an integrated economy and land-revenue system, would surely have appealed to merchant-bankers in the region.

Balwant Singh’s ability to extract revenue payments from zamindars on a regular basis secured the services of merchant-bankers. On the other hand, his relationship with the merchant-bankers became a defining factor in the continuation of his rule over the zamindari. Throughout the period of his reign, Balwant Singh was able to placate the Nawabs of Awadh by offering large sums of ready money that had no doubt been loaned to him by merchant-bankers. Thus in 1765, Balwant Singh was able to get himself reinstated in the Banaras zamindari despite his betrayal during the Afghan rebellion by offering 200,000 rupees as tribute to the Nawab and promising a further increase in annual revenue by 200,000 rupees. Another striking example is Balwant Singh’s acquisition of a new zamindari of Ghazipur in 1757. The author of The Bulwuntnamah noted that the Raja was able to wrest Ghazipur from the previous revenue farmer, Fazl Ali, by offering to pay the Nawab twice the annual revenue for the region.

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58 Ibid., p. 40-41.
Patron-client relationships between the Rajas of Banaras and Naupatti merchant-bankers overlapped with their shared practices of piety towards Gopal Lal Ji.⁵⁹ A manifestation of Lord Krishna, like other Vallabha idols, Gopal Lal Ji was “believed to contain this [Krishna] deity’s immanent presence and to possess (and emanate) his mystical powers.”⁶⁰ The Vallabha sampraday was a devotional sect that emerged during the sixteenth century. Founded by the Vaisnava saint, Vallabhacharya, it was one of the many Vaisnava sects that had gained popularity in north India from the sixteenth century onwards. However, Vallabha beliefs differed from other Vaisnava sects.⁶¹ The latter had been defined by dualist metaphysical systems in which the world was believed to be maya and the devotee sought to transcend the world to seek union with a distant and loving god. Vallabha beliefs, on the other hand, were more akin to Saiva non-dualist metaphysical philosophies that were based upon the belief that the universal god Shiva was the subtle body that emanated into the material world.⁶²

The potency of Vallabha idols in emanating divine power informed their patronage. According to Norbert Peabody, “members of the sect worship the idols in order to partake of their special powers.”⁶³ Therefore, the ability to see and worship the Vallabha idols was highly controlled and only the privileged were allowed to worship them. Peabody explains that the worship of the Shri Nathji idol in the eighteenth century

⁵⁹ Petition to Governor General from the Naupatti bankers and other merchants of Banaras, Pre-Mutiny Records, Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, Banaras, January 1798-February 1799, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 3, pp. 49-51.
⁶⁰ Peabody, Hindu Kingship and Polity in Pre-colonial India, p. 51.
⁶¹ Ibid., p. 55-56.
⁶³ Peabody, Hindu Kingship and Polity in Pre-colonial India, p. 52.
created tensions between ruling families in western India and trading sects who historically had charge of the idol and moved it between kingdoms.

Illustration 8: Gopal Lal Ji Temple: Inner compound (left) and Main gate (right).

Peabody has explored the connections between the idol of Shri Nathji, merchants and rulers in greater detail than is possible within the scope of this project. However, his study provides important insights into the patronage of Gopal Lal Ji in Banaras. We know that the Naupatti merchant bankers and the Rajas of Banaras were the principal patrons of the idol of Gopal Lal Ji from a late eighteenth-century petition to the East India Company by the same merchants. The worshippers of Gopal Lal Ji fervently believed that the divine power of the deity emanated from the idol in the temple. As the idol was a source of divine power, it is highly likely that its worship and patronage were zealously regulated. Being vested in the worldly pursuits of commercial and royal power, the Naupatti merchants and the Rajas sought to draw upon the powers of the idol to their

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64 Petition to Governor General from the Naupatti bankers and other merchants of Banaras, Pre-Mutiny Records, Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, Banaras, January 1798-February 1799, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 3, pp. 49-51.
65 Ibid., pp. 50.
advantage. That they shared in this privileged relationship of patronage towards the idol shows that their mutual success and fate were bound together.

By sharing in the patronage of Gopal Lal Ji with merchant-bankers, the Rajas Balwant Singh and Chait Singh were able to bolster ties that were critical to their finances. On the other hand, “as chief devotees and benefactors of shrines so closely associated with the ruling family, merchant people acquired enhanced status.” This explained why the merchants’ sought British patronage of the temple when they established their suzerainty over the region in the 1780s. In their petition, the merchants urged the East India Company officials to provide patronage to the shrine they were devoted to – which they claimed had suffered from the lack of patronage after the passing of Rajas Balwant Singh and Chait Singh. Such entreaties must necessarily be contextualized within shifts in the political economy when the East India Company emerged as the hegemonic power in the region. In these shifting political and economic contexts, the Naupatti merchants were prudent in attempting to associate themselves with the highest authority in the region through the shared patronage of the shrine.

**Gosain Pilgrimages and Trade Networks in the Banaras Political Economy**

The eighteenth century was marked by political fragmentation and the emergence of warring regional and local polities. This political scenario created a military labor market and consequently, a demand for the services of Shaiva ascetics who were renowned for

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68 Petition to Governor General from the Naupatti bankers and other merchants of Banaras, Pre-Mutiny Records, Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, Banaras, January 1798-February 1799, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 3, pp. 49-51.
their martial traditions.\textsuperscript{69} The potency of such sects lay in their ability to recruit large numbers from various caste backgrounds. These sects had an agrarian base with their members coming from the ranks of peasant and landless families. As has been pointed out by Pinch, numbers of followers grew in periods of famine and unrest in agrarian regions.\textsuperscript{70} In the second half of the eighteenth century, increased revenue demands in Bengal under Company rule during the latter half of the eighteenth century fueled growth in numbers of ascetic sects.\textsuperscript{71} In periods of agrarian unrest, impoverished peasant and laboring families would sell their children to members of these sects. These children were then incorporated into the sect as disciples, which tied them in bonds of loyalty and obedience towards their gurus.

The ascetic sects were organized according to martial traditions. They recruited large numbers of boys across caste boundaries whom they molded into a disciplined and cohesive body of warriors. Due to their effectiveness in battle, the Nawabs of Awadh recruited them into their armies beginning with Safdar Jung in 1751 when he strove to recover his territories from Ahmad Khan Bangash of Farrukhabad.\textsuperscript{72} Pinch argues that the recruitment of warrior ascetics by the Nawab of Awadh enabled him to make a decisive break from his dependence on the Mughals.\textsuperscript{73} Safdar Jung’s successor, Shuja-ud-daulah

\textsuperscript{69} See Pinch, \textit{Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires}, p. 10. Also see White, \textit{The Alchemical Body}.
\textsuperscript{70} Pinch, \textit{Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires}, pp. 80-81.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 81.
\textsuperscript{73} Pinch, \textit{Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires}, p. 111.
continued to recruit gosains into Awadh’s army and the gosain leaders, Anupgiri and Umraogiri, became favorites at the Nawab’s court.  

It is difficult to determine if gosains were recruited into the armies of the Banaras Rajas. However, we know gosains were important to Balwant Singh. Surviving records reveal that the Raja Balwant Singh patronized gosain sects through land grants. These land grants were recorded in a list of charitable grants to holy people including sheikhs and Brahmons. This suggests that aside from the powers of saints and Brahmons, the Rajas drew upon the authority of gosain ascetics and priests too.  

Worldly power was problematic in Brahman-centric structures of kingship precisely because of systems of thought that posited a division between the cosmic (divine) and human order. Relationships between the Brahman and the king sought to reconcile dharma with the king’s involvement in the corrupting, worldly power. However, other systems such as tantra involving gosain practitioners unapologetically enabled the king to channel this power. Tantra was based upon monistic systems of thought that underscored a continuity of being from the godhead to all forms of matter in the world. Tantric practitioners and philosophers posited that all beings emanated from the ultimate godhead and thereby were an important part of it.

Tantric practices were predicated on an energy grid which was three dimensional. It located the supreme deity at the center and apex of a hierarchized cosmos. All other

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75 Commissioners Office Banaras, August 1785, Basta no. 2, Volume no. 6, pp. 5-54.  
77 White, The Alchemical Body, p. 17.
beings, including the practitioner, were situated at lower levels of the grid. However, because the deity was transcendent and immanent, all of the beings located at the various levels on the grid participated in the “outward flow of the godhead, and are in some way emanations or hypostases of the deity himself (or herself)”.

Gosains were avid tantric practitioners who harnessed such power and were sought out by royal patrons.

There is no evidence which shows that the Rajas participated in tantric rituals. However, records show that the Rajas Balwant Singh and Chait Singh patronized gosain pilgrimage routes. Both these Rajas fostered ties with different tantric pilgrimage sites that stretched as far as Nepal and Tibet during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Accounts of East India Company officials who traveled to Tibet on diplomatic missions reveal how Raja Chait Singh used gosain informants to establish relations with the Panchen Lama of Tibet in the late eighteenth century. Tibetan Buddhists had revived tantra beginning with the sixteenth century. Gosain practitioners traced intimate connections between Vajrayana Buddhism and tantra in India. These connections brought Tibetan Buddhists to temples and pilgrimage sites in India. The third Panchen Lama who emerged as the most powerful authority in Tibet by the 1770s strengthened these ties.

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Toni Huber has attributed the increasing popularity of tantra and subsequently pilgrimages to Indian sites to gosains who connected key holy sites through their relations with Tibet. Gosains were traders, messengers and purveyors of news. Gosains acted as emissaries of heads of states in India and Tibet. Between 1771 and 1777, the Panchen Lama sponsored four pilgrimage missions to India which included gosains. The Raja of Banaras remained an important contact during these pilgrimages. Panchen Lama’s envoys were received at Chait Singh’s court and the Raja himself sent gifts along with his envoys to the former.

The eighteenth-century Banaras rulers participated in a cosmological, political and economic milieu that was mapped along the intertwining pilgrimage and trade routes of the gosains that tied centers of tantric thought and practice. The Rajas Balwant Singh and Chait Singh fervently supported gosain sects, piety and trade in the Banaras region. Balwant Singh patronized the construction of caravansarais for pilgrims and traders such as the one built in Mirzapur, a major trade entrepot and pilgrimage site. Travelers’ homes facilitated gosain movement.

The early rajas of Banaras fostered building activities in the district of Mirzapur which was a stronghold of gosain sects. Colonial deliberations on stone quarry duties in Mirzapur reveal that gosians could have enjoyed important privileges in support of their building activities. In these deliberations, gosains noted that during Balwant Singh and Chait Singh’s reigns, they arranged their own labor to cut stones from quarries and

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84 Ibid., pp. 194-202.
85 Commissioners Office Banaras Duncan, September 1788, Basta no. 3, Volume no. 17, pp. 49-56. This information emerges from a tussle for rights to the quarries in the district of Mirzapur between the
transport them by road to the mart at Mirzapur without paying any duties. With these exemptions, **gosains** constructed **maths**, temples and other stone buildings in Mirzapur.

Colonial records detailed a dispute between Sadashiv Lal, the tax collector, of a stone quarry farm at Mirzapur, and a **gosain**, Kalandar Gir. Kalandar Gir complained against Sadashiv Lal for charging duties on stones against customs that had been in place since the establishment of the Mirzapur mart in 1700. Kalandar Gir included the names of several other **gosains** to support his case against the tax-farmer and argued that they had never been charged duties provided that their own labor-force was used to cut the stones out of the quarry.

Kalandar Gir’s claims may not have been entirely unfounded. **Gosain** sects had been nurtured under the patronage of the Rajas of Banaras leading to their power and influence in the region. The Rajas of Banaras’ relationships with **gosains** were economically motivated too. Eighteenth-century colonial documents show how duties on goods were specially conceived to encourage **gosain** trade. According to colonial reports on the Banaras trade, during Balwant Singh’s reign, **gosain** traded goods for gold bullion in Nepal in return for gold bullion. Balwant Singh is said to have imposed a duty on the bullion imported by the ascetics through the **gosain** trade in Nepal. Although **gosains** were given favorable terms, the lucrative nature of their trade in gold made them subject to duties even after it had collapsed in 1763. The trade with Nepal is

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commanding officer at Mirzapur and Chait Singh’s successor, Mahipnarain. The documents reveal that by 1787 the Company had acquired a monopoly over the stone quarries.

86 See Banaras Duncan, February 1790, Basta no. 6, volume 33, pp. 527-536.
87 Ibid.
88 Banaras Duncan, August 1787, Basta no. 2, volume no. 7, p. 150.
89 Ibid., pp. 157-158.
90 Ibid.
said to have collapsed when the ascetic community stopped trading there due to unfavorable political shifts in Nepal. However, the tax collectors were allowed to continue charging duties on all the specie remitted by the ascetics.

The Rajas of Banaras introduced various measures to protect *gosain* trade. *Gosains* traveled in bands and were martially equipped, which is the reason why they were most successful in trading across vast distances. However, they did face challenges because of the nature of their trade. *Gosains*’ trade in gold made them attractive to bandits. Toni Huber’s reconstruction of the Tibetan *gosain* Sonam Rabgye’s journey from Tibet through Nepal, Bengal and into the Gangetic plains illuminates of the dangers faced by *gosain* traders.\(^9^1\) When Sonam Rabgye traveled to India from Nepal in 1752, bandits robbed him of gold and other valuables.

Records of the Banaras Resident Jonathan Duncan offer other useful information on trade under the early Rajas of Banaras. A petition by *gosains* and other merchants to the Resident revealed how the state under Balwant Singh and Chait Singh undertook the responsibility of fulfilling merchants’ losses in cases of robberies.\(^9^2\) The Rajas’ guarantee of security was particularly significant as *gosains* were prone to attacks by bandits.

*Gosains* prospered under the patronage of the Rajas of Banaras. Records show how *gosain* capital generated through trade formed an important component of the land-revenue system. For instance, the author of *The Bulwuntnamah* narrated how in 1755 Himmat Bahadur, the zamindar of Garwara, was able to retain his *zamindari* when one Jatti Gosain agreed to provide security for *zamindari*’s land-revenue commitments

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\(^9^2\) Banaras Duncan, August 1787, Basta no. 2, volume no. 7, pp. 196-199.
amounting to 80,000 rupees.³ They were beginning to act as bankers, providing security for payment of revenue and acting as creditors for landlords. They illuminate how gosain capital was woven into the land-revenue structures from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century.⁴ Records from the early nineteenth century thus pointed to how gosains comprised of one of the richest communities in the region who had considerable property in the Banaras city.⁵

**Shifting Deference from Awadh to the East India Company, 1770-1775**

Relationships between the Banaras Raj and the client groups of merchant-bankers and gosains underwent important shifts as the East India Company expanded its political and economic control over the region. The exigencies of Company rule were intricately connected to its relationship with Awadh.

When Chait Singh came to power in 1770, the political economy of northern India was shaped by the expanding powers of the Marathas, the rulers of Awadh and the East India Company. From 1770, the Marathas gained influence over the Mughal Emperor and used his authority to formally take over several of his territories. These included the territories Kora and Allahabad that had been bestowed by the Awadh rulers to the Shah Alam II at the behest of the East India Company. The transfer of these regions, on paper, to the Marathas brought their threat closer to Awadh. The presence of British troops in

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³ See for example the case of Juttee Gosain who in 1755 provided the security for Himmat Bahadur’s revenue commitments, Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 37-38.

⁴ See Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 5, Banaras Collectorate Records Basta no. 4 (a), volume no. 23, Year January 1811 to 6 December ...? [not mentioned on the volume cover], pp. 169-176; Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General Benares 1820-1822, Basta no. 3, volume no. 15, pp. 107-108, Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General Benares, 1822-1825, Basta no. 4, volume no. 16, p. 140. See Banaras Duncan, March 1794, Basta no. 39, volume no. 78, pp. 163-177.

⁵ Banaras Collectorate, Basta no. 4 (a), volume no. 22, Year January 1827 to April 1829, p. 103.
Awadh, however, deterred Maratha occupation. Instead, they launched an attack on the regional kingdom of Rohilkhand in 1772 which was formed under the leadership of Afghan mercenary soldiers during the decline of the Mughal Empire.

Maratha incursions into Rohilkhand significantly shaped the Nawab of Awadh Shuja-ud-daulah’s expansionist policies in the early 1770s. The Nawab hired Company troops to drive the Marathas out of Rohilkhand and to subordinate the Rohillas to his authority. In 1772, the Nawab carved a treaty with the Rohillas under which the latter were to pay him 4,000,000 rupees in installments for assistance against the Marathas. In 1774, however, Shuja-ud-daulah annexed Rohilkhand using the Rohillas’ inability to pay the installments as a pretext. Around the same period, the Nawab deployed his armies to challenge the Maratha occupation of territories around the other Afghan regional kingdom of Farrukhabad, which came under the authority of the Bangash Pathans. In 1772, Shuja-ud-daulah entered into a treaty to support the ruler of Farrukhabad against the Marathas who had occupied the latter’s territories. After successfully expelling the Marathas from these territories in 1773, Shuja-ud-daulah signed another treaty with the ruler of Farrukhabad that allowed the Nawab to keep certain territories adjoining the Awadh border. During this period, the Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah regained possession of

97 Barnett, *North India between Empires*, p. 93.
98 Foreign Department, Branch: Select Committee proceedings 1771, Consultation: SC Proceedings 2 January- 6 December 1771, see p. 275 and 285.
99 Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28th June 1785, Consultation: S 28 June 85 (20). The treaties forged by Shuja-ud-daulah in the early 1770s can be found in this document.
100 Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28th June 1785, Consultation: S 28 June 85 (20).
Kora and Allahabad and in return agreed to pay 5,000,000 rupees to the East India Company.\textsuperscript{101} 

Awadh’s expansionist policies fed the political and fiscal needs of the East India Company. Correspondence between East India Company officials revealed how Shuja-ud-daulah’s ambitions secured the East India Company’s dominions in Bengal against the Marathas without the requisite war expenses that were instead transferred to the Nawab of Awadh.\textsuperscript{102} The Nawab of Awadh would thus have the services of the East India Company’s armies upon the payment of substantial sums of money. In 1773, it was settled that the Nawab would pay 210,000 rupees per month for each brigade hired. These brigades were then actively used in the reduction of Rohilla power.\textsuperscript{103} The Company strengthened its economic position further by establishing favorable trade relations with the regional state.

Between 1768 and 1773, the trade relations between Shuja-ud-daulah and the East India Company underwent significant upheavals and changes. The 1765 Treaty of Allahabad between Shuja-ud-daulah and the East India Company included duty-free trade for English merchants in the regions of Awadh. The Nawab of Awadh was strongly opposed to this clause which is why between 1765 and 1771, duty-free trade was allowed and then disallowed following repeated protests by the Nawab.\textsuperscript{104} 

In 1773, Shuja-ud-daulah effectively imposed a trade barrier against the East India Company’s commercial expansion in Awadh. Awadh resisted the onslaught of

\textsuperscript{101} Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 25\textsuperscript{th} September 1773, no. 3, Consultation: S 23 Sept. 73 (3). See also Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings 21 June to 30 December 1773, pp. 540-545. 
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{103} Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 3 January- 3 June 1774, Consultation: S 3 Jan 74 (10).
duty-free Company trade until the 1790s. However, its indebtedness to the East India Company created a relationship of dependence. To make matters worse, Company officials besieged Shuja-ud-daulah and Asaf-ud-daulah with demands for repayment of debt. These engagements had a direct bearing on Banaras. In 1775, the Company signed a new treaty with the Nawab of Awadh in spite of the Nawab’s protests against it. A major clause of the treaty included the shift in possession of the Banaras region from the Nawab of Awadh to the East India Company.

The Company took direct possession of Banaras in that same year. Upon taking charge, it gave Chait Singh, the ruler of Banaras, uncontested authority over revenue collection and administration provided he paid the annual revenue of 2,248,449 rupees, the same as under Shuja-ud-daulah, to the Company and maintained a regular cavalry of 2,000 men for the Company’s service. The shifts in 1775 relieved Chait Singh from obligations to the Nawab of Awadh. The Company gave Chait Singh some authority. However, its political and economic engagements reshaped the patron-client relationships that had been so critical to the constitution of kingship under the Banaras Rajas.

**Patron-Client Relationships between the East India Company and the Merchant-Bankers**

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104 Barnett, *North India between Empires*, p. 84.
105 Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 3 January-3 June 1774, Consultation: S 3 Jan 74 (10), p. 316, Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 26th June, 1775, Consultation: S 26 Jun. 75 (2), Home Series Miscellaneous, Home MI SC/235, IOR/H/ Misc/235, date 13 Feb 1775, p. 9.
106 *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, Vol. IV, letter no. 1701, p. 296.
108 *Calendar of Persian Correspondence Vol. IV* (Delhi: Imperial Records Department, National Archives of India,1919), letter no. 1701, p. 296. Also see C.U Aitchinson, *A Collection of treaties, engagements and sunnuds relating to India and its neighboring countries* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer), Volume 2, pp. 74-77.
109 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 12 June 1775, no. 2, Consultation: S 12 Jun. 75 (2).
The Rajas of Banaras had been dependent on Banaras’ merchant-banking families to remit their revenue-payments to the Nawab of Awadh and later to the British. Banking houses made large temporary loans against the incoming land-revenue to the Raja. Their systems of credit made it possible for the Rajas to remit their tribute regularly and safely across distances to the Nawab of Awadh or the British.\textsuperscript{110}

Merchant-bankers benefited immensely by extending these loans. Bayly and others have noted that large Lucknow and Banaras banking houses handling the Banaras revenue charged two and half percent of the amount as service charges.\textsuperscript{111} The East India Company’s engagements with merchant-bankers of Banaras provided new opportunities to the latter in this regard.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, the East India Company became dependent upon the Naupatti merchant-bankers to sustain the Company’s trading and military activities through the advancement of loans in ready money.\textsuperscript{112} It made use of the “fiscal relations which had been created between the Indian principalities and the capital-owning corporations.”\textsuperscript{113} On the other hand, merchant-bankers were able to generate competition between different rulers as their combined demands of tributary payments, pilgrimages, military supply and trade were linked together in their dependence on mercantile corporations.\textsuperscript{114}

The political shifts following the cession of Banaras to the East India Company nonetheless presented new challenges for merchant-bankers. During the 1770s, the

\textsuperscript{110} Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, pp. 168-169.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., pp.232- 234.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
Company officials altered certain policies that were brought to bear on fiscal arrangements with the Raja of Banaras regarding the payment of revenue. Banaras merchant-bankers contested these policies. As I will show in this section, these contestations had an adverse impact on the Raja of Banaras.

Chait Singh relied on *hundis* issued by merchant-banking houses such as those of Kashmirimal to secure the payment of his tribute periodically in installments to Calcutta. Between 1775 and mid 1777, Chait Singh’s revenue payments to the Company appear to have been regular and the transactions relatively smooth.\(^{115}\) In September 1777 however, revenue payments were disrupted when the merchant-banking houses in Banaras refused to issue *hundis* towards Chait Singh’s monthly installments to the East India Company.\(^{116}\)

These disruptions were directly related to the Company’s reforms regarding revenue payments. In 1776, the Company insisted that Chait Singh pay the revenue in Calcutta *siccas*. This injunction came after a prolonged period of dispute between the Company officials and Chait Singh. When the Company assumed direct possession of Banaras in 1775, it allowed Chait Singh to pay revenue in Banaras coin from his mint at Banaras on two conditions: first that the coins were not debased and second that no changes were made to the weight or alloy of the coin without the sanction of the

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\(^{114}\)Ibid., pp.170-171.  
\(^{115}\)Foreign Department, Secret Branch 15 July 1776, Consultation no. S 15 July 76 (2), Foreign Department, Secret Branch 19 August 1776, Consultation no. S 19 August 76 (9), Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 23 September 1776, Consultation no. S 23 Sept. 76 (31), Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 21 October 1776, Consultation no. S 21 Oct. 76 (15, 16, 17, 18- four files in themselves). For the year 1777 see Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 17 Feb 1777 (22), 31 March 1777 (16), 21 April, 1777 (16), 19 May 1777 (1), 30 June 1777 (3).  
\(^{116}\)Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Vol. V (Delhi: Imperial Records Department, National Archives of India,1919), letter no. 649.
However, further colonial correspondence on the subject revealed that these standards were not maintained at the Banaras mint. Governor-General Warren Hastings reprimanded the Raja and Francis Fowkes, the British Resident at Banaras at the time, for this negligence. As a result, Chait Singh had to pay the tribute in Calcutta siccas.119

The merchants of Banaras complained against this requirement. The Company’s deliberations on the matter of the Banaras coin and the subsequent debates on its standard created confusion regarding the exchange rates between the Banaras coin and the Calcutta sicca.120 The merchants argued that the rate of exchange between Banaras coin and the Calcutta siccas, which had been contracted between them and Chait Singh on an older standard and alloy of the Banaras currency, was much lower than the exchange rate based on the new standard and alloy of the currency. 121 The merchant-bankers argued that the East India Company’s exchange rate put them at a loss.

An examination of records on the Banaras mint, however, reveals that much more was at stake than appeared in the bankers’ complaints.122 Colonial reports from the 1780s which dwelt on the history of the Banaras mint show that in 1755, Shuja-ud-daulah farmed the Banaras mint to his brother-in-law.123 He in turn farmed it to the Naupatti

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117 See Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 12 June 1775, no. 3, Consultation: S 12 Jun. 75 (2). Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 12 June 1775, no. 3, Consultation: S 12 Jun. 75 (3).
118 See, Foreign Department, Secret Branch 1 February, 1776, Consultation: S 1 Feb. 76 (5). For allegations against Francis Fowkes see Banaras Duncan, December 1776, Basta no. 1, volume no. 2, pp. 5-7.
119 See, Foreign Department, Secret Branch, Consultation: S 26 Feb 76 (5).
120 See, Foreign Department, Secret Branch 1 February, 1776, Consultation: S 1 Feb. 76 (5).
121 See, Foreign Department, Secret branch, 1 December 1777, no. A. See also Foreign Department Secret branch, 1 December 1777, no. 6.
122 See, Home Department, Public Branch, Public proceedings 24-28 December, 1786, serial no. 35, see pages 5313-5315 and 5322-5331 for the account on the Banaras Mint.
123 See, Home Department, Public Branch, Public proceedings 24-28 December, 1786, serial no. 35, see pages 5311.
merchant-banker Gopal Das Sahu. Under Gopal Das Sahu, the coins were so debased that Balwant Singh, who paid his revenue obligation to the Nawab of Awadh in Banaras coin, refused to accept any currency from the mint. Shuja-ud-daulah is said to have removed Gopal Das in response. Gopal Das is said to have gained and lost the rights to farm the mint on four separate occasions. Aside from Gopal Das, two other Naupatti merchants, Jamimal and Ami Chand, gained the rights to farm the mint on different occasions from the Nawab of Awadh’s officials. By 1775, the Company took over the mint from the Nawab of Awadh when it assumed direct control over Banaras. Company officials put Chait Singh in charge of it. As I show in the following paragraphs, under the supervision of the Company, merchant-bankers could no longer afford to control the standard of coins.

Merchant-bankers’ close ties with the mint are useful in considering how they would have been able to control the standard and hence, the real exchange rate of the coin to their advantage. This history provides an important context for the bankers’ complaints to the Company in 1777. The regulations of the Company threatened the advantages banking communities had gained in the market by their manipulation of the Banaras currency.

Further reforms under the Company threatened to reduce the bankers’ advantages. By 1777 the Company had decided to demonetize gold in favor of a monometalic system based on silver. Governor-General Hastings temporarily suspended gold coinage for

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three years. In same year, the bankers Kashmirimal and Lala Bacchiraj argued that they remitted the Raja’s revenue payments to Calcutta by sending gold to the mint at Murshidabad where it was converted into gold coins. These coins were then sent to Calcutta and paid into the Company’s treasury. 

By establishing a monometallic system, the Company had reduced important advantages for the merchants that had ironically emerged from its own previous policies. In the 1760s, colonial officials had placed the ratio of gold to silver currency at a much higher rate than the market ratio. This created a scarcity of silver currency as merchants and others started using it to buy gold at much cheaper rates in the market. It may be interpolated that the Naupatti bankers bought gold at the lower market rate, sent it to the Murshidabad mint to be coined into gold mohurs and finally paid these into the treasury as part of the revenue payments that were denominated in Calcutta siccas. This conversion of gold metal bought at cheaper rates, while meeting the nominal value of the revenue payments in Calcutta siccas, reduced the real value of the payments made by the merchant-bankers.

Following the merchant-bankers’ refusal to make revenue payments on Chait Singh’s behalf, the Board of Governors wrote to Thomas Graham, the newly appointed Resident at Banaras in October 1777, urging him to settle and resume the tenders for revenue payment with the bankers. Meanwhile when Chait Singh approached Thomas Graham and Hastings regarding his inability to pay the installments due to the merchant-

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126 See Foreign Department, Secret branch, 1 December 1777, no. A.
128 Banaras Duncan, December 1776, Basta no. 1, volume no. 2, pp. 54-55.
bankers refusal to advance him the money, the officials were unrelenting in their demand for regular payment of the tribute.\textsuperscript{129}

Throughout the controversy, Banaras’ merchant-bankers argued that these currency reforms were unjust and put them at a loss. In response, they used their economic clout to disrupt the revenue payments thereby highlighting both the Banaras Raj and the Company’s dependence on them. As has already been pointed out, Banaras banking families had reached new heights in the Company-dominated political economy of the 1770s. Relationships of dependence now included bankers on the one hand and the Company and Banaras Rajas on the other. However, the hierarchies of power between the Company and the Raja of Banaras made the latter particularly vulnerable in this triangulated relationship of dependence. On the other hand, the Company and Banaras Rajas’ dependence emboldened merchant-bankers to assert their indispensability.

In the period following Chait Singh’s expulsion, relations between the Banaras Raj and the Company were restructured. Company policies were directed towards establishing a stable administration which would preserve British interests in the region. As I will show here, such restructuring complicated relations between the Raja of Banaras and their client merchant-bankers in significant ways.

In 1781, after Chait Singh’s successor Mahipnarain’s accession to the throne, Governor-General Hastings introduced extensive political and economic reforms in the zamindari. These reforms were poised to increase Company control over the region and reduce the authority of the new Raja. Thus in his letter to the council of governors

\textsuperscript{129} Calendar of Persian Correspondence Vol. V (Delhi: Imperial Records Department, National Archives of India, 1919), letters no. 649, 662 and 718.
regarding his reforms, Hastings wrote that the new Raja Mahipnarain had been apprized of the colonial government’s intentions to disallow him from exercising “any privilege or authority, on which an opinion of independency could be founded.”

Under Hastings’ reforms, the rights to the Banaras mint, kotwali of the town of Banaras, administration of justice, power of levying duties and maintaining fortresses in the zamindari came under the authority of a Company appointed Indian official. These shifts were accompanied by massive increases in revenue demands from the Raja that nearly doubled the revenue payment commitments during Chait Singh’s reign. They made the Raja even more dependent on merchant-bankers than before.

As Company officials curtailed the authority of the Banaras Raja, the exigencies of Company demands of revenue payments and its own requirements for money bolstered that of merchant-bankers. Records on Mahipnarain’s revenue payments from 1782 to 1785 show how the Raja struggled to meet them on a regular basis. Company officials sequestered some of his jagirs until the balances were paid through loans extended by Gopal Das Sahu, the Banaras banker.

These shifts provoked responses from the Raja. In a petition to the Governor General in 1785, Mahipnarain requested that he be allowed to perform the usual

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130 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch: 3 December 1781, Consultation: S 3 Dec. 81 (1).
131 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Department S 12 Nov 81 (5) Year 1781 and Foreign and Political Department, Secret Department S 12 Nov. 81 (7) Year 1781. See also Calendar of Persian Correspondence, volume VI (Delhi: Imperial Records Department, National Archives of India, 1919), letter no. 292, pp. 108-109.
132 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch, 19 November 1781, Consultation: S 19 Nov. 81 (5)
133 Foreign and Political Department, Year 4 December, 1782, Consultation: 4 Dec. 82 (3).
Foreign and Secret Department, Secret Branch, Year 1783, Consultation: S 24 Mar 83 (2). Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28th June 1785, Consultation: Proceedings 28th June 1785, p. 2179 and pp. 2252-2254.
ceremonies and rituals that were befitting of a king.\textsuperscript{134} These included the right to present *khilats* to his dependents upon their appointments. He went on to petition that his officials be ordered to pay obeisance to him upon receiving or taking leave of him.

In late eighteenth-century Banaras, the emergent nexus of services, movements of money, hierarchies of deference and political intrigues reconstituted the patron-client relationships between the Rajas of Banaras and their client merchant-bankers. To be sure, contestations between the client bankers and the patron Raja of Banaras cannot be attributed entirely to the emergence of the East India Company. Earlier, I have emphasized that under the Rajas of Banaras, kingship was constituted by ensuring services from key client groups. Through their key services towards kingship, client groups shared in the sovereignty of the king.\textsuperscript{135} Such sharing had necessarily engendered processes of contestation between patrons and clients. Nevertheless, established hierarchies between patrons and clients underwent critical shifts.

These shifts are manifested in the accumulation of land rights by merchant-bankers. Sources reveal that merchant-bankers insinuated themselves into the land-revenue structures by drawing upon their relationships with Company officials. A dispute between Kashmirimal, the Raja’s principal banker and Mahipnarain shows that established hierarchies were being challenged in the period. The banker Kashmirimal, who was appointed as Mahipnarain’s treasurer in 1784, acquired rights in land shortly

\textsuperscript{134} Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, Consultation: Proceedings 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, p. 2179.

afterwards through the machinations of the Resident Francis Fowkes. At first, the banker is said to have obtained the right to farm the revenue of certain parganas in Jaunpur and Ghazipur together with Mahipnarain. However, in 1786, Mahipnarain complained to the Resident James Grant that Kashmirimal had taken the land-revenue in certain villages and talukas in the Ghazipur district as his jagir without a sanad from him. As a revenue farmer, Kashmirimal profited by fixing and even reducing the jama below the Raja’s assigned sum. Upon reducing the jama of certain villages and talukas, Kashmirimal took them as his jagir. The report reveals that the Raja had made several efforts to hold Kashmirimal accountable for his actions but the banker refused to come to his court.

After Mahipnarain’s complaint, Kashmirimal was ordered to pay the balance he owed in revenue payments in 1786. Additionally, Company officials declared that the Raja had no right to alienate any cultivable land either voluntarily or involuntarily without consulting them. It was argued that “as the alienation of lands in perpetuity in the zemindarry [sic] of Benares [sic] without the authority of Government was not only repugnant to the rights of the company but injurious to the Public revenue.” Hastings’ successor Cornwallis revoked any grant of land as jagir that was alienated in perpetuity after 1784 including that of Kashmirimal. Furthermore the office of the Raja’s treasurer, which was usually occupied by merchant-bankers, was abolished by the Company.

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137 Foreign Department, Secret and Political Proceedings 6 November- 22 December, 1786, December 1786 (77A), pp. 4033-4036.
138 Ibid., pp. 4037-4044.
The institutionalization of Company rule presented new challenges to client groups as it foreclosed possibilities of negotiation and contestation that informed kingship under pre-colonial polities. These shifts explain why Gopal Das Sahu was able to negotiate and gain farming rights to the Banaras mint on multiple occasions during the 1750s and 60s under the Nawab of Awadh and why Kashmirimal had a radically different experience in the 1780s.

**Patron-Client Relationships between the East India Company and Gosains**

During the early years of Chait Singh’s reign, the exigencies of colonial rule had a critical impact on the position of *gosains* in Banaras and Awadh. As Pinch has argued, the East India Company officials perceived *gosains* as a threat to the company’s control over the revenue in Bengal.  

*Gosains*, whose networks stretched across Bengal, were known to command the support of numerous landless laborers and peasants who were recruited within the sects in times of famines. These armed sects were seen as antithetical to the Company’s envisioned stable agrarian order.

To this end, warrior ascetics were excluded from the Awadh court. East India Company officials edged Shuja-ud-daulah’s key dependents Himmat Bahadur and his brother from the court of Awadh after his successor Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah came to power in 1775.  

In Banaras, records show how Hastings began to put pressure on Chait Singh to provide military support to help the British suppress ascetics.  

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139 Foreign Department, Secret and Political Proceedings 6 November- 22 December, 1786, December 1786 (77A), pp. 4037-4044.
140 Political and Secret Department, 5 Jan 1778-25 Aug 1794, IOL/L/PS/5/20, pp. 149-157.
142 Ibid., p.113.
143 Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 3 January- 3 June 1774, Consultation: S 3 Jan 74 (10).
supply a cavalry of 500 soldiers to the Company for this purpose.\textsuperscript{144} Chait Singh’s participation in this suppression would surely have destabilized established relationships of patronage between the Raja of Banaras and the \textit{gosains}.

Within Banaras, Company regulations against \textit{gosains} in this period were directly related to concerns over trade. After failed negotiations in 1773, Shuja-ud-daulah refused to lift the trade barrier against the Company and private English merchants in Awadh. However, in Banaras, Hastings was able to enforce duty-free trade on Company goods such as broadcloth, lead, and copper.\textsuperscript{145} The imposition of duty-free trade in Banaras allowed Company appointed \textit{gomashtas} to use Banaras’ vibrant trade networks.

The trading privileges achieved by the Company in Banaras followed its establishment of monopolistic rights over the trade in Bengal in 1764. However, the Company had undercut indigenous trading activities like that of the \textit{gosains} even prior to this period which may explain why a group of \textit{gosains} had wrecked one of the Company’s factory-warehouses in 1763 in Dacca.\textsuperscript{146} After these violent events, the Company began controlling \textit{gosain} movement along pilgrimage routes. Its regulations impacted \textit{gosain} trade.\textsuperscript{147}

In the 1770s, the newly appointed Governor-General Warren Hastings undertook several measures to barricade \textit{gosain} travel through the regions of Banaras along routes that eventually led to Bengal. In a letter to Hastings in April 1775, Lt. Colonel Muir, the officer in charge of Company troops in the Banaras region, reported that Muir’s troops

\textsuperscript{144} See \textit{Calendar of Persian Correspondence Vol. IV} (Delhi: Imperial Records Department, National Archives of India, 1919). See letter no. 822, February 1774, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{145} Banaras Duncan, August 1787, Basta no. 2, volume no. 7, p. 195 (page had several paginations, 105, 42)
\textsuperscript{146} Pinch, \textit{Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires}, p. 87.
and his hircurrahs were redirecting ascetic groups away from the Banaras routes. A month later Chait Singh wrote to Governor-General Hastings complaining about Muir’s harassment of traders at the chaukis and his impositions of new duties on pilgrims. From the timing of Muir’s report on and Chait Singh’s complaint it may be surmised that these traders and pilgrims who were harassed by Company officials included gosains.

The seizure of goods from traders at the chaukis disrupted trade and pilgrimage activities in the region. These disruptions were exacerbated in 1781 when Hastings introduced his reforms in trade following which gosain traders temporarily boycotted Banaras.

Trade reforms included the establishment of a custom house in Banaras which discouraged gosain trade by charging high rates of duties. For instance, the duty on luxury goods was increased from 25 rupees per cart to 100 rupees. In their petitions to the Resident at Banaras, gosain traders stated that in the time of Raja Balwant Singh they were well protected. If goods were lost, they were made good by the Raja. They went on to complain that the Rajas put the kotwal in charge of their protection. However they noted that since 1781, they were charged 5 percent of the value of goods they were moving for protection and yet their goods went unprotected.

Hastings’ policies disrupted gosain trading activities in the region. However, they also compromised gosain pilgrimage activities. The critical connection between trade and

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147 Ibid., p.87.
148 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch, Year 1775, Consultation: S 20 Apr 75 (2)
149 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch, Year 1775, Consultation: S 22 May 75 (14)
150 See petitions by Dasnami ascetics in Banaras Duncan, August 1787, Basta no. 2, volume no. 7, p.161.
151 Banaras Duncan, August 1787, Basta no 2, volume no. 7, p. 152.
152 Ibid., p. 197.
religiosity was lost on Company officials. Katherine Prior has argued that Company policies towards pilgrimage activities were based upon epistemologies that separated the divine from the tangible, material world.\textsuperscript{153} Writing about Maratha pilgrimages, Prior has argued that colonial officials found the political and religious activities that Maratha rulers undertook during state sponsored pilgrimages contradictory to each other.

In the context of gosains in Banaras, such predispositions informed Hastings’ contradictory measures in his reforms. Thus even as Hastings constrained gosain trade under his reforms on the one hand, on the other, he abolished various duties levied on pilgrims arguing that they were a “great discouragement” to pilgrims whose “spirit of devotion” brought them to Banaras.\textsuperscript{154} In the late eighteenth century, colonial officials’ assessment of gosains was informed by Enlightenment conceptions of religion which were pivoted upon a private and spiritual belief in a distant but loving God.\textsuperscript{155}

\textbf{Sovereignty and Piety under the Early Colonial Administration}

Patron-client relationships between the Company and service groups were mediated by institutions such as colonial law. In the eighteenth century, the East India Company organized colonial courts into two separate categories: criminal and personal. As Radhika Singha has shown, the state claimed exclusive rights to juridical power and reserved the right to criminal justice.\textsuperscript{156}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{153} Prior, \textit{The British Administration of Hinduism in North India, 1780-1900}, p. 39.
\bibitem{154} Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch: 3 December 1781, Consultation: S 3 Dec. 81 (1), pp. 13-15.
\bibitem{155} Pinch, \textit{Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires}, pp. 10-14.
\end{thebibliography}
This conception of an indivisible sovereignty stood in contrast to pre-colonial practices of kingship in which the “rights to wield force, administer justice and award punishment, could be layered or farmed out along with fiscal rights.” Colonial officials critiqued indigenous practices of kingship that had allowed revenue farmers to wield military might, juridical authority along with fiscal rights. Company officials argued that the administration of justice under kings, zamindars and other officials was despotic and fostered chaos and disorder. Such critiques emphasized the importance of abstracting juridical authority from commercial and fiscal motives for the sake of public justice. By emphasizing the venality in pre-colonial judicial practices, the Company legitimized its interventions.158

The Company’s assertions for exclusive sovereignty were, however, counterpoised by their conceptualization of the sphere of personal law. Personal law pertained specifically to matters of marriage, inheritance, debt and religious worship. Cases related to these issues were to be administered according to the religious laws of parties concerned. Colonial officials upheld the institutionalization of personal law in civil courts by arguing that it protected the “personal rights” of its subject populations.159 However, as has already been pointed out in the previous chapter, the formulation of religious law under colonial agency was in itself an innovation.

In the late eighteenth century, patron-client relationships between the Company and the merchant-bankers were refracted through these institutional innovations. Records from Hastings’ judicial reforms in Banaras reveal that aside from discourses on the

157 Ibid., p. x
158 Ibid., pp.21-35.
159 Ibid., p.121.
venality of the Rajas of Banaras, officials implicated the city’s prominent merchants in
the exploitation of the “citizens of Benares.”160 When colonial officials articulated
discourses on the venality of the merchants, they were reacting against the merchants’
political power in the region.

The Banaras merchants’ political power was manifested in their juridical rights
and authority. Judicial reforms aimed towards curtailing these rights had important
implications for the bankers, who contested them. They contextualized their arguments
on rights within pre-colonial practices of jurisprudence according to which social groups
with political and economic power could wield special privileges and rights over their
inferiors.161

In 1798, the Naupatti merchant-bankers approached colonial authorities
complaining how certain judicial processes in the civil court undercut rights they had
held since “ancient times.”162 Significantly, their assertions of rights were framed within
pre-colonial systems of jurisprudence where, as Sumit Guha has underlined, antiquity of
practice was a source of right.163 Banking families sought recognition of their traditional
practices upon which they argued their success was conditioned. Among other issues, the
petition addressed the question of debt. When the Naupatti banking families petitioned to
Cornwallis regarding the recovery of debts, they stated that colonial regulations required

160 Hastings to Edward Wheeler, Esquire, Fort William, Foreign and Political Department, Secret
Department S 12 Nov 81 (5).
161 For a useful article on customary practices and rights in eighteenth-century polities see Sumit Guha,
‘Wrongs and Rights in the Maratha Country: Antiquity, Custom and Power in Eighteenth-century India’ in
Michael R. Anderson and Sumit Guha eds., Changing Concepts of Rights and Justice in South Asia (Delhi:
162 See Pre-Mutiny Records, Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, Banaras, January 1798-
February 1799, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 3, pp. 59-67.
India’, pp. 16-18.
them to submit a petition in the civil court against the debtor. However, they went on to argue that when the court sent summonses to their debtors, the latter disappeared. Therefore, the Naupatti merchants requested that they be allowed to recover debts in “whatever mode they can”.

In their petition, the merchants linked their access to special privileges and rights to customary practice and the respectability they had commanded in the region since the reign of the early rajas of Banaras. However, even as they critiqued colonial law, merchants strengthened their position by invoking the *shastras* as a source of authority to justify their practices. As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, Company officials foregrounded the authority of antiquated texts such as the *shastras* for deliberating over issues that came under Hindu law. Therefore, interestingly, in their petition for rights to practice their traditional way of conducting business, bankers emphasized both customary practices that were determined by their privileged status and the emergent colonial renderings of the authority of the *shastras*.

Such recourse to a multiplicity of sources of authority was hardly novel. In the context of eighteenth-century Maratha polity, Sumit Guha has argued that vested parties could invoked a multiplicity of scriptural and customary sources of rights to strengthen their cases. It is possible that merchant-bankers applied such approaches to retain the power and authority they had enjoyed under the Rajas of Banaras.

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164 See Pre-Mutiny Records, Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, Banaras, January 1798-February 1799, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 3, p. 63.
165 Ibid.
In the late eighteenth century, merchant-bankers negotiated with the Company in order to establish older styles of patron-client relationships. This point is reinforced by considering how the petition to the Governor General was accompanied by their petition regarding the Gopal Lal Ji temple in 1798.167 In this petition, the bankers exhorted the Governor General to patronize the temple of Gopal Lal Ji as the Rajas Balwant Singh and Chait Singh had done before them. They stressed that “in all countries where places of sacred worship of this description exist the Rajahs [sic] and men of rank consider themselves happy in offering services to them.”168 By forging relationships of shared piety between the Company officials as the new rulers of the region and themselves as “men of rank”, merchant-bankers hoped to re-create patron-client relationships in which they too could partake in the sovereignty and status of the new rulers.

Significantly, bankers’ exhortations to the Company were at odds with colonial constitutions of personal law according to which religious practices were matters of personal belief. By inviting the Company state to participate in piety towards Gopal Lal Ji, merchant-bankers pointed to the direct relation between political and religious practices. Furthermore, their emphasis on sharing piety with the Company countered colonial categorizations where religion became a key organizational field for constructing mutually exclusive communities under personal law.

Reconstituting Cosmologies: Gosains and Colonial Law, 1784-1791

In the years subsequent to Hastings’ reforms in 1781, the Company reversed its policies towards gosains. Reports on trade reforms in the years 1784 and 1787 reveal that the

167 See Pre-Mutiny Records, Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, Banaras, January 1798-February 1799, Basta no. 1, Volume no. 3, p. 57.
Company began making various concessions for *gosains* on the subject of duties.\(^{169}\)

Trade concessions were directly related to the *gosains’* involvement in the Company’s cotton trade. In this period, Company agents and other private English traders began using *gosains* to bring cotton from the interior regions of central India to Banaras and Bengal.\(^{170}\)

This recruitment of *gosains* as a client group marked a critical shift from the earlier policies of the Company. Those earlier policies were informed by the categorization of *gosains* as anarchic, mobile bands of raiders, the very antithesis of the ordered and stable colonial administration. Under the exigencies of Company trade, officials came to recognize the significance of *gosains’* role as reliable traders whose services were desirable to the Company. However, as shown earlier under the discussion on Hastings’ trade reforms, categorizations of *gosains* as traders created a significant epistemological disjuncture that elided the intimate connections between their religious and commercial practices. Under early colonial law, such distinctions were reinforced — not without considerable tensions — as officials tried to mold *gosains* within the framework of criminal and personal law.

In 1791, *gosains* became involved in the developments of a criminal court case against one of their members, Shiva Bharati. The latter had been imprisoned for the murder of three *gosains* in Mirzapur: Kashi Bharati, his *guru*, Jubraj Bharati, Kashi

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\(^{168}\) Ibid., p. 58.


Bharati’s *chela* and Bhul Bharati, Jubraj Bharati’s *chela*. At the beginning, the criminal court judges interrogated the two prospective heirs of Jubraj Bharati: his mother Raji and his disciple Daya Bharati. Daya Bharati called Raji his grandmother and Raji had stated that the two of them “were of one mind” and would be co-owners of Jubraj Bharati’s effects if other relatives did not arrive to claim a share.

The interrogations revolved around one key question: Why had Daya and Raji pardoned Shiva Bharati? Court authorities wanted to know whether this pardon was a result of a threat or a bribe. Court officials did not believe Raji and Daya when they said that they did not want to take a life. Raji and Daya then drew upon the Sharia, the religious law of Islam, to justify their pardon. In invoking Islamic law to grant pardon, Raji and Daya Bharati took recourse to one of the many pre-colonial authorities of jurisprudence under the Mughals where the *kazi* arbitrated over matters of assault, marriage, injury or property. Although the court authorities maintained the juridical authority of Islamic law in the newly instituted criminal courts, they modified this law in order to extend the punitive authority of the state.

Modifications of Islamic law targeted the rights of victims to *diya*, *kisas*, and pardon. As Singha has argued,

Hastings and Cornwallis therefore shared the opinion that the Islamic law regarding the offences ‘of blood’ concentrated too narrowly on the consequences of the criminal act for the party injured or his heirs, and on their claims to

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172 Banaras Duncan, May 1791, Basta no. 31, volume no. 44, p. 123. Banaras Duncan, August 1791, Basta no. 32, Volume no. 47, p. 21.
174 Ibid., p.60.
175 Ibid., p. 9.
retribution or compensation instead of on the injury to the ‘public interest’, equated here with the claims of the state.\textsuperscript{176}

These critiques informed judges’ decision on the \textit{gosain} murder case. Despite Raji and Daya Bharati’s pardon, Shiva Bharati was sentenced to death. Governor-General Cornwallis dismissed Raji and Daya Bharati’s rights under Islamic law to grant pardon and ordered the death penalty.\textsuperscript{177}

In his letter to the Governor General in September 1791, the Banaras Resident Jonathan Duncan expressed his exasperation with the \textit{gosain} community for demanding Shiva Bharati’s release.\textsuperscript{178} Duncan believed that the \textit{gosain} community was eager for Shiva Bharati’s pardon because of “the disgrace that might be reflected on it by a public execution ordered by the temporal magistrate”.\textsuperscript{179} Duncan went on to state that the case marked a significant departure for \textit{gosains} because they “like all other religious communities have generally affected a greater independence than mere lay subjects” from the authority of the “temporal magistrate”.\textsuperscript{180}

The criminal court did not make a distinction between temporal and religious spheres. However, \textit{gosains} and their supporters invoked religious privilege to contest the death penalty. A pandit supporting the \textit{gosains} approached the Resident at Banaras to inquire whether Shiva Bharati’s status as a \textit{gosain} excused him from capital punishment.\textsuperscript{181} The pandit referenced Company regulations that had in 1790 exempted

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., p.53.
\textsuperscript{177} Banaras Duncan, October 1791, Basta no. 32, Volume no. 49, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{178} Banaras Duncan, September 1791, Basta no. 32, Volume no. 48, pp. 111-113.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., p. 112. For an examination of how Criminal and Personal law in colonial India was informed by the distinctions in English law between “courts Christian” and “courts temporal” see J.D.M. Derrett, \textit{Religion, Law and the State in India} (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 233.
\textsuperscript{180} Banaras Duncan, September 1791, Basta no. 32, Volume no. 48, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{181} Banaras Duncan, October 1791, Basta no. 32, Volume no. 49, pp. 99-100.
the Brahmans of Banaras from capital punishment due to their sacred character.  

By alluding to the similarity between gosains and Brahmans, the pandit drew attention to the religious authority and patronage that gosains had enjoyed under Balwant Singh and Chait Singh.

Although the court did not modify its opinion, these challenges were taken seriously. The Resident Jonathan Duncan approached the pandits appointed from different courts in Banaras to determine whether a gosain could be sentenced to death under Hindu law. Duncan put the following question to the pandits:

…according to the Hindoo Law, is it lawful to put a gosayn [sic] to death for committing such a murder as infers capital punishment: the said gosayn [sic] not being of the brahmin [sic] cast [sic] originally and having entered into that tribe of gosayns [sic] in which trade is followed as a profession.  

Duncan received two responses. The first pandit responded that

…the shaster [sic] admits not of any other but a Bramin [sic] to become a gosayn [sic]. Therefore to put to death this murderer who is only a fabrication of a gosayn [sic] and of the Raujepoot [sic] cast [sic] is permitted according to the shasters [sic].

The second pandit replied,

In the case of a person not being a bramin [sic] and who shall have become a gossayn [sic] - If that person has committed such a crime as to infer a capital punishment, his being a gossayn [sic] does not impede his suffering capitaly.  

The two pandits disagreed on the similarities between a Brahman and a gosian. The first pandit argued that only Brahmans could become gosains. The second pandit

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183 Banaras Duncan, October 1791, Basta no. 32, Volume no. 49, pp. 81.
184 Ibid., p. 144.
185 Ibid.
stated that *gosains* were not exclusively Brahmans. However, these responses were similar in that they foregrounded upper-caste brahmanical authority according to which sacred/divine was posed in opposition to worldly investments such as trade. Within colonial constitutions of law then, multi-caste corporate *gosain* sects could not enjoy privileges based upon their religious powers under either criminal or personal law.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shown how state-formation under the Rajas of Banaras was dependent upon the services of the Naupatti merchant-bankers and the *gosain* sects. Such dependence engendered multiple forms of sovereignty that provided respectability and status to client groups. Simultaneously, shared rights and authority created space for client groups to contest and negotiate with their patron rulers. In these circumstances, practices of piety and patronage became important both in channeling divine power and strengthening relationships.

Under the East India Company, sovereignty became indivisible and was concentrated under the Company state. Merchant-banker client groups tried to counter this loss of treasured rights by attempting to establish shared practices of piety with the new sovereign. However, this was also the period when, informed by Enlightenment beliefs, religion was being abstracted from worldly power. Reconstitutions of politics and religion had significant implications for *gosain* sects for their status as worldly traders denied them any legitimate religious authority within the Company’s institutions.
Chapter 3:

Kinship, Gender Relations, and Rights in Land: Gendering Colonial Land-Revenue Policies, 1775-1818

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the political economy of Banaras and its surrounding regions from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century and reconstruct a history of networks of gender and kinship. I illuminate how specific articulations of gender hierarchies informed colonial policies and how those articulations reordered hierarchies of deference between kin. I then trace the ways in which processes of reordering hierarchies within familial relationships ensured the movement of capital and power to the colonial state and to key colonized subjects.

In the period under examination, colonial officials undertook vast and ambitious administrative measures that reshaped the land-revenue structure in north India. As colonial officials implemented agrarian policies, they created new opportunities as well as new tensions, and fueled old rivalries among landholding groups. These groups engaged with emergent shifts in policies through careful and strategic mobilization of kinship ties, which were important conduits of wealth and power. The political significance of kinship networks shaped marital practices as elite families in Banaras orchestrated marriages to accumulate rights in land. Colonial officials kept a wary watch over important landlords in the Banaras region and supervised their marital networks. Simultaneously, British officials challenged the validity of certain kinship relations to oust recalcitrant landlords and limit the resources in wealth of elite women.
During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, familial relations shaped elite women’s rights and power. Elite women in eighteenth-century polities wielded extensive rights in land revenue and markets, and controlled other sources of wealth. In this chapter, I illustrate ways in which colonial policies compromised these practices by recognizing only male rights in land, beginning with the last three decades of the eighteenth century. This was disastrous for women. It provided opportunities for male relatives to usurp their female kin’s resources in land, and in that process, reordered hierarchies between kin based upon age and rank.

**Motherhood and Political Power in Eighteenth-Century Awadh**

The year 1781 marked the expulsion of Chait Singh from the Banaras principality and the consolidation of the East India Company’s authority in the region. At the same time, the East India Company officials were actively engaged in extracting money from the Banaras principality and Awadh. Officials pressed Chait Singh with increased demands for revenue to fund the English Company’s war against the French in India. Simultaneously, they put pressure on the Nawab of Awadh Asaf-ud-daulah (r. 1775-1797) to pay 5,000,000 rupees of debt incurred by him. Chait Singh revolted in retaliation to such excessive revenue demands, which ended in his expulsion from Banaras. In Awadh, the Company managed to forcibly extract much of the debt from the Begams of Awadh, Sadr-un-Nissa (d. 1796), the wife of Nawab Safdar Jang (r. 1739-1754), and Bahu Begam (c.1728-1816), the wife of Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah (r. 1754-1775).

Historians of the British Empire have studied the Company’s dealings with the Begams of Awadh. Nicholas Dirks and Anna Clark have shown how the events of 1781
became key issues in a scandal over the East India Company’s, and particularly Governor-General Warren Hastings’, engagements in India.¹ Warren Hastings was impeached in the House of Commons on charges of corruption in his dealings with Indian rulers. This controversy occurred amidst the growing wariness in London against the East India Company, the corrupt practices of its officials, and the threat they posed to the British nation.

New imperial histories are particularly useful in examining such controversies. Kathleen Wilson argues that imperial pursuits significantly informed the formation of the British nation-state.² Likewise, the influx of colonial materials and cultural goods shaped British cultural production and consumption. Significantly, these processes of colonialism, which facilitated the inflow of colonial goods, were based upon legitimizing discourses of difference.³ Essentialized discourses of Britishness underlay colonialism and lent themselves to the construction of a national British identity. However, imperial excess in the form of an unscrupulous English nabob with the wealth and power to marry into the old gentry and buy their way into the parliament threatened to corrupt British society.⁴ Hastings’ impeachment scandal engaged with such tensions.

Scholars focusing on these scandals underscore how discourses on the excesses of East India Company officials and the defenses offered by the latter were similar to insofar

³ Ibid., p. 13 and 18-19.
as they deployed gendered and Orientalist narratives to underline difference.\(^5\) In particular, they have pointed to how the Begams of Awadh became a key site of contestation during the debates. Scholars have shown that while Hastings’ opponents created narratives of victimized womanhood centering on the Begams of Awadh, Hastings contested the same by pointing to the excessive power women such as the Begams could wield over state politics. Scholars pointed to how Hastings’ defense drew attention to the implicit dangers in Indian principalities where the so-called women of the *zenana* could wield so much influence in political affairs.\(^6\)

Studies on scandals surrounding the Empire offer significant insights on the centrality of gender in the constitution of the Empire. In this section, however, I focus on the ways in which colonial officials used varying arguments to tap into the resources commanded by the Begams of Awadh. Their dealings with the Begams played a central role in the consolidation of the East India Company’s rule in India and set an important precedent for the Company’s fiscal policies in India.

The Begams of Awadh, Sadr-un-Nissa Begam and Bahu Begam, ruled over a vibrant and powerful court in eighteenth-century Awadh.\(^7\) Sadr-un-Nissa was the daughter of Saadat Khan, the first ruler of Awadh. She was married to Safdar Jang, Saadat Khan’s sister’s son. Safdar Jang succeeded to the throne in 1739. In 1754, Sadr-un-Nissa and Safdar Jang’s son Shuja-ud-daulah became the ruler of Awadh. Shuja-ud-

\(^{5}\) Ibid., p. 112  
daulah’s wife was Bahu Begam. She was the daughter of a prominent noble at the Mughal court. This marriage alliance benefited Awadh in many ways, not least because Bahu Begam brought vast amounts of wealth into the family. A marriage with the daughter of a Mughal noble also increased the prestige and legitimacy of the Awadh state. Bahu Begam’s son, Asaf-ud-daulah, became the Nawab of Awadh in 1775.

Richard Barnett and Michael Fisher have underscored the Begams’ status and role in state-formation in this period. Indrani Chatterjee has highlighted that women rulers derived status and power from motherhood in pre-colonial polities. These mothers had a share in governance over state affairs. As mothers of the rulers of Awadh, the Begams wielded political and economic clout. The Begams derived their wealth from land revenue payments and control over markets. They had substantial jagirs and enjoyed extensive rights in income from customs and excise duties. In addition, they shared in the sovereignty of the Awadh ruler through control over certain treasuries and percentages of state revenue collections.

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8 Bahu means daughter-in-law. Shuja-ud-daulah’s wife was popularly known as Bahu Begam.
10 For a description of the wealth Bahu Begam brought to her marital household see letter to John Adam, Secretary to the Government by William by J Baillee, Resident at Lucknow in Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 23-30 April 1813, no. 34, pp. 3295-3329.
13 Chatterjee, Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India, pp. 57-60.
15 Barnett, North India between Empires, p. 175. See letter to John Adam, Secretary to the Government by William by J Baillee, Resident at Lucknow in Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 23-30 April 1813, no. 34, pp. 3295-3329.
In the 1770s and 1780s, the Begams’ wealth and power became a subject of contention as the East India Company expanded its influence in the region. Colonial officials overrode the Begams’ authority, thereby challenging power-sharing practices between the Nawab and the Begams. Company officials’ interactions with the Begams took place within a wider context in which the former challenged the authority vested in motherhood and eldership in Islamicate polities.\(^\text{17}\)

The Begams’ troubles began with the accession of Asaf-ud-daulah to the throne of Awadh in 1775. The latter overcame his contenders and succeeded to the throne through the efforts of Bahu Begam. Upon his accession, however, the new ruler flouted established norms and hierarchies of deference and contested his mother’s power. He established a separate political center in the city of Lucknow away from his mother whose court was in the city of Faizabad. In Lucknow, Asaf-ud-daulah appointed nobles and officials who rose in rank owing to their proximity to the ruler.\(^\text{18}\) New officials then played a key role in reducing the influence of the Begams and their supporters as they sought to consolidate their own power bases.

Under the aegis of the Company in the period from the late 1770s, the Nawab made inroads into the Begams’ resources. He ignored his mother’s advice and agreed to hand Banaras over to the Company in 1775.\(^\text{19}\) When the Company put increasing pressure on him for repayment of debts, Asaf-ud-daulah, in collaboration with the British Resident, extracted significant sums of money from the Begams.\(^\text{20}\) Furthermore, when

\(^{17}\) Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*, p. 77.  
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 193.  
\(^{20}\) For evidence on such pressure for demand of payment see Home Series Miscellaneous, IOL/ H/ Misc/235, 13 February 1775, p. 9.
exactions of money failed to meet the debt payments and the exorbitant rates of interest accruing upon them, the Nawab and Company officials began appropriating the *jagirs* of nobles in the region, including that of the Begams. Some of Asa-ud-daulah’s close officials were later able to use their proximity to the ruler and claim control over the Begams’ and their dependents’ *jagirs*.21

The Company began to supervise the Awadh’s revenue from 1779.22 Between 1778 and 1783, the British officials and the Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah challenged the Begams’ rights to certain *jagirs* and treasures. In rebuttal, the Begams made exclusive claims to their properties. When Begam Sadr-un-Nissa demanded the restoration of her *jagirs* conferred by her husband and son, she argued that Asaf-ud-daulah had no right to take what was rightfully hers.23 Among her *jagirs* she listed a grant of a permanent land-revenue assignment from the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II in the province of Allahabad in 1771.24 Correspondence between the Resident at Lucknow and Governor-General Hastings reveals that the title deeds for this grant were authentic.25 Records from a later period illustrate that Bahu Begam also asserted her claims to *jagirs* presented to her by the Mughal Emperor and her deceased husband.26

British intervention in the mother-son relationship between Bahu Begam and Asaf-ud-daulah challenged established practices in Islamicate polities according to which

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22 Barnett, *North India between Empires*, p. 156.
23 Foreign Department, Secret Branch 9 Feb 1778, Consultation: S 9 Feb 78 (D). Foreign Department, Secret Branch 9 Feb 1778, Consultation: S 9 Feb 78 (6).
24 Ibid.
women could become immensely powerful as mothers of rulers. In polities like Awadh, mothers shared in the power of their ruler-sons. The Resident Middleton’s report on his correspondence with Begam Sadr-un-Nissa is particularly revealing of this process. Middleton commented that the Begam had never taken possession of the jagir she claimed the Mughal Emperor granted to her during her son Shuja-ud-daulah’s reign. Middleton noted that when he approached the Begam regarding this issue she replied, “whatever her late son possessed she looked upon and commanded as her own and that she was no sufferer by leaving the purgana [sic] in his charge.”

Sadr-un-Nissa’s response provided an important counterpoint to colonial discourses on rights that sought to separate the Nawab’s property from that of the Begams. However, during the early 1780s, colonial discourses against the Begams gained urgency as the latter participated in widespread revolts against the Company in 1781, Chait Singh’s rebellion being one of them. Their participation provided the impetus for a direct attack on the Begams and the plunder of their treasures in Faizabad.

Marginalizing Elite Women’s Rights in Land

The vicissitudes of politics in Awadh pivoted upon strategic invocations of property. Colonial officials employed discourses that intersected to marginalize the Begams and reduce their political and economic base. They assumed control over the Begams’ jagirs, and other rights over revenue, by arguing that the crown or ruler owned all the land in the polity. They invoked discourses of patrilineality under Islamic law that were selective.

27 Chatterjee, Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India.
28 Foreign Department, Secret Branch, Consultation: S 9 Feb 78 (D), pp. 3-4.
29 Ibid.
30 Barnett, North India between Empires, p. 200.
insofar as they ignored customary practice and provisions under the *sharia* according to which women were entitled to half the share of the male counterpart. Further, they applied British legal notions that recognized only the male as a property-owning subject.\(^{32}\)

Colonial engagements with the Begams had varied between the late 1770s and early 1780s. Correspondence between the Board of Governors regarding the Nawab’s and the Company’s policies towards the Begams reveal that officials disagreed with each other. There is no doubt that all the colonial officials involved in the politics of Awadh were keen on extracting as much of the resources as they could from the Begams. However, officials differed in their approaches towards the Begams.

Barnett has noted how in the early years of Asaf-ud-daulah’s reign, Hastings and the two Residents at Awadh, Bristow and Middleton, were moderate in their treatment of the Begams.\(^{33}\) Hastings and Middleton in particular used discourses that highlighted the Begams’ status as mothers deserving of the Nawab’s deference. These discourses enabled the Company to extract sums of money from the Begams without entering into a hostile relationship with them.\(^{34}\)

In 1778, Middleton provided a report on the *jagirs* and other sources of revenue stating that they belonged to Begam Sadr-un-Nissa.\(^{35}\) He noted how the Begam had authentic documents to prove her rights to a certain *jagir* presented to her by the Mughal

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., pp. 199-200.

\(^{32}\) Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch, 12 June 1783, Consultation: S 12 Jun. 83 (8A). For a discussion on provisions for women under the *sharia* see Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women’s Rights in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 35.

\(^{33}\) Barnett, *North India between Empires*, p. 195.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Foreign Department, Secret Branch 9 Feb 1778, Consultation: S 9 Feb 78 (D).
Emperor. He further went on to narrate that the Nawab of Awadh had taken charge of certain properties such as houses and gardens belonging to the Begam in exchange for a promised, but unpaid, sum of money. Another letter followed these arguments; in that, the Resident pointed to the Nawab’s ill-treatment of the Begams and the dispossession of their rights in properties.  

Barnett has argued that Middleton was cautious in his early interactions with the Begams owing to their political and economic clout. The Begams had established a separate power center in Faizabad, and Middleton was concerned that any forcible mobilization against them would provoke a strong resistance. The reasons behind Middleton’s deference towards the Begams are important. They highlight how political and economic contexts shaped the officials’ treatment of powerful women in this period. Nevertheless, other colonial officials were less obliging.

In 1776, when the Board of Governors debated whether the Nawab had the right to seize the Begams’ property, Hastings advised caution in the seizure of the Begams’ properties for fear that this action would tarnish the Company’s image. However, other members of the Board disagreed arguing that the Begams only had a right to property within the *zenana*. Philip Francis stated that as a woman, Bahu Begam only had a right to what was in the *zenana* and everything else belonged, according to Islamic law, to the late Nawab’s son, Asaf-ud-daulah. He argued further that she had no right to interfere in the Nawab’s government, “in a country where women are not allowed a free agency in the most trifling domestic affairs it seems extraordinary that this lady [Bahu Begam]
should presume to talk of appointing ministers and governing kingdoms." Francis’ based his interpretations of the Begams’ rights over property on narrow understandings of the *zenana*, of Islamic law, and elite women’s roles in polities. These presumptions elided the Begams’ extensive rights in land and markets, and their political role in the Awadh state.

These arguments must be examined within the broader discussions and ideologies on rights and property that officials such as Francis himself were articulating in this period. Francis was a Physiocrat who believed land was “a source of all wealth.” The Physiocrats’ theory of value was based on an analysis of agricultural production in which the difference between the value of labor power and the value created was seen as much more tangible than in industry. Consequently, this philosophy placed private property, especially property in land, above all else.

During the late eighteenth century, Physiocratic principles informed Francis’ colonial reforms in the land-revenue system. In the same period that Francis gave his opinion on the Begams’ rights, he was devising a new plan for the Bengal land revenue settlement. The impetus for reform had emerged from colonial deliberations over the Great Bengal Famine in 1770. For Francis, the solution for securing land revenue payments lay in guaranteeing private property in land to the *zamindars*. Francis upheld the rights of *zamindars* for he saw them as akin to the English gentleman-farmers who improved the productivity of their land through the introduction of new techniques. The

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39 Ibid., pp. 12.
41 Ibid., p. 108.
zamindars formed the backbone of Francis’ revenue plans that would be categorized as the Permanent Settlement in Cornwallis’ proclamation of March 1793.

In creating absolute property in land and positing zamindars as proprietors of that absolute property, colonial officials applied English notions of landownership. In India, as Ratnalekha Ray has pointed out, rights over land were layered and manifested in a graded hierarchy. Ray pointed to how zamindars were hereditary revenue payers with proprietary rights in revenue management. Another group called the jotedars, rich farmers from “dominant landed village groups” were “in effective possession of land and commanding the labour of poor villagers.”

While, as Ray asserts, zamindars could also have effective possession of the land within the complex structure of land rights in India, they were mainly those who wielded “heritable proprietary rights not in the land itself, but in the office of collecting the [revenue] assessment.”

Bihar and Banaras had, however, witnessed the introduction of these land revenue plans from 1789. These plans conceived of a decennial system that aimed to give the zamindars stable and permanent proprietary rights, and encourage them to invest in improving agriculture. Colonial land-revenue reforms upheld the authority of zamindars as landowners. However, these processes of reform were based upon gender identities: when Francis underscored the inviolability of the private property of zamindars, his conception of rights in land was shaped by eighteenth-century ideologies that tied conceptualizations of the citizen and individual in the nation-state to the propertied

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43 Ibid., p. 7.
44 Ibid., p. 8.
male. These understandings were themselves based upon emergent eighteenth-century philosophies that organized society along the binary of public/political and private/family spheres. Within such a framework, only propertied individuals could participate in the public sphere and those individual was at all times male.

Three sets of discourses on rights shaped late eighteenth-century colonial engagements with the Begams and their rights in land. These were put to use intermittently to marginalize the Begams’ claims. The first drew upon tenets on patrilineality under Islamic law but ignored provisions made for women under Islamic law and custom. The second argued that all land belonged to the state embodied in the ruler. Conceptions of individual and private property that excluded female subjects informed the third set of arguments.

The second and third sets of arguments were counterpoised to each other: the second upheld the state’s [embodied in the person of the ruler] right to all property whereas the third asserted the primacy of private property. During the late eighteenth century, Hastings and Francis argued over conceptions of private property. Hastings believed that all land belonged to the king while Francis expounded the argument on the principles of private property that would lead to the introduction of the Permanent Settlement in Hastings’ successor Cornwallis’ tenure as Governor General. However, they found common ground on the question of women’s rights in land with Hastings and Francis agreeing on their policies towards the Begams’ jagirs.

46 Ibid., p. 44.
Rebellious Sons and Their Mothers

The Company’s interventions in Awadh were intimately connected to politics in Banaras. In 1781, after Hastings subdued Raja Chait Singh who fled from the territory, Company troops stormed the Fort of Bijaigarh where the Raja’s mother, Panna, safeguarded a substantial treasure. Besieged in the fort, Panna brokered a deal with the Company troops commander, Major Popham. According to this, Popham and his regiment could have access to the treasure inside the fort provided they allowed Panna and her dependents to leave safely with a certain percentage of the treasure.\(^48\) Despite the promise, when the Rani and her 300 dependents emerged from the fort they were attacked and looted of their wealth by Company soldiers and officers.\(^49\)

This episode underscores how the East India Company used military force to gain access to resources outside the purview of the stipulated annual revenue. Colonial correspondence on the storming of the Fort of Bijaigarh focused on Chait Singh’s treasure. Popham and his soldiers’ looting of the treasure provoked a strong reaction from Governor General Warren Hastings. Hastings reprimanded Popham and claimed the treasure on behalf of the Company.\(^50\) In his response, Popham quoted one of Hastings’ letters where the latter had stated that Popham and his regiment could share the treasure if they were successful in capturing the fort.\(^51\) Furthermore, Popham claimed that the

\(^{48}\) Home Department Records, Public Branch, 23 May 1782, Consultation: O.C., May, no. 3.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
\(^{50}\) Ibid., pp. 17-19.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 23.
treasure could not be produced as it had already been distributed among his soldiers and other camp followers.\(^{52}\)

Colonial interventions in the subordination of rulers such as Chait Singh, and their inroads into the wealth of such rulers had a direct impact on the status of elite women like Panna. Major Popham’s troops besieged Chait Singh’s mother Panna in the Fort of Bijaigarh as the latter sought to plunder the treasure she protected within. When the Company soldiers proved relentless, she sent her envoys to negotiate with Popham, the terms of which were that she would surrender the fort. According to Khair-ud-din Khan, the author of *The Bulwuntnamah*, Panna had demanded a share in the treasure when Popham stated that she could ask for anything aside from a *jagir*.\(^{53}\) Colonial correspondence reveals that she asked to be allowed to live in either of her two houses in Banaras.\(^{54}\) To this Hastings replied that as the houses were Panna’s “own immediate properties” she could reside in either of them.\(^{55}\)

It is unlikely that Panna was allowed to remain in Banaras. Early nineteenth-century colonial records show that Chait Singh’s relatives, his wives and children had lived outside Banaras after the revolt because of prohibitions against them from residing in the region.\(^{56}\) However, here I am more concerned with examining the ways in which Panna’s rights were being constituted around what Hastings described as her “own

\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 25.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Home Department Records, Public Branch, 23 May 1782, Consultation: O.C., May, no. 3, p. 13. Interestingly, in *The Bulwuntnamah* one of the houses that Panna claims as hers is referred to as the house of Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah’s half brother, Nawab Saadat Ali Khan. On the other hand, in the colonial correspondence, Saadat Ali Khan, who was in exile, is reported to be merely living in Panna’s house.

\(^{55}\) Home Department Records, Public Branch, 23 May 1782, Consultation: O.C., May, no. 3, p. 16.

\(^{56}\) Board’s Collections 1813-1814, IOR/F/4/401/10096, Extract Political letter from Bengal 15th June 1813.
immediate properties‖. Hastings’ categorization of property in Panna’s case must be read closely to understand how the rights wielded by elite women were being reconfigured under colonial rule in this period.

Hastings’ argument that the houses were Panna’s “own immediate properties” raises an important question. I argue that when Hastings expressed his readiness to hand over the houses, he simultaneously challenged Panna’s rights in land. We know from The Bulwuntnamah that Panna was denied rights to a jagir. That text also reveals that Panna had been bestowed a jagir by her husband Balwant Singh. Furthermore, the author of the text, Khair-ud-din Khan, narrates that in Chait Singh’s time, his own maafi land grant had been taken over by the Raja and added to his mother Panna’s jagir. Khan goes on to argue that his lands were only returned to him when the Raja received orders to do so from the Governor General’s council. The author reveals that the Raja had “with much entreaty got her [Panna] to relinquish” Khair-ud-din Khan’s lands.

It is probable that Khair-ud-din Khan sought to signal his influence with colonial officials, particularly the Governor General, through this narrative. However, whether the author constructed this narrative or not, it is clear that Panna stood to increase her rights in land during her son’s reign. As the mother of the Raja, she had access to such rights. However, owing to the East India Company’s exertions, rights derived through mother-son relationships were being circumscribed for women like Panna. These limitations were particularly applied to rights in land as the Company sought to recover all revenue-free

57 Home Department Records, Public Branch, 23 May 1782, Consultation: O.C., May, no. 3, p. 16.
58 See Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, p. 148 for Chait Singh’s resumption of the lands and p. 156 for the Raja’s decision to give the lands back to the author.
59 Ibid., p. 147. For Khan’s land issues see pp. 148-151, 154-156.
60 Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, p. 156.
land grants and channel them towards the accumulation of the substantial land revenue payments demanded from the new Raja Mahipnarain.

The appropriation of Panna’s *jagirs* relate to the Company’s policies in Awadh, another site where the Company challenged the Begams’ rights in land. In Awadh, the Company also put pressure on the Nawab of Awadh to take charge of *jagirs* of nobles and officials. They used a variety of discourses to question the rights of the Begams to their *jagirs*. In the Begams’ case, officials overlooked how the Begams had gained some land rights through their ties with Mughal Emperors. Yet, rather than arguing that such land rights were the Begams’ “own immediate properties”, Hastings categorized them as the Nawab of Awadh’s patrimony.

Despite the similarity in the two cases, there was one critical difference. In the Awadh Begams’ case, the officials did not recognize that the Begams’ wielded wealth and privilege as mothers of Awadh’s rulers. However, by dispossessing Panna of her rights in land following her son’s expulsion, officials inadvertently highlighted the ways in which mothers and sons shared sovereignty in pre-colonial polities.

Elite women’s rights were defined in increasingly narrow terms under such colonial interventions. When Hastings underscored Panna’s rights to her “own immediate properties”, he disregarded the ways in which kinship ties and relationality informed access to land rights in pre-colonial polities. The British thus undercut the political import of kinship ties that gave elite women extensive rights in land. These reorientations enabled colonial officials to make inroads into their rights in land that had in the first place been contingent upon their kinship ties. Within colonial discourses, the definition of
women’s own properties was abstracted from these women’s kinship ties. It foreclosed their access to power and wealth that derived from family and community ties.

**Adoptive Mothers, their Slave-Sons and the Redefinition of Land-Revenue Structures**

Colonial engagements in Awadh and Banaras were a prelude to the implementation of extensive administrative reforms in the land-revenue structure in the late 1780s. In Banaras, officials introduced the Decennial Settlement between 1789 and 1790 under the supervision of the British Resident Jonathan Duncan. I show here that the implementation of the Decennial Settlement provided zamindars with opportunities to revise as well as resolve long-standing disputes and political rivalries. I am interested in highlighting the ways in which landlords began using familial discourses to oust their rivals from zamindaris as a means to claim or reclaim territories. In particular, shifts in the political economy made adopted slave-sons and their adoptive mothers vulnerable to new discourses on the family. As concubines and slave-sons lost their rights in land, so did their mothers and other dependents. In addition, the challenge to mother-son kinship ties reduced the political and economic authority of mothers and their dependents. This provoked mothers into asserting their own rights over land. However, as I have demonstrated earlier, this move proved fruitless as officials refused to recognize women’s rights in land. This happened regardless of whether the families were formally Muslim or formally Hindu. Women lost out from both.

The Decennial Settlement, implemented under the British Resident Duncan, created disputes between landlords. This is because Duncan had not established official
boundaries between villages and zamindaris.\textsuperscript{61} The borders between the territories of the Nawab of Awadh and those of the Company in Banaras were fraught with tension. With the cession of control over the Banaras principality from Awadh to the Company, landlords on the borders found their territories divided between the two regions.\textsuperscript{62} While regulations regarding the boundaries were still in the making, officials were beleaguered with recalcitrant landlords and border disputes.\textsuperscript{63}

Both the Nawab of Awadh and colonial authorities were keen on establishing a fixed and documented boundary between their territories. However, some landlords tried to take advantage of the ambiguous borders.\textsuperscript{64} Landlords in the bordering area, whose possessions were split between territories of Awadh and Banaras, resisted the payment of revenue and duties. For example, in the boundary area adjacent to Jaunpur district, recalcitrant Rajput landlords secure within their forts, entered into conflict with revenue collectors from Awadh and Banaras.\textsuperscript{65}

Other key actors, such as Himmat Ali, took advantage of the confusions regarding spheres of geographical authority and expanded their territories in the border zones. Himmat Ali was the adopted son of Raja Deedar Jahan, of the Mahole district in the pargana of Anguli. In the late 1780s and early 1790s, the Raja’s zamindari was at the center of boundary disputes as it lay in both the region of Awadh under the authority of the Nawab, and the Company territories in the Jaunpur district of the Banaras

\textsuperscript{61} Cohn, \textit{An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays}, p. 359.
\textsuperscript{62} Regional Archives, Varanasi, Extract from Duncan’s record 1787-1791 and Copies of Correspondence, Volume no. 8, pp. 155-156.
\textsuperscript{63} See Banaras Duncan, November 1791, Basta no. 32, volume no. 50, pp. 24-27 and Banaras Duncan, June 1792, Basta no. 34, volume 55 (1), p. 167-168.
\textsuperscript{64} Banaras Duncan, June 1792, Basta no. 34, volume 55 (1), pp. 134-136, 167-168.
principality. In 1777, the Nawab of Awadh ousted Deedar Jahan from his zamindari owing to unpaid revenue balances, and replaced him with Deedar Jahan’s manager instead.66

The estate was later given in jagir to one of the Nawab of Awadh’s trusted officials.67 Deedar Jahan’s manager had, in the meantime, handed over control of a strategic fort to a militarized Rajput landlord brotherhood in order to deflect attacks from his ousted master.68 These Rajput landlords secured themselves in the fort and created problems for the Nawab’s government officials as well as the East India Company. When the recalcitrant Rajputs had been temporarily subdued, one of the Nawab of Awadh’s officials gave the fort over to Himmat Ali in 1787 who had been able to ingratiate himself to the official.69 However, Himmat Ali used this opportunity to recover the territories held by his deceased father Deedar Jahan.70 However, he antagonized both the Nawab’s officers and Company officials in the process and was arrested by the Nawab’s officers at the behest of the Banaras Resident. The exact date of his arrest is not available but correspondence between the Governor General and the Resident at Lucknow shows that

65 Regional Archives, Varanasi, Extract from Duncan’s record 1787-1791 and Copies of Correspondence, Volume no. 8, pp. 161-163, 167-171. Banaras Duncan, July 1794, Basta no. 40, volume no. 82, pp. 146-147.
66 Banaras Duncan, June 1792, Basta no. 34, volume 55 (1), p. 147.
67 Ibid. Under the Mughal Empire, jagirs were transferable assignments of revenue made by Mughal rulers to members of the nobility for a period of three-four years in lieu of pay. Assignees were allowed to collect revenue but they had to conform to imperial regulations. See Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 257-261. By the eighteenth century, jagirdars treated their revenue assignments as hereditary land-holding.
68 Ibid., p.148.
69 Ibid., p 149.
70 Ibid., p. 152.
Himmat Ali was in the custody of British officials in 1794.\textsuperscript{71} The same documents also reveal the confiscation of his possessions.\textsuperscript{72}

Himmat Ali’s recalcitrance cost his adoptive mother and him dearly for they lost all rights in land they previously enjoyed. Significantly, they were dispossessed through strategic mobilizations of familial discourses. These discourses were informed by colonial assumptions on the centrality of consanguinity to kinship.\textsuperscript{73} Colonial officials drew attention to Himmat Ali’s status as a slave-son. They argued that it was unjust for an adopted son to inherit Deedar Jahan’s \textit{zamindari} while blood-related “direct and near” male collateral family members were alive.\textsuperscript{74} British Officials argued that Himmat Ali had never been Deedar Jahan’s “recognized” heir and supported instead the succession of Salamat Jahan, “an heir by blood”, to the \textit{zamindari}.\textsuperscript{75}

In denying the legitimacy of adopted sons as heirs in favor of male collateral blood-related kin, colonial officials inverted established practices of adoption.\textsuperscript{76} In the process, they reduced the political and economic power of both adoptive mothers like Deedar Jahan’s widow and their adopted sons like Himmat Ali. Such mothers were therefore actively involved in challenging British policies in the period. Deedar Jahan’s widow and adoptive mother, who considered Himmat Ali her legitimate son, petitioned British officials and officials in Awadh on her son’s behalf. She asserted, “You have

\textsuperscript{71} Banaras Duncan, July 1794, Basta no. 40, volume no. 82, p.161.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., pp.161-169.
\textsuperscript{73} Chatterjee, \textit{Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India}, pp. 40-41.
\textsuperscript{74} Banaras Duncan, June 1792, Basta no. 34, volume 55 (1), p. 149, 218.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 137, 146.
\textsuperscript{76} Chatterjee, \textit{Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India}, p. 43.
written that Himat [sic] Ali is my adopted son and not the proprietor of the zamindary [sic]. He is in every way my son and protects 200 widows”.

Throughout the period of Himmat Ali’s troubles, his mother attempted to secure his release several times. She paid substantial amounts of money to the colonial government as security to ensure Himmat Ali’s release. She also negotiated for her son’s restoration to his zamindari. While the records are unclear about the question of Himmat Ali’s release, it is however evident that he was not restored the zamindari. Indeed, both the Governor General and the Nawab of Awadh’s minister soundly rejected all proposals to give Himmat Ali any grant of land. In response to the intractability of colonial officials, Himmat Ali’s mother shifted tactics and emphatically claimed

The zamindary [sic] it is mine and I have from 8 generations been a subject of the Viziers and am now hopeful that I may remain so. I now trust that from your endeavour the release of my son and my own [emphasis mine] establishment may be effected. I have been ruined and ejected from my habitation and who is there besides your …[unclear word] who would do such an act of friendship for me and restore a desolated house.

This excerpt reveals that elite women like Himmat Ali’s mother attempted to salvage zamindaris by claiming rights when their sons lost theirs. Her discourse on rights found little support as Salamat Jahan succeeded to the zamindari. What is more, she lost rights over a separate jagir that the Nawabs of Awadh had bestowed upon her.

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77 Banaras Duncan, July 1794, Basta no. 40, volume no. 82, pp. 165-166.
78 Ibid., pp.151-153.
80 Banaras Duncan March 1795, Basta no. 41, volume no. 89, pp. 107-113. For Himmat Ali’s mother’s petition regarding the securities for the release of her son, see Banaras Duncan, July 1794, Basta no. 40, volume no. 82, pp. 161-162.
81 Banaras Duncan, July 1794. Basta no. 40, volume no. 82, pp. 167-169.
82 Ibid.
83 Resident’s Proceedings June 1792, Basta no. 34, volume no. 55 (1), p. 135.
In the late eighteenth-century, the fates of sons and their mothers – who emerged as their sons’ greatest advocates – were inextricably intertwined. Furthermore, in elite households, which could often consist of several hundred women and other dependents, dispossession of land rights had a widespread impact on all members. Thus, even as Deedar Jahan’s widow stressed her own rights to the zamindari, her petitions illustrate the combined and shared nature of the fates of the members in the household.

**Upper-Caste Women, Kinship Networks and the Shifts in Rights in Land under Colonial Regulations**

Colonial policies in the late eighteenth century necessarily included mediations in kinship networks. Hierarchies of power suffused kinship ties even during the periods of heightened colonial entrenchments. Colonial officials and their Indian collaborators therefore continued to draw upon and manipulate these ties for political and economic advantages. In the process, they reconstructed relations of power between kin along caste and gender lines. In this section, I examine colonial land revenue policies to illustrate the political import of kinship ties and colonial reconstructions of those ties along gender relations in particular.

When Mahipnarain succeeded to the throne of the Banaras Raj in 1781, his grandmother Gulab Kuar took control of the household and became her grandson’s advisor. Over the next twenty years, Gulab Kuar used her status and shifts under colonial rule to increase her wealth from land revenue in Banaras. During Mahipnarain’s reign, both Gulab Kuar and Mahipnarain drew upon discourses of inheritance to increase their rights in land. They also used marital practices to increase their rights in land through
Such histories of dowry reinforce Veena Talwar Oldenburg’s argument that the practices of dowry must be examined within political and economic contexts at all times. During the eighteenth century, East India Company officials referred to dowry as wasteful expenditure. However, the Banaras royal family’s engagements in the land revenue system point to the ways in which marriages and practices of dowry were deeply embedded in agrarian transfers of land rights. Furthermore, they proved critical to accumulating land revenue resources at a time when it was under the considerable pressure of an extractive colonial state.

In 1782, the royal family faced condemnation over the issue of embezzlement by British officials. The controversy largely concerned Raja Mahipnarain’s father Drigbijai Singh who had been appointed the Raja’s naib or deputy. Drigbijai Singh was in charge of supervising the revenue collection of the entire Banaras principality, and handing this collected revenue over to British officials in installments. After Chait Singh’s reign, Company officials consistently appointed older male kin to supervise and conduct the affairs of (the often) young Rajas of Banaras. Such appointments aimed specifically to reduce the authority of the latter. This policy was also useful to the Company officials whose affairs in Banaras came under critical scrutiny in the British parliament after Chait Singh’s expulsion. As Mahipnarain’s naib, the “older guardian” was responsible for the timely payment of the Raja’s revenue commitments, which had doubled since Chait

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85 Ibid., p. 23.
86 For the Company’s policies regarding the maintenance of the Raja as a titular head see, Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch: 3 December 1781, Consultation: S 3 Dec. 81 (1) and Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 13 May to 30 June, 1784, Consultation: Secret Proceedings, 13 May to 30 June (64-A), pp. 1902-1910. For Mahipnarain’s naiibs see Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 4 Dec. 82 (2), Foreign and Secret Department, Secret Branch, Year 1783, Consultation: S 24 Mar 83 (2),
Singh’s time. The naib, rather than the Raja, was removed from his position by Company officials if the revenue was not paid in time. The office of the naib became crucial in exerting pressure on the Raja for the payment of revenue without destabilizing the dynasty itself.

Within a short period of appointment, Drigbijai Singh came under the scrutiny of colonial officials and was charged with embezzlement. Officials complained that in 1782, he had only paid 2,700,000 rupees of the annual revenue instead of the stipulated 4,000,000 rupees. Drigbijai Singh was imprisoned on failing to pay the remaining amount. Subsequently, both Mahipnarain and Gulab Kuar attempted to free him by advancing a loan from the Banaras merchant-banker Gopal Das Sahu to pay the balance owed to the Company.

The Company confiscated the Khera Mungore pargana, claimed by the Rajas of Banaras as a hereditary jagir, as compensation. Between 1782 and 1785, Mahipnarain and Gulab Kuar struggled to regain this jagir. Even though they had paid the balance owed, the Company continued to keep the pargana under its control. Gulab Kuar and Mahipnarain appealed to officials for its release but colonial officials were reluctant to let the Raja reassume his rights over the pargana. Subsequent proceedings reveal how

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Footnotes:

87 Foreign Department Secret Branch, 28th June 1785, Consultation: Proceedings 28th June 1785, see pp. 2205-2210.
87 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch, 19 November 1781, Consultation: S 19 Nov. 81 (5)
88 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 4 Dec. 82 (2), Year-1782.
89 Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 11 November to 31 December 1782 Volume no. 53-A, pp. 3542-3559.
90 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 27 Dec. 83 (30).
91 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 4 Dec. 82 (2), Year-1782. Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28th June 1785, Consultation: Proceedings 28th June 1785, pp. 2179-2182.
92 Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 27 Dec. 83 (30).
Mahipnarain and Gulab Kuar used patterns of inheritance to retrieve it and claim it as a *jagir*.

Mahipnarain challenged the confiscation of Khera Mungore by arguing that it was unjust to sequester it because of the wrong doings of his father Drigbijai Singh.\(^{93}\) Mahipnarain and Gulab Kuar stated in separate petitions that the *pargana* was a *jagir*. They argued that it had been in the family for a long period and now belonged to Gulab Kuar.\(^{94}\) In making this argument, both petitioners signaled a deeper history of their claimed rights recounted in *The Bulwuntnamah*. According to Khair-ud-din Khan, the author of *The Bulwuntnamah*, Balwant Singh first focused attention on to the region when his recalcitrant uncle Dusaram sought shelter with Daim Khan, the *zamindar* of Khera Mungore and an enemy of the Raja.\(^{95}\) Balwant Singh defeated Daim Khan, occupied the *pargana* of Khera Mungore, and approached the Mughal Emperor for the granting of *jagirdari* rights. He was successful as the Mughal Emperor granted it as a rent-free *jagir* to Balwant Singh.

In addition, when Mahipnarain and Gulab Kuar asserted that the *jagir* belonged to the latter, both petitioners challenged the Company’s rights to confiscate *jagirs* to make up for Drigbijai’s defaults. They implied that if the *jagir* belonged to Gulab Kuar, Balwant Singh’s lawful widow, only Mahipnarain – and not his father – had claims to it as her lineal heir. In October 1784, Hastings wrote to the Resident Fowkes that Rani Gulab Kuar had approached him for regaining possession of the district of Khera

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\(^{93}\) Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28\(^{th}\) June 1785, p.2179.

\(^{94}\) Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28\(^{th}\) June 1785, Proceedings 20\(^{th}\) June-30 August 1785, pp. 2252-2254.
Mungore, which had not been part of the revenue assessment of the government, and had belonged to her family as a jagir.\textsuperscript{96} He informed the Resident that he had given a title-deed to the Rani putting her in charge of the jagir but on a provisional basis until her right could be verified by his office. In his reply, Fowkes noted that Gulab Kuar’s authority over the jagir could not be determined from any records in the office. He wrote, “the Rani never had any possession of it, since the expulsion of Chait Singh – I mention the period because I conceive it unnecessary to enquire any further back.”\textsuperscript{97}

Ultimately, Gulab Kuar and Mahipnarain were successful in securing their claims and the colonial authorities recognized Khera Mungore as Mahipnarain’s hereditary jagir.\textsuperscript{98} Gulab Kuar and Mahipnarain’s concerted efforts ensured that the pargana was returned to the Raja of Banaras; that it was recognized as a hereditary jagir. Meanwhile, descendants of Daim Khan, the zamindar of Khera Mungore whom Balwant Singh had displaced, continued to assert their rights to the pargana well into the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{99}

Led by Gulab Kuar, the Banaras household continued to accumulate rights in land through new marital ties. However, colonial officials regulated them. In 1791, the Resident Duncan wrote a letter to Sub-secretary G. H Barlow informing him of Raja Mahipnarain’s son, Uditnarain’s upcoming nuptials. Duncan reported that the marriage

\textsuperscript{95} Khan, The Bulwuntnamah, pp. 34-36. Contestations between Daim Khan’s heirs and the Banaras Rajas over rights to the jagir would continue into the nineteenth century, see Family Domains of the Rajas of Banaras, February 1832- October 1848, Basta no. 97 A, volume, 190 (II), pp. 197-229.
\textsuperscript{96} Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, Proceedings 20\textsuperscript{th} June-30 August 1785, pp. 2248-2249.
\textsuperscript{97} Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, Proceedings 20\textsuperscript{th} June-30 August 1785, pp. 2252-2254.
\textsuperscript{98} Banaras Duncan, June 1788, Basta no. 2, Volume no. 10, pp. 138-140. See also A. Shakespear, Selections from the Duncan Records, Vol. II (Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1873), pp. 75-76.
had been arranged with the daughter of one Fateh Shah, Raja of the province of Bahar who had been in continuous rebellion against the Company. Duncan urgently informed the Sub-secretary that he had only recently come upon this information; until then, it had been believed that the bride in question was the daughter of another zamindar Pahalwan Singh. Actually, the bride was Pahalwan Singh’s granddaughter as Fateh Shah had married Pahalwan Singh’s daughter.

Duncan accused Mahipnarain of passing the bride-to-be as Pahalwan Singh’s daughter when in fact she was Fateh Shah’s daughter. According to Duncan, Mahipnarain had clarified that Pahalwan Singh’s granddaughter had been living with her grandfather since her mother’s death nearly ten years ago and that Pahalwan Singh had been her adoptive father since then. However, Duncan still questioned the suitability of the marriage. He placed the blame entirely on Gulab Kuar. Duncan reported that Gulab Kuar arranged the match herself since she “completely controls all the interior concerns of the Raja’s family.” In the letter, Duncan stated that he had been successful so far in postponing the marriage and asked whether it should proceed at all. The marriage took place only after the Board of Governors’ approval.

This match had important consequences especially as it overrode histories of animosity and facilitated the movement of resources to the Banaras Raj. The Bulwuntnamah provides some interesting insights. Pahalwan Singh’s family had a long

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99 See Family Domains of the Rajas of Banaras, February 1832- October 1848, Basta no. 97 A, volume, 190 (II), pp. 197-229.
100 Banaras Duncan, June 1791, Basta no. 31, vol. 45, pp. 59-62.
101 Ibid., p. 61.
102 Ibid., p. 45, 137.
history of conflict with the Rajas of Banaras.\textsuperscript{103} Due to their enmity with the Rajas, Pahalwan Singh’s ancestors had lost their zamindari rights in the Majhowa pargana. However, their descendant Pahalwan Singh was able to recover rights over Majhowa after orchestrating the marriage of his son Gurdutt Singh to the daughter of Ajaib Singh, Gulab Kuar’s brother.\textsuperscript{104} Ajaib Singh had become the naib to the Raja of Banaras in 1784 and he used his power to give the pargana of Majhowa in dowry to Gurdutt Singh and Pahalwan Singh.\textsuperscript{105}

In a later period, the pargana transferred once again in dowry, this time to the Banaras Raja Mahipnarain’s son, Uditnarain when he wed Pahalwan Singh’s granddaughter. The marriage enabled Raja Mahipnarain to take charge of Pahalwan Singh’s estate. Pahalwan Singh’s zamindari had been burdened with balances in revenue payments to the government. He gave up his rights to the pargana in favor of the Raja and years later, Gulab Kuar would refer to Majhowa as hers “in a manner”.\textsuperscript{106} Marriages were therefore extremely significant in accumulating rights in land in the form of dowry.

In the period after Mahipnarain’s accession to the throne in 1781, Gulab Kuar was able to leverage her status in engagements with colonial officials to increase the Raja of Banaras’s political and economic clout. As I argue subsequently, this proved instrumental in maintaining the royal household’s authority in the new land revenue structure of Banaras.

\textsuperscript{103} Khan, \textit{The Bulwuntnamah}, pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 6, 11. For Ajaib Singh’s kinship status see page 11, and for Pahalwan Singh’s political-kinship practices see page 6.
\textsuperscript{105} Khan, \textit{The Bulwuntnamah}, p. 6. For Ajaib Singh’s appointment as naib, see Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, Consultation: Proceedings 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, Proceedings 20\textsuperscript{th} June-30 August 1785
\textsuperscript{106} Agent to the Governor General, December 1796, Basta no. 1, volume no. 1, p. 115.
The Decennial Settlement with *zamindars* in Banaras, which later informed the Permanent Settlement regulations of 1793, provided new opportunities for those interested in gaining or expanding their rights in land. Eager to settle revenue obligations with adult male *zamindars*, who alone were recognized as true proprietors of the land, officials in Banaras set about identifying them. Consequently, they decided to recognize only those who could prove that they had made revenue payments to the government after 1775, when the Company assumed direct control over the region, as *zamindars* and confirm their rights to land. Many families came forward to claim proprietary rights in land.

The complexities of the process of settlement often resulted in the assignment of incorrect revenue rates. According to Cohn, the Banaras Resident Duncan had been unable to devise a system in order to assess accurately the productivity of all the estates in the Banaras region.\(^{107}\) This enabled Indian officials called *tehsildars*, who were in charge of collecting revenue on behalf of the colonial government, to profit. *Tehsildars* under-assessed the revenue outputs of estates or *zamindaris*. By under-assessing *zamindaris*, *tehsildars* enriched themselves for they submitted to the government lower revenue than what they actually collected. Furthermore, as colonial officials upheld the proprietary rights of *zamindars*, and recognized them as owners of the land, *tehsildars* began employing various strategies and ploys to fabricate *zamindari* titles for themselves. *Tehsildars* frantically accumulated *zamindari* titles when it became apparent to them that

\(^{107}\) Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians*, p. 363.
the government preferred giving revenue management rights of an estate to those who also held zamindari titles over the same.\textsuperscript{108}

These circumstances led to the rise of a small group of revenue officials including the Raja of Banaras Mahipnarain and his successor Uditnarain who accumulated most of the tehsildari rights in the region. These Rajas of Banaras along with two other men, the Bhumihar Brahman Devakinandan and the Brahman merchant-banker Sheo Lal Dube, profited from the discrepancies in the revenue assessments of zamindaris between 1789 and 1795. They used their position to accumulate more zamindari rights unto themselves.

After 1795, these men benefited again. Large numbers of zamindars of the initial Settlement between 1789 and 1790 were unable to make regular revenue payments. These delinquent zamindars became vulnerable to a key regulation of the Settlement according to which “estates that were in arrears of revenue could be auctioned off to the highest bidder, who thus obtained zamindari rights and the obligations to pay the land revenue.”\textsuperscript{109} Beginning with 1796, several such zamindaris came into the hands of men such the Rajas of Banaras, Devakinandan, and Sheo Lal Dube after being auctioned off.

What has remained unacknowledged in earlier scholarship on this political economy is that the Rajas of Banaras and Devakinandan used ties with their female kin to accumulate rights in land. The Rajas of Banaras inherited Gulab Kuar’s land rights after the Rani’s death in 1805.\textsuperscript{110} However, even before her death, Raja Uditnarain had enjoyed the benefits of Gulab Kuar’s land resources by serving as the manager of some of her


\textsuperscript{109} Cohn, \textit{An Anthropologist among the Historians}, pp. 361-362.

\textsuperscript{110} Banaras Collectorate 1799-1809, Basta no. 3, Volume no. 13, p. 267.
parganas. In return, he had only to provide for Gulab Kuar’s personal expenses and needs.  

Records show that Gulab Kuar’s engagements in the land-revenue structure contributed to the Banaras Rajas’ land resources. A letter from the Banaras Collector, I. Barlow to the Acting Resident Thomas Graham in 1805 elaborates upon Gulab Kuar’s rights over different landed estates. This letter illuminates the resources that upper-jati women in positions of power were able to command in this period. Details of the letter reveal that Gulab Kuar had land rights in eight parganas. Of these, she consolidated zamindari rights over four of them. As a zamindar, she controlled land in those parganas; she was also responsible for the payment of government-assessed revenue for those parganas based on their productivity to the colonial authorities. Gulab Kuar also obtained tehsildari rights, which allowed her to collect revenue from zamindars in the other four parganas. As a tehsildar, she was allowed to keep a certain percentage of the collections before handing the bulk of it the revenue over to the government.

The Banaras Collector’s letter illustrates that unlike Chait Singh’s mother Panna, who lost all rights to her jagirs, Gulab Kuar continued to hold zamindari rights over certain estates since Balwant Singh’s time. According to the Banaras Collector, she accumulated the rights to collect revenue from four other parganas in the period following her grandson Mahipnarain’s accession to the throne under the Resident Duncan. Duncan’s own report on Gulab Kuar’s land engagements, however, offers

111 Ibid., p. 268.
112 Ibid., pp. 267-269.
113 Ibid., pp. 267-269.
conflicting evidence on the number of newly acquired *parganas.*\(^{114}\) Both documents, however, reveal that the Rani expanded her land rights under the British Resident.

Gulab Kuar was able to expand her land revenue rights because she was a privileged upper-jati woman with important kin. She attained rights at the expense of her lower-jati male and female relatives such as Chait Singh and Panna. The debates and discourses surrounding her grandson Mahipnarain’s accession to the throne had been based upon Gulab Kuar’s acknowledged status as Balwant Singh’s wife. It had given her authority as an upper-jati woman of the Brahman caste and upheld her place as the ritually pure wife. This enhanced her status as the rightful widow of the Raja Balwant Singh.

The exigencies of the Decennial Settlement provided opportunities to certain elite women like Gulab Kuar to accumulate wealth through land-revenue engagements. However, even women like Gulab Kuar faced constraints. In his correspondence with the Governor General in 1788, the Resident Duncan noted that Balwant Singh’s widow, Gulab Kuar, contracted *tehsildari* rights over three *parganas* from him.\(^{115}\) However, Duncan reported that he regretted his decision because Gulab Kuar owed 3,500 rupees to the government at that time. The Governor General observed that the loss was too small to demand any particular change in the arrangements with Gulab Kuar though he advised the Resident to limit such revenue arrangements in the future.\(^ {116}\) This correspondence is striking in the way it shows colonial officials opposed land-revenue settlements with women. Consequently, they used minor revenue lapses to exclude women from land and

\(^{114}\) Banaras Duncan, June 1788, Basta no. 2, volume no. 10, pp. 150-161.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., pp. 150-161.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., p. 224.
revenue rights even though other male zamindars and tehsildars posed the British more serious problems such as embezzlements.

During this period, elite women employed different means to gain rights in land under the Decennial Settlement in Banaras. Their efforts were in response to colonial regulations and proscriptions against women’s participation in the agrarian structure. In order to overcome gendered regulations, women drew upon the support of their male relatives. However, as I will subsequently illustrate, such support systems could prove counter-productive as male kin made inroads into the wealth and resources of their female family members.

The historical scholarship on the Banaras region has elided gendered histories of land revenue settlements under colonial rule. Studies on shifts in land revenue under colonial rule have typically only examined male actors. I argue that the study of the female kin of male actors who accumulated rights over land offers critical insights into the ways in which gender difference informed colonial regulations. In so doing, I also draw attention to how the examination of the intricate connections between kinship relations and networks of land rights reshapes histories on propertied males. I will illustrate these points by analyzing the career of Devakinandan, one of the “new men” on whom Bayly and Cohn first drew our attention.\footnote{Bayly, \textit{Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars}, p. 166 and Cohn, \textit{An Anthropologist among the Historians}, p. 373.}

Bayly has pointed to two men, Devakinandan and Sheo Lal Dube, as emblematic examples of the new “enterprisers”, landholding elites who had emerged under colonial
reforms. These elites, he argued, were “unfettered by the power of the old rajas.” I suggest instead that it is possible to link the success of such men to older structures of power and authority. In fact, the colonial understanding of the propertied individual as exclusively male underwrote their ability to draw upon older structures of power.

The Decennial and Permanent Settlement policies forbade revenue settlements with females and minors. With these policies in place, women had to find male relatives or male managers who could take over zamindaris, which the women had previously held or wanted to gain. Male representatives, however, could, only take over the zamindaris of their female kin on the condition that they paid the revenue due to the government. In addition, they had to pay an extra ten percent of the revenue assessment for the “maintenance of the female or the minor”. In practice this regulation undercut women’s traditional rights in land that only the most enterprising women with resources at hand could hope to circumvent.

Records from the period following the Settlements reveal that both widows and their minor sons were declared incapable of managing the zamindaris of their husbands and as a result they lost control over the estates. The same issues arose even in cases where women found male relatives to serve as managers for them. Records relating to Jagatdeo Singh, the Raja of Banaras’ collateral family member, are especially striking. They reveal that Devakinandan came to wield land rights through kinship relations with

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118 Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, p. 314.
119 Ibid.
120 Guha, A Rule of Property for Bengal, p. 163.
121 Banaras Duncan, June 1788, Basta no. 2, volume, no. 10, p. 240-241.
122 Banaras Duncan, September 1790, Basta no. 5, volume no. 31, p. 188.
123 Banaras Collectorate, Basta no. 4 (a), vol no. 23, Year January 1811 to 6 Dec…[?], pp. 257-261.
his sister who had been married to Jagatdeo Singh, a prominent member of the Banaras royal family called Jagatdeo Singh.\textsuperscript{124}

Jagatdeo Singh was Mansaram’s third brother, Mayaram’s, grandson.\textsuperscript{125} He had enjoyed wealth and power owing to his ties with the royal family of Banaras. Jagatdeo Singh and his siblings were given rights to two parganas of land in the Banaras region by Balwant Singh.\textsuperscript{126} Colonial officials had also appointed him as Raja Mahipnarain’s naib for a brief period before removing him on charges of embezzlement.\textsuperscript{127} When Jagatdeo’s widow recounted her husband’s prominence in Banaras politics in a petition, she did not mention his complicated relationship with the Company.\textsuperscript{128} Instead, she argued that Jagatdeo had served the British loyally and successfully as the naib for two years. Of course, her supplication to the British to intervene in her dispute with her brother over land rights underwrote these representations.

In her petition, Jagatdeo’s widow argued that her brother Devakinandan had cheated her out of her zamindari and tehsildari rights. She stated that after her husband’s death, she had approached the Resident Duncan to make provisions for her. She claimed Duncan replied that since law forbade the granting of parganas to women, he could only oblige her if she asked a male relative to become her proxy. Jagatdeo’s widow noted that this was why she made her brother Devakinandan, who lived in the Nawab of Awadh’s

\textsuperscript{124} Letters from the Agent to the Governor General, 1801-1804, Basta no. 1, volume no. 5, pp. 199-203.
\textsuperscript{125} Khan, The Bulwunnamah, p. 3
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{127} See the Governor-General Hastings’ letter to the Banaras Resident Thomas Markham in Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings, 11 November to 31 December 1782, Volume no. 53-A, p. 3559. For Mahipnarain’s naibs see Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 4 Dec. 82 (2), Foreign and Secret Department, Secret Branch, Year 1783, Consultation: S 24 Mar 83 (2), Foreign Department Secret Branch, 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, Consultation: Proceedings 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, see pp. 2205-2210. Foreign and Political Department, Secret Branch 27 Dec. 83 (30), Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1785, Proceedings 20\textsuperscript{th} June-30 August 1785, p. 2183, 2205-2210.
territories in the Allahabad district, her proxy. In exchange for his services, Devakinandan received a salary from her.

Thus, Devakinandan received rights to revenue collection in *parganas* of the Ghazipur district, which was a part of the Banaras principality. Duncan’s provisions for Devakinandan were apparently conditional. According to Jagatdeo’s widow, Devakinandan was a man of few means and therefore she had to provide the name of a merchant-banker who would stand in as security for the revenue payment. The widow thus narrated that she arranged with the merchant-banker Babu Mokund Laul to become her security in exchange for a substantial sum of money. Interestingly, she noted that in addition to her brother, she gained revenue collection rights over more *parganas* in the name of other male dependents, namely, Jhanky Pershaud and Bishen Dutt Singh.

According to the petition, this arrangement proved disastrous. The widow’s brother and the other dependents co-opted her land rights. Writing particularly about her brother Devakinandan, Jagatdeo’s widow argued that he had, in addition to the salary, taken large sums of money from her for purported expenditures and appropriated her profits, such as the ten percent that *tehsildars* were able to keep for themselves from the revenue collected in each *pargana*. She claimed her inability to prevent him from usurping what were originally her rights to revenue collection resulted from the land revenue engagements being in her brother’s name.

In asserting her claims, the widow constantly drew attention to her position and status as a member of the royal family of Banaras. As a member of the royal family, she had been able to convince Duncan to grant rights to certain *parganas* to her brother (and

128 Letters from the Agent to the Governor General, 1801-1804, Basta no. 1, volume no. 5, pp. 199-203.
proxy) Devakinandandan. Her royal family connections also allowed her access to resources and other capital; based upon those she had been able to produce a merchant-banker to serve as security for revenue payments to the government. She strengthened her claims by proffering evidence as “proof of my [read her] right under the seal of Ranny [sic] Gulab Koowur [sic], Raja Oodit Narain [sic] Singh, the Baboos [sic] and other respectable and well informed people of the city.…”

There are no other records related to this case. This lack of other records on the proceedings of the dispute between the brother and sister could be because of her specific demands noted in the petition. She had pleaded the case remain outside the courts for fear that it would bring disgrace upon her, and damage her social standing. Nonetheless, the petition, in conjunction with other sources, is useful for reconstructing the intersecting histories of kinship ties and land rights in this period.

An examination of the petition must necessarily move beyond questions of the truthfulness of the widow’s claims. For then surely her claims of her husband’s success as naib to Mahipnarain in 1783 would encourage scholars to disregard the petition as an important source. Moving beyond the more obvious discrepancies, the petition reveals how Devkinandandan, one of the foremost tehsildars in the region, had connections to the royal family at Banaras. These connections were critical in shaping his career. According to Jagatdeo’s widow, her brother Devkinandandan had been extremely poor but rose in power and wealth when she chose him as her proxy following the Resident Duncan’s advice. Before elaborating upon the possibilities of wealth accumulation offered by such

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familial connections, it is useful to consider the plausibility of practices in which women produced male relatives as their proxies in this period.

Jagatdeo held rights to revenue collection in two parganas of the Ghazipur district from the period of Balwant Singh’s reign. Moreover, he had a brief stint as the naib in charge of the revenue collections for the entire Banaras principality. Combined, these opportunities would have enabled Jagatdeo to accumulate vast amounts of wealth. His widow inherited some of this wealth. In her petition, she noted that Jagatdeo did not have any children. However, it is possible that aside from her, Jagatdeo had other wives and children through them, for most ruling elites established polygynous households in this period. In that case, it is also highly likely that she would have shared Jagatdeo’s wealth with such other members of the household. What is critical for us to note is how she directed her share of the inheritance towards accumulating land rights.

Jagatdeo’s widow’s engagements in land were similar to those of Gulab Kuar’s, whose zamindaris and tehsildaris too had been under the management of male kin and agents. Colonial policies towards Gulab Kuar and their reluctance to assign her tehsildari rights after she had defaulted in paying a small sum provide an important context for Jagatdeo’s widow’s narrative regarding Duncan’s suggestion to appoint a male proxy. Though this narrative cannot be verified, it is highly likely that Devakinandan gained power, wealth and prestige through his kinship ties with his sister. As a member of the royal family of Banaras, and Jagatdeo’s wife, she would have had resources at her command that her natal kin could use to their benefit. In Devakinandan’s case, it appears that he was able to accumulate advantages deriving from his sister’s
position after Jagatdeo’s death because according to his sister, Devakinandan came to her in distressed circumstances.

The 1792 statement of the Decennial Settlement in the Banaras region reveals that Devakinandan had *tehsildari* rights in the *pargana* of Budhwal (also referred to as Burmal) in the Ghazipur district. 131 This is also the first instance when Devakinandan finds mention in the Banaras records. We do not find mention of him in records prior to this period; this suggests that he was a man of means independent of his sister. If these documents corroborate Jagatdeo’s widow’s claims, they are further strengthened by an examination of the territories first acquired by Devakinandan in the 1790s. It is striking to note that the *pargana* s he came to control in the 1790s, which were listed in his sister’s petition, were all within the Ghazipur district where Jagatdeo’s family had a long history of land rights. This suggests that Devakinandan’s success in the region is linked to kinship ties with his sister.

The narrative provided by Jagatdeo’s widow shows that the men who Bayly and Cohn had called “enterprizers” and “new men” respectively had succeeded owing to their relationships with well-placed women. 132 There are examples of other elite men who expanded their power and influence by assigning rights in land to their wives’ brothers and daughter’s husbands. 133 The losses of women like Devakinandan’s sister meant gains for their male relatives. It also suggests that the changing land revenue system only made

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130 Banaras Collectorate 1799-1809, Basta no. 3, Volume no. 13, pp. 267-269.
131 Banaras Duncan, December 1776, Basta no. 1, volume no. 2, p. 274.
133 See for example the ways in which Kulb Ali, the revenue farmer of Jaunpur, entrenched himself in the district by giving rights in land to his wife’s brother and daughter’s husband in Extract from Duncan’s
room for a subterranean form of women’s power as wielded by Gulab Kuar. As elucidated earlier, elite women such as Jagatdeo’s widow and Gulab Kuar participated in this economy along with other male relatives. Kinship ties, themselves infused with hierarchies of power such as those between elite sister and poorer brother, mediated participation in land revenue structures. As a result, shifts in the land revenue structure could redefine the position of elite women in their families.

The political and economic importance of kinship ties were, however, elided by colonial officials. Their response to Jagatdeo’s widow’s complaint against her brother is particularly revealing of this process. In their correspondence, officials pointed to the dispute being of a familial and ‘private nature’ and suggested it could be resolved amicably between brother and sister. By pointing to such disposessions as familial, Company officials were able to depoliticize kinship ties and the shifts therein. Furthermore, it bears stressing that this emphasis on the private nature of familial disputes would have reduced the recorded number of such cases in colonial proceedings. This is precisely why the petition noted above is critical for historians.

**Shifts in Contours of Kinship and Inheritance Patterns**

In this section, I examine the ways in which Gulab Kuar and Uditnarain, her great grandson and the Raja of Banaras, reshaped familial relations to harness wealth and property from Gulab Kuar’s father’s zamindari. I argue that they were successful in marginalizing the claims of Gulab Kuar’s natal kin owing to the exigencies of colonial
rule. In 1800, Raja Uditnarain claimed the *pargana* of Kola Asla on Gulab Kuar’s behalf. Kola Asla had been Burriar Singh’s – Gulab Kuar’s father – *zamindari* and had devolved to his adopted son, Ajaib Singh and his descendants. Uditnarain challenged the inheritance of Ajaib Singh’s sons by claiming it as Gulab Kuar’s instead. In his letter to the Banaras Collector, Raja Uditnarain framed Gulab Kuar’s rights within the discourse of Raja Balwant Singh’s supremacy.\(^{136}\) He argued that

Rajah [sic] Balwant Singh was the lord paramount of the raje [sic] and the purgunahs [sic] and villages in the zemeendarry [sic] of Banaras-on his marriage he made over to his Ranny [sic], Gulab Koonwr [sic], the purgunah [sic] of Kola Asla, which was the immediate zemeendary [sic] of her father Baboo [sic] Berear [sic] Sing [sic]- the surplus revenue after paying all the government dues he presented to Ranny [sic]- moreover and above certain villages were given to her as a *jagir* [italics mine] for her private expenses the annual produce of which was ten thousand rupees.\(^{137}\)

Uditnarain went on to argue that Balwant Singh did not consider it important to give Gulab Kuar a *sanad* as his word was supreme. He continued that when the Company acquired the dominions of Banaras, Rani Gulab Kuar asked the Resident Fowkes to give a *sanad* to her brother Ajaib Singh; but in reality, Ajaib Singh held rights in the *pargana* only in the capacity of Gulab Kuar’s manager. Later sources reveal that Uditnarain had successfully supported Gulab Kuar’s claims for she did receive *tehsildari* rights to the *pargana* in 1800.\(^{138}\)

Colonial officials’ decision to recognize Gulab Kuar’s rights relate to matters of contingency. Ajaib Singh’s heir and oldest son Sheoparshan Singh had been involved in a

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\(^{136}\) Letters by the Agent to the Governor General 1801-1804, Basta no. 1, volume 5, pp. 95-97.

\(^{137}\) Ibid., p. 96.

\(^{138}\) Letters by the Agent to the Governor General 1801-1804, Basta no. 1, volume 5, pp. 93-94.
rebellion against the Company leading to the dispossession of his land rights. Consequently, officials granted rights over the *pargana* to Gulab Kuar.\(^{139}\) Such shifts in land rights point, yet again, to the ways in which patrilineal patterns of inheritance could be compromised under colonial rule when they pertained to adopted sons such as Ajaib Singh and his sons, and male descendants who resisted colonial authority. In such cases, women such as Gulab Kuar were declared heirs, and were able to accumulate land rights as inheritance. They became conduits through which land rights could be transferred to more reliable men such as the Raja of Banaras. This becomes evident in further proceedings regarding the *pargana* of Kola Asla.

The contest for rights over the *pargana* of Kola Asla resurfaced two years later in 1802.\(^{140}\) Gulab Kuar demanded that since Company officials had allowed hereditary *zamindaris* to devolve through generations, she should be allowed to turn the *zamindari* rights to the *pargana* over to her legal heir Raja Uditnarain, whom she had also adopted as her son. In order to strengthen her claim, Gulab Kuar constructed a new narrative for her inheritance claims by recasting kinship ties between Ajaib Singh and herself. Unlike Raja Uditnarain who referred to Ajaib Singh as Gulab Kuar’s brother in his petition, Gulab Kuar argued that Ajaib Singh was her father’s paternal nephew instead of a lineal heir.\(^{141}\) In doing so, Gulab Kuar challenged Ajaib Singh’s adoption by her father Burriar Singh. At the same time, Gulab Kuar constructed her relations with Uditnarain along the more direct and closer relationship of mother and son rather than their relationship of great-grand mother and great-grand child.

\(^{139}\) Banaras Collectorate 1799-1809, Basta no. 3, Volume no. 13, pp. 267-269.
\(^{140}\) Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, 1801-1804, Basta no. 1, Volume no 5, pp. 94-95.
\(^{141}\) Ibid.
In 1802, the Acting Agent to the Governor General informed the Persian Secretary to Government that Rani Gulab Kuar had claimed the *pargana* of Kola Asla that produced an yearly revenue of 10,000 rupees as her *zamindari*.\(^{142}\) The letter reveals that Gulab Kuar had already attained the *tehsildari* rights to the *pargana* by paying the substantial balances in revenue due from it. She was now petitioning the government for *zamindari* rights that she claimed were her inheritance. Gulab Kuar’s father Burriar Singh held *zamindari* rights in the *pargana*, and the Rani claimed the *zamindari* rights based on her relationship as a descendant. In making such claims, Gulab Kuar challenged the *zamindari* rights of Burriar Singh’s adopted son Ajaib Singh and of his son Sheoparshan Singh. She emphasized that Ajaib Singh was not her father’s direct descendant and, therefore, could not be the heir. Instead, she argued that Ajaib Singh – her “father’s nephew” – and his son had merely been managers acting on her behalf in matters concerning *her pargana* throughout the reigns of Raja Chait Singh and Mahipnarain.\(^{143}\) Gulab Kuar went on to point out that during the Decennial Settlement in Mahipnarain’s reign, she appointed Ajaib Singh’s sons to manage the revenue of the *pargana*.

Other documents do not support Gulab Kuar’s version of her natal kin’s history of land possession. The author of *The Bulwuntnamah* notes that Burriar Singh had adopted his sister’s son Ajaib Singh as his heir since he did not have a male biological descendant.\(^{144}\) He noted further that after Ajaib Singh’s death, his four sons – Sheoparshan Singh being one of them – came into possession of this *pargana*. However, their involvement in a rebellion against the Company resulted in their dispossession in

\(^{142}\) Ibid., pp. 91-93.
\(^{143}\) Ibid., pp. 94-95.
\(^{144}\) Khan, *The Bulwuntnamah*, p. 11.
1800.\textsuperscript{145} Records from the settlement proceedings reveal Sheoparshan Singh as zamindar of the pargana in the 1792 revenue accounts.\textsuperscript{146} Other surviving documents attest to Mahipnarain’s confirmation of the zamindari of Kola Asla in Sheoparshan Singh’s name in 1784. The document showed that Mahipnarain was entering into a new settlement with Sheoparshan Singh who had already been described as the zamindar.\textsuperscript{147} Another corroborating document from 1785, which was attested by the British Resident at Banaras Francis Fowkes stresses that Ajaib Singh “as heir” to Burriar Singh, a maaфи grant of the village of Fatehpur in the pargana of Kola Asla.\textsuperscript{148} A list of grants of land made by prominent landholders in the Banaras region further suggests that Ajaib Singh held land rights in his adoptive father’s zamindari. It is believed that he made a kishuarpam grant to a Basdeo Pandit in 1780-81 in a village that was in the Kola Asla pargana.\textsuperscript{149} However, records also reveal that Mahipnarain made a land-grant from the same pargana a year later, in 1781-82.\textsuperscript{150} This either meant that Mahipnarain too held some land rights in the region or that, after his accession, he gained control over the pargana. Drawing upon The Bulwuntnamah, it can be inferred that Ajaib Singh may have temporarily lost control over the zamindari due to the support he lent to Chait Singh during the Raja’s rebellion in 1781. According to Khair-ud-din Khan, Ajaib Singh remained undisturbed in his possession of the zamindari …during the lifetime of Balwant Singh until the expulsion of Chait Singh, whom he accompanied…. When, however, Chet [sic] Singh prepared to go to the Deccan, Ajaib Singh left him and took up his residence for a considerable time at Chilakot – a celebrated place of pilgrimage, and where he remained until

\begin{itemize}
\item[145] Ibid., p.12.
\item[146] Banaras Duncan, December 1776, Basta no. 1, volume no. 2, p. 238.
\item[147] Banaras Duncan, 1777-1787, Basta no. 1, volume no. 3, p. 159.
\item[148] Ibid., p. 163.
\item[149] Banaras Duncan, August 1785, Basta no. 2, volume no. 6, p. 6.
\item[150] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
summoned to Banaras by Rajah Muheepnarayan, who appointed him to a post in his court, and afterwards advanced him to the dignity of the Naib.\footnote{Khan, \textit{The Bulwuntnamah}, pp. 11-12 and p. 164 for Ajaib Singh’s support of Chait Singh during the attack on the Shivala.}

It is possible that Mahipnarain was able to make inroads into the \textit{pargana} due to Ajaib Singh’s brief defection in support of Chait Singh. An analysis of the documents enables us to reconstruct only a fragmented history of Ajaib Singh’s land rights in the Kola Asla region. However, they all suggest that Ajaib Singh was Burriar Singh’s declared heir.

Gulab Kuar died in 1805. In the period after her death, colonial officials were faced with three claimants comprising village zamindars, each of whom asserted their hereditary \textit{zamindari} rights to a certain \textit{mauza} in the Kola Asla \textit{pargana}. Rajah Uditnarain underscored his rights to the \textit{pargana} Kola Asla, simultaneously contesting the competing claims of the village zamindars, and those of Ajaib Singh’s descendants.\footnote{Banaras Collectorate 1799-1809, Basta no. 3, volume no. 13, pp. 295-297.} However, this time he incorporated key arguments that were made by Gulab Kuar and introduced some new elements such as dowry. According to Uditnarain, the whole \textit{paragana} had been the \textit{zamindari} of Burriar Singh who had further acquired large rent-free areas in the region from the Nawab of Awadh Shuja-ud-daula. He argued that Gulab Kuar was Burriar Singh’s daughter but she was also wedded to Balwant Singh, “the Maharaja of the whole province”.\footnote{Ibid., p. 295.} Uditnarain stated that upon Gulab Kuar’s marriage to Balwant Singh, she inherited her father’s province as dowry. Burriar Singh managed it for his daughter during his lifetime and after his death, “Baboo [sic] Ajaib Singh, \textit{cousin} [emphasis mine] of the Rannee [sic] supervised the Purgunnah [sic] for the Rannee [sic] and after his death, Sheopursun Singh in like manner as the mokhtair [sic, Manager] of
the Rannee [sic].” The excerpt reveals that Uditnarain used multiple arguments to secure Gulab Kuar’s and, by extension, his own rights to Kola Asla. He strengthened Gulab Kuar’s status as heir by arguing that Kola Asla had been her dowry. Furthermore, he no longer referred to Ajaib Singh as Gulab Kuar’s brother but instead, as her cousin. This shift in argument therefore challenged Ajaib Singh’s, and his descendants’, status as lineal heirs, and their rights of inheritance. Documents from the period between 1812 and 1818 reveal that Uditnarain was successful. After Gulab Kuar, the zamindari rights to the pargana did indeed devolve to Uditnarain.

Gulab Kuar and Uditnarain’s machinations aside, their success in claiming Kola Asla was directly related to colonial exigencies as colonial officials sought to enter into revenue engagements with their subject, Uditnarain, the patrilineal ruler of the region. However, while political and economic exigencies shaped official’s engagements which had an adversarial impact on Uditnarain, the Banaras ruler. By 1818, colonial officials came down heavily on powerful landlords and tehsildars who had benefited immensely from the late eighteenth-century land-revenue settlements. The colonial state now sought to tap into the resources amassed by tehsildars. In this changing scenario, Uditnarain’s contestants such as Ajaib Singh’s widow claimed the pargana again by petitioning the government. Records from September 1817 to February 1818 show that the courts ruled in favor of Ajaib Singh’s widow and those of her sons who had not been involved in the rebellion against the Company. An examination of a letter from the Superintendent of Legal Affairs to the Secretary of the Commissioner of Banaras reveals that the court

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154 Ibid.
155 Banaras Collectorate, Letters received. Basta no. 4 (a), Year January 1812- April 1816, Volume no. 20, pp. 113-114 and 179-184.
156 Kumar, Raychaudhuri and Desai eds., Cambridge Economic History of India, pp. 42-43.
ruled that the *pargana* had belonged to Ajaib Singh as his *milkiat*. It stated further that Raja Uditnarain had misrepresented facts, and that there had been a false representation of his great grandmother’s interests in the property.\textsuperscript{158}

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined gender and kinship networks in Banaras and its surrounding regions from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. I have shown that colonial administrative policies mobilized and reconstituted these networks. Conversely, I have illuminated the ways in which specific articulations of a gender hierarchy and definitions of family informed and reinforced colonial policies. Furthermore, an examination of kinship ties in the political economy of the late eighteenth-century Banaras and Awadh has demonstrated that wider familial relations shaped elite women’s land rights. The same explorations have also highlighted how female kin, their resources, the successful manipulations of marital networks and political clout fueled the careers of emergent enterprisers and dominant male landlords who were successful in controlling the majority of land rights. The chapter draws attention to this gendered political economy.

\textsuperscript{157} Banaras Collectorate, January 1811- 6 December ?, Basta no. 4 (a), volume no. 23., pp. 225-227.
\textsuperscript{158} Banaras Collectorate, January-April 1818, Basta no. 5, volume no. 24, pp. 165-169.
Chapter 4:

Locating Mercantile Households in Making of Colonialism: Caste, Gender, Religiosity and Capital in Late Eighteenth-Century Banaras

Introduction

In late eighteenth-century Banaras, merchants and bankers expanded their businesses. In addition to economic capital, they accumulated social, cultural, and symbolic capital through consumption and display. A critical element of this process was their relationship of dependence and service with regional rulers and the East India Company. Revisionist historiography on eighteenth-century Banaras has drawn attention to such intermediary mercantile groups; how their services facilitated the formation of regional polities and states in the period. Scholars have also underscored that these intermediary groups provided the necessary capital and resources for the establishment of early colonial rule. However, this scholarship has neglected to examine the centrality of mercantile and service-providing households in the making of colonialism.

In this chapter, I argue that gender played an important role in the accumulation of all forms of capital by the mercantile households during the late eighteenth century. I trace the ways in which hierarchical relationships between women and men, as well as those between different generations of women, were central to the continuation of mercantile households across generations. The management of relationships and capital within households was central to the marginalization of certain women.

I focus on widows from a variety of mercantile and service households who had
been marginalized from their families. Importantly, women in this situation sought help from the British in an attempt to regain their rights to wealth. I engage with the instances of three women from Banaras, belonging to three different social groups, to illustrate this process. I begin by examining the case of Baidamu, a widow from a small shop-keeping household of the mercantile Khatri jati. Subsequently, I discuss the case of Ganga Bai, a widow from a wealthy Khatri mercantile household. Finally, I investigate the case of Bini Bai who belonged to a Brahman household, and whose members performed their traditional priestly duties besides being involved in the money-lending trade. The households of all three women were located in Banaras.

I therefore highlight how constellations of relationships within households shaped mercantile wealth and status; how these were, in turn, central to the establishment of colonial rule in the eighteenth century. Women who were unhappy with their positions sought redress in the newly established colonial courts. I argue that the processes of familial dispute resolution in the courts that upheld upper-caste male authority played a key role in consolidating colonial sovereignty.

**Gendered Contestations over Inheritance: Small Merchants, Corporate Sects and Blood-Brotherhoods**

During the late eighteenth century, the East India Company introduced significant changes in the political and economic administrative structures of the Banaras region. In the first and third chapters, I have shown how colonial interventions provided a new understanding of family and inheritance by strengthening the property rights of the upper-castes, as well as male family members. In this chapter, I examine early colonial court

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1 Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*. 
cases on mercantile family disputes to demonstrate how colonial law facilitated a shift in the flow of capital away from female kin – and towards men – in service gentry families.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the adjudicatory structures of the early Company judiciaries included arbitrative assemblies alongside formal Company courts. These arbitrative assemblies comprised of arbitrators chosen from the community of the disputants, and drew upon a multiplicity of juridical authorities from customary practice to the shastras to resolve conflicts. After 1793-95, the Company dispensed with such forms of arbitration in its eagerness to monopolize the dispensation of justice.

Between the late 1780s and 1792, a majority of court cases in Banaras dealt with issues of moveable and immoveable property within mercantile and other service families. Hardly any of these cases dealt with disputes over land; rather, they were concerned with houses, shops, jewelry and money. An overwhelming majority of the disputes involved widows and their affinal kin.

From the late 1780s in Banaras, Hindu law implicitly came to refer to the gendered principles of Mitakshara law. Colonial officials relied on court pandits to dispense justice using shastric texts. In this process, they drew upon principles that universalized the brahmanical patriarchal family. Colonial law validated two distinct schools of pre-colonial law, namely, the Mitakshara and the Dayabhaga schools. The Dayabhaga school of law predominated in Bengal, while the rest of British India recognized Mitakshara law as a source of authority for Hindu law.² These schools had distinct principles regarding women’s rights to inheritance.

The Dayabhaga School did not advocate joint male ownership and allowed widows, daughters and mothers to a share in the family property. The Mitakshara legal doctrine recognized two distinct forms of property. One form was that which belonged jointly to the male agnatic kin, inherited from one’s father, or father’s father, and so on. The other form was self-acquired, or inherited through other family members and considered separate. It was possible to divide the first form of property among the coparceners if they so agreed. More significantly for the argument here, Mitakshara excluded women from ownership of joint property. Daughters were entitled to maintenance and marriage expenses, while wives and widows had a right to maintenance from the joint property.

Aside from these schools of law which were based upon *shastric* literature, customary practices too shaped governance in the pre-colonial period. Familial disputes illustrate the ways in which colonial administration of justice established the dominance of Mitakshara. A central aspect of this universalization of Mitakshara was to facilitate the movement of property to male members of upper-caste families, and to constitute them as legal heirs. Thus colonial courts supported specific groups of males from upwardly mobile, mercantile castes and communities such as those identified as Khatris.

Baidamu was the widow of Gurdayal, a shopkeeper and member of the Khatri mercantile community. Gurdayal belonged to a religious sect called Nanakpanthi whose

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3 Ibid., p. 17.
6 Ibid.
members were devotees of Nanak, the founder of Sikh community.\(^7\) After Gurdial’s death, Baidamu – a member and patron of the local chapter of Nanakpanthi sect – claimed the income from Gurdial’s shop. Gurdial’s paternal cousin, Bhawani Singh – excommunicated from the Nanakpanthi fold – also staked a claim to the shop and its income. Their dispute came to court in 1787 and remained there until 1792.\(^8\)

Four arbitrators from the Khatri and Brahman pandit castes adjudicated the question of inheritance to Gurdial’s shop.\(^9\) They declared that Baidamu had exclusive right to earnings of the shop during her lifetime.\(^10\) They placed the management of the shop under another merchant but listed both Bhawani Singh and Baidamu as joint owners. If Baidamu ran out of money, Bhawani Singh was to provide for her. The shop and its earnings would transfer to Bhawani Singh after Baidamu’s death.\(^11\)

Baidamu was not satisfied with the arbitrators’ decision. She appealed to the colonial court in 1789. This second round of litigation brought forth new arguments, with both sides citing the customary practices of Nanakpanthis and the shastras. Baidamu’s lawyer asserted that Bhawani Singh had no legal claim to Gurdial’s property. The lawyer produced two farkhatis signed by Bhawani Singh’s father and Bhawani Singh. The lawyer argued that when “a Farghkhuty [sic] is passed between 2 peple [sic] the one of them cannot become the other heir –nor even his children.”\(^12\)

Baidamu’s lawyer appears to have relied upon Mitakshara law. In this school,

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\(^7\) Nanakpanthi was a popular religious sect since the sixteenth century in Punjab and northern India.

\(^8\) Banaras Duncan, January 1792, Basta no. 9, volume no. 54, pp. 37-38 and 40-53. Resident’s Proceedings June 1792, Basta no 32, volume no. 52, pp. 29-105 and Resident’s Proceedings June 1792, Basta no. 34, volume no. 55 part II, pp. 625-633.

\(^9\) Resident’s Proceedings, January 1792, Basta no. 32, volume no. 52, pp. 79-85.

\(^10\) Ibid., pp. 83-84.

\(^11\) Ibid., pp. 89-90.
rules of inheritance distinguished between agnatic male kinsmen’ rights to undivided wealth with corresponding obligations to maintain the widows of their kinsmen, and the widows’ rights to parts of the wealth that may have been set aside from the agnatic corporate wealth. A widow’s proprietary rights hinged upon proof of whether the disputed property had been set aside by her husband before his death or not. If there was no conclusive proof that the property had been set apart, or that the family itself had not separated from each other, then the male agnatic kinsmen inherited the undivided wealth with the widow receiving only maintenance from the joint property. However, if a family divided a property, and categorized it as separate at the time of a partition in the family, the widow of the owner then became entitled to an inheritance provided he died without a male heir. By suggesting that there had been a division between Gurdayal and Bhawani Singh’s father, Baidamu’s lawyer sought to challenge Bhawani Singh’s claims to any of Gurdayal’s property. The lawyer argued that according to the farkhati, Bhawani Singh’s father had relinquished any claim, including that of his son’s, on Gurdayal.

The case now took an interesting turn. Bhawani Singh’s lawyer argued that Gurdayal had adopted Bhawani Singh as his son, made him a Sikh like himself, “put hair on his head and established him in his shop and said that he had made him proprietor and heir of the shop.” As an adopted son, Bhawani Singh was entitled to inherit like any other biological son according to the Mitakshara School of law. In response, Baidamu’s lawyer said that contrary to Bhawani Singh’s claims, the latter had been a mere “servant”

12 Ibid., p. 41.
14 Resident’s Proceedings, January 1792, Basta no. 32, volume no. 52, p. 43.
15 Maynes, Mayne’s Treatise on Hindu Law and Usage, p. 243.
in Gurdayal’s enterprise, and employed on fixed wages.\textsuperscript{16} He drew upon Gurdayal’s account books to prove this.

Matters were complicated further as patterns of inheritance within the family intersected with Khatri networks of patronage and piety towards the Nanakpanthi sect. Members of the Khatri mercantile community in Banaras were fervid devotees of the Nanakpanthi sect, which had a corporate organization.\textsuperscript{17} The Nanakpanthis comprised of both laymen and ascetics.\textsuperscript{18} The sect owed its popularity to its inclusiveness: lay followers were not required to abandon prior religious and caste-based practices.\textsuperscript{19} As Khatri families prospered in trade from the sixteenth century onwards, and expanded their trade networks over the subcontinent, the Nanakpanthi sect flourished under their patronage. However, in the late eighteenth century, colonial courts became a key site through which Khatris aspiring for property could intercept networks of patronage towards the corporate sect and direct capital towards themselves.

The Nanakpanthi sect’s practices and customs came under investigation when Bhawani Singh asserted the legality of his adoption since the deceased Gurdayal had been a Sikh and a prominent member of the Nanakpanthi order.\textsuperscript{20} As the disputants tried to prove and disprove the adoption, they elaborated upon customs, rites and practices of adoption within the Nanakpanthi \textit{sangat}. This process was both reconstitutive and inventive of customary practice as both sides responded to challenges posed by the other.

\textsuperscript{16} Resident’s Proceedings, January 1792, Basta no. 32, volume no. 52, p. 81. See also Banaras Duncan, January 1792, Basta no. 9, volume no. 54, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{17} Bayly, \textit{Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars}, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Resident’s Proceedings, January 1792, Basta no. 32, volume no. 52, pp. 69-73.
with a volley of arguments. Witnesses who supported Bhawani Singh elaborated upon the performance of certain Sikh customs in the *sangat* to prove his adoption. They drew attention to the significance of the presence of the *sangat*, and argued that the adoptive father had performed certain ceremonies in front of his Nanakpanthi brethren including sharing a ceremonial feast with them.

Witnesses were called upon to provide more details on the customs and practices of adoption in the Nanakpanthi order as court officials searched for precedents. Because of the inconsistencies in the narratives of disputants and witnesses, colonial officials were hard pressed to determine established customary practices of the sect. When Bhawani Singh argued that Gurdayal had adopted him as his son and “taken him into the sect”, Baidamu’s lawyer countered that the adoption could not have taken place because Bhawani Singh did not

…ever drink the remainder of his [Gurdayal’s] *sherbet* [italics mine]. It is the custom that a *murshid* [italics mine] or grue [sic] makes his adopted son drink the remainder of his *sherbet* [italics mine] which is the established rule among the Sikh sect.²¹

Baidamu’s lawyer went on further to state that Bhawani Singh instead drank the *sherbet* from the cups of the *faqirs* of the sect.²²

By making this statement, Baidamu’s lawyer challenged Bhawani Singh’s claims on two counts. The first being that Bhawani Singh never drank from Gurdayal’s cup and the second that by drinking from the cup of the ascetics, Bhawani Singh had become an ascetic himself. As I will show later, by asserting that Bhawani Singh was an ascetic, the

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²¹ Ibid., p. 53.
²² Ibid.
lawyer sought to compromise the former’s claims to the property and wealth of a layman.

In order to strengthen his second argument, Baidamu’s lawyer stated that other ascetics of the sect were ready to testify that Bhawani Singh had indeed become an ascetic of the sect [that is, a Nanakshahi *faqir*] through that rite.\(^{23}\) It is likely that Baidamu’s lawyer would have been able to get other ascetics of the sect to vouch for him because of his client’s patronage of the sect. In 1788, Baidamu had gifted her house to the *sangat* because, as stated by her lawyer, she did not have a son or daughter to inherit it.\(^{24}\) Since the gift of the house was *after* the beginning of the dispute over the shop, it suggests that Baidamu was deliberately courting the support of the corporate community for herself. It was thus a shadowy presence in the widow’s case. In addition, the Nanakpanth’s investments in the case in support of Baidamu were strengthened by Bhawani Singh’s marginal location in the Sikh community.\(^{25}\)

The *sangat* had excommunicated Bhawani Singh who could not be a part of the congregation. Further, they barred him from using the shared communal vessels that were used by the Sikhs of the order. He faced pressure from the priests of the *sangat* to return and seek forgiveness “for his offence” of opposing the bequest.\(^{26}\) Bhawani Singh was, however, in no mood to relent. Despite this, his lawyer continued to assert that his client had been adopted son of Gurdial and therefore Baidamu’s transfer of the house to the Nanakpanthi sect was illegal.

The overlaps between networks and practices of discipleship in the Nanakpanthi

\(^{21}\) Ibid., pp. 53-54.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., pp. 76-77.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp. 84-85.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., pp. 76-77.
sect and the (contested) relationship between the adoptive father (Gurdayal) and son (Bhawani Singh) brought the case to an impasse. The disputants struggled to elaborate the relationship between Bhawani Singh’s adoption and his initiation into the Nanakpanthi sect, noting the subtle differences between rites that went into the initiation into the sect, and that of the adoption. In the process, they argued over whether Gurdayal simply initiated Bhawani Singh into the sect or adopted him as a son. Both parties drew upon customary practices and the shastras alternatively to strengthen their case.

Baidamu’s lawyer now argued that instead of deciding the case according to the customary practices underlined by Bhawani Singh, the adoption ought to be decided according to the shastras. He argued that Gurdayal and Baidamu were Hindus; therefore, Bhawani Singh had to prove the validity of his adoption according to the shastras. It may be argued that in asserting the primacy of the shastras as the judicial authority, the lawyer sought to underscore Bhawani Singh’s status as a Nanakpanthi ascetic whose customs could not have any influence over matters of property within a lay family. This maneuver did not necessarily mean that the sect recognized Hindu and Sikh identities as distinct. Indeed, Baidamu’s lawyer would later argue that Gurdayal had been a Sikh, suggesting the overlap between the two identities. I argue that the main objective was to highlight difference between the world of ascetics and that of laymen. The following exchanges between the disputing parties are illuminating in this regard.

Bhawani Singh bolstered his arguments on the adoption by arguing that he had lit Gurdayal’s funeral pyre. Under Mitakshara law, a son had to perform this act for his

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27 Ibid., p. 65.
father.\textsuperscript{28} To Bhawani Singh this was sufficient proof in support of his claim: if a son was obliged to light the fire – and he had done so – it then necessarily followed that he must have been the dead man’s adopted son. However, Baidamu’s lawyer was set on categorizing Bhawani Singh as a Sikh ascetic, whose practices could not be understood within the purview of Hindu law. He stated,

Bewany [sic] Sing [sic] also represented, that he performed Gurdeal’s [sic] Funeral Rites, the reason of which that the Funeral Rites on persons of this Sikh cast [sic] are merely setting fire to the Body and at the time of putting the fire to Gurdeal [sic] as Bewany [sic] Sing [sic] did it, Bedamow’s [sic] father called for justice, and said that he must not set fire to the body, Bewany [sic] Sing [sic] said, I set fire to the body of Gurdeal [sic] for God.\textsuperscript{29}

Baidamu’s lawyer appears to have suggested that the import of the funeral rites for ascetics was not the same as that for lay Hindus. He claimed that ceremonies mandated by the \textit{shastras} had not been performed during Gurdial’s [sic] funeral; this made Bhawani Singh’s claim dubious.

Disputants created an ascetic Sikh vs. lay Hindu binary to construct a distinctly Hindu legal subject who was subject to the \textit{shastras}. Court officials, in turn, universalized textual law and brought it to bear on both lay and ascetic practices and customs in various sects. Thus, in response to the arguments by Baidamu’s lawyer, court officials inquired from Bhawani Singh’s lawyer, “When Gurdeal [sic] having made Bewany [sic] Sing [sic] a Sikh at the singhet [sic] and placed him in his shop did he observe any of the ceremonies required by the shaster [sic]?\textsuperscript{30} Bhawani Singh and his lawyer were hard pressed to provide an answer. Officials demanded abstract laws based upon Sanskrit

\textsuperscript{28} Maynes, \textit{Mayne’s Treatise on Hindu Law and Usage}, p. 595. Resident’s Proceedings, January 1792, Basta no. 32, volume no. 52, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{29} Resident’s Proceedings, January 1792, Basta no. 32, volume no. 52, p. 54.
prescriptive texts and thereby overlooked the point that initiation into the devotional sect and practices of adoption in the Sikh Khatri community were based upon historical practices and customs that were transient and shifting in themselves.

In his reply to the question, however, Bhawani Singh’s lawyer drew attention to customary practice yet again. He said, “it is customary in the Sikh tribe, that if a person adopts any person among his brethren they must make them a Sikh in the singhet [sic], and let hair grow on their heads, and at their death the adopted becomes heir to their property.” Now engaging with established customary practices of the sect, Baidamu’s lawyer denied any such rite. He stated,

Gurdeal [sic] my mistress’s husband, was a Sikh and of the kitree [sic] tribe and a worldly man, it is the custom of the Sikha [sic] tribe and of worldly men that if any person adopts any of his brethrens children they make them drink of their own leavings and whatever is the custom of adoption, in the same manner as the worldly men do, is to be observed.

His witnesses then elaborated these distinct secular rites in court.

Throughout the discussion on customary practices of the Nanakpanthi sect, Baidamu’s lawyer used details to distinguish familial relationships of the faqirs of the sect from those of the sect’s laymen. These arguments were used to create abstract differences between the intermeshed practices of initiation in the layman family and the priestly order of the sect. However, such abstractions served the interests of Bhawani Singh. His claim of being the adopted son, and his contestation of Baidamu’s gift of the house to the Nanakpanthis demonstrate Bhawani Singh’s attempts at ensuring the transfer

30 Ibid., p. 66.
31 Ibid., p. 67.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 84.
of property along specific relations under Mitakshara law. The court pandits chose to uphold the rights of Bhawani Singh, the upper-caste male, “according to the shaster [sic]” even as they ruled that his adoption could not be proved.  

In their ruling, the pandits argued that Bhawani Singh’s right to the property was proved on two counts: first by the depositions of his witnesses according to which Gurdial had invested Bhawani Singh with power over his property; second, that he was the heir based upon relationships of consanguinity.

In the event of the court’s inability to substantiate Bhawani Singh’s adoption, the proprietary title should have gone to Baidamu. Under Mitakshara, a widow was entitled to inherit if the husband died separated from his agnates and left no male issue. Chastity was a singular condition for widows to retain control over their property. The pandits agreed about Baidamu’s sexual chastity. However, they were still inclined to uphold male authority in what was a narrowly defined field of property transfers and family. The court granted Baidamu only rights to food and maintenance from the property while Bhawani Singh inherited it.

Baidamu contested the decree. Men from the Nanakpanthi sangat, keen on regaining rights to the house gifted to them, supported her. Following her appeal, Duncan, the Resident at Banaras decreed that the court had not investigated the case properly on two counts. First, the pandits had referred to Bhawani Singh as Gurdial’s

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34 Ibid., pp. 85-86.
35 Ibid.
36 Maynes, Mayne’s Treatise on Hindu Law and Usage, p. 604. Resident’s Proceedings, January 1792, Basta no. 32, volume no. 52, p. 85.
37 Maynes, Mayne’s Treatise on Hindu Law and Usage, p. 604.
38 Resident’s Proceedings, January 1792, Basta no. 32, volume no. 52, p. 85.
39 Ibid., pp. 103-104.
brother’s son in their decree and based their decision upon consanguinity whereas, in fact, he was Gurdayal’s paternal uncle’s son. The Resident asked the pandits whether this made a difference to the succession. Second, Duncan asked the pandits to ascertain if Gurdayal had indeed adopted Bhawani Singh; if so, whether the adoption was valid. Duncan argued that in case an uncle’s son had no rights, especially owing to the passage of farkhati between them, the question of adoption alone would determine the case in Bhawani Singh’s favor.40

In June 1792, the judge at Banaras, Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan, responded to the Resident’s comments on the case.41 He supported Bhawani Singh by arguing that since the latter did not claim the inheritance based on his biological father’s relationship to the dead man, the question whether he was an uncle’s son or brother’s son was irrelevant. Instead, he argued, Bhawani Singh’s claim lay in his becoming a Sikh under Gurdayal’s aegis and by lighting the latter’s funeral pyre. Interestingly, the judge added a new component to support Bhawani Singh: he justified the latter’s claim because of his appointment as the manager of Gurdayal’s shop.

This prompted the widow to ask how it was possible for Bhawani Singh to inherit the property since it had been decided by the court that he could neither claim the inheritance based upon relations of consanguinity (since they had separated through the farkhati) nor through adoption as it had not been proved in court?42 She questioned how a “traveller or passenger” (here Bhawani Singh) who lit her husband’s funeral pyre could

40 Ibid., p. 105.
41 Resident’s Proceedings June 1792, Basta no. 34, volume no. 55 part II, pp. 625-633.
42 Ibid., pp. 629-632.
become a legal heir; how this was supported by Hindu or Muslim law.\textsuperscript{43}

On 25\textsuperscript{th} June 1792, the Resident Duncan wrote to the judge at Patna, in the province of Bihar, asking for advice on the dispute.\textsuperscript{44} He wrote that as there were many respectable Nanakpanthi Sikhs in Patna, he hoped the judge would be able to help him in resolving the dispute. Simultaneously, he approached pandits in Banaras to arbitrate according to the \textit{shastras}.

There is no further information about this case in the records. Nevertheless, the proceedings of this case illustrate how colonial courts were involved in securing the rights of males in property disputes. Such cases buttressed the male patrilineal family while women and religious sects, who previously had a share in the family property, became the losers. In this sense, the above dispute was not between women and men, but between two different kinds of family formation and inheritance. One, represented by the widow’s claim, stood for the Sikh \textit{sangat}. The other, represented by the male cousin, represented the lay household of blood-related kin. The fact that Hindu pandits, a Muslim judge at Banaras, and finally a colonial Resident, argued for the rights of Bhawani Singh suggests that all of them upheld lay householder lineages headed by males. Such males in turn became supporters of the colonial courts in alliances over property.

\textbf{Mercantile Households and Early Colonial Law}

During the eighteenth century, large mercantile firms in Banaras were family firms. In these firms, members of the household, their roles in businesses, and their expenses,
played a role in the well-being of the enterprise. The status of each member in the family fundamentally informed their expenses and occupations. The most powerful members supervised the disbursement of resources to other members of the household besides adjudicating on disputes. This process was gendered as well as generational as older members kept control over the younger males and females, instructing them on their different obligations and rights as men and women. Experienced women with a keen knowledge of accounts and expenses in the business and household could exercise authority over such households. Most prominent among such women were the oldest women in the family, whose supervisory roles in the management of mercantile household finances, including those of their sons’ multiple wives and children, came to mirror the networks of males.

The supervisory authority of older matriarchs was significant especially in banker families because of two distinct characteristics of such families. The first was that, in the eighteenth century, merchant-bankers provided cash and credit to various rulers: Nawabs, successors to the Mughal governors all over northern India, as well as to the East India Company. Their mercantile dealings led them to seek status in the eyes of those they served. This process often generated tensions within their households. For instance, landed elites and mercantile households of the eighteenth century depended on polygyny to bolster their claims on human resources and communities. As a result, merchants and the ruling elites experienced struggles between junior wives and senior wives, between childless widows and their elderly stepsons, between mothers-in-laws and daughter-in-

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46 Ibid., p. 377.
47 Ibid. See Bayly’s discussion on the Shah merchant-banker family in Banaras and one of the matriarchs in the family.
laws. In such households, it was not the death of a man but, more definitively, the death of a senior woman that shifted power and fiscal management between one generation and another. Such shifts were especially important in the management and flow of capital in merchant-banker families whose success depended on being able to channel expenditures to ensure expansion of credit opportunities. The control of household finances came to correspond to the ability to manipulate capital.

Second, the banker-families were dispersed over a wide territory in the eighteenth century. For example, branches of the household of the leading merchant of late eighteenth-century Banaras, Lala Kashmirimal, were located between Banaras and Jammu to the north, Multan to the west, and Bengal to the east. The management of a household of this spatial spread required substantial social and political skills, even as it presented significant challenges to the members who sought to regulate the movement of capital within the various branches of the family.

Disputes in such families remain under-studied. Scholars such as Bayly have examined the histories of merchant-bankers and their role in the making of colonialism in the region. However, these studies have left mercantile families and their significance to the process of establishing colonial rule unexamined. Further, these studies have posited a contrast between Persianate banker-families and austere Hindu capitalists without qualifying these categories adequately. I argue that such binaries can be complicated, and the role of gender in capital accumulation elaborated, if we expand our ideas of capital

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48 Residents Proceedings August 1792, Basta no. 35, volume no. 58, p. 137.
During the eighteenth century, patronage styles and the cultivation of certain elite habits by merchant-bankers served important purposes that the parameters of profit and loss cannot adequately explain. Bourdieu’s theorization on the forms of capital underscores the limitations of conceptualizing capital within economic theory alone; it reduces “the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange and which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit.”\(^{50}\) Bourdieu, therefore, points to forms of cultural, symbolic and social capital that accumulate through the transubstantiation of material forms of capital. These could, under certain conditions, be converted into economic capital.

By cultural capital Bourdieu means the inculcation of prized skills, the consumption of precious and culturally valued objects, and the acquisition of institutional qualifications by certain advantaged sections of society. Symbolic capital, on the other hand, implies the symbolic and material profits accumulated through the investment of economic capital by groups in society through the performance of ceremonies, charity and patronage.\(^{51}\) By social capital Bourdieu refers to the network of institutionalized relationships that are cultivated through exchange and efforts at sociability. Bourdieu posits these social relationships as investments in the form of a “capital of obligations”; importantly, the profits deriving from these are not necessarily immediate.\(^{52}\) In the context of colonial India, these forms of capital were critical to the social and material


\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 242.

advancement of mercantile families. Working at tandem, they lent these families the wherewithal to ingratiate themselves with rulers and nobles, wield superiority over other sections of society, gain the legitimacy to dominate over those below them, and provided opportunities to increase their economic capital.

In the late eighteenth century, political economy shaped the mercantile behavior of the period. Merchants adopted lavish lifestyles as they emulated kings and nobility. Bayly has argued that even frugal merchants participated in the courtly world. This created tensions for them as such participation had to be reconciled with merchant dharma that emphasized frugality and piety. According to Bayly, frugal merchants offset emergent tensions by lavish performances of piety that “exalted the merchant as a substantial and pious man capable of fulfilling his role in society.” Piety was critical for the overall, that is, the spiritual, physical and monetary, well-being of the merchants. As Bayly has argued, piety enabled a merchant to “become a king by proxy” through participation in social redistribution and meritorious charity. I argue, however, that rather than seeing performances of piety as existing in tension with other lavish expenditures and behavior, it may be more productive to understand them as one of the many investments that merchants used to accumulate capital.

Merchant-bankers in the period invested economic capital to create relationships with other elites and powerful authorities that allowed them to gain social prestige. Bayly has pointed to popular anecdotes which contrasted great merchant-bankers like

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53 Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, pp. 386-387.
54 Ibid. p. 384 and pp. 386-387.
55 Ibid., p. 389.
56 Ibid.
Kashmirimal with frugal and pious ones. Great-merchant bankers established themselves as magnates in palatial houses such as Kashmirimal’s haveli (see Illustration 9), adopted Persian manners and lifestyles of the Mughal nobility besides keeping Muslim concubines. However, distinctions between the splurging, Persianate great sahu and the frugal, pious merchant can be complicated.


Such distinctions presuppose a direct relation between piety and austerity as normative practices which does not necessarily hold for the eighteenth century. For example, James Prinsep’s sketch (see Illustration 10) and description of the elaborate architecture of the prayer room in Kashmirimal’s haveli illustrate that Kashmirimal spent

57 Ibid., p. 383.
lavishly on piety.\textsuperscript{59} Other sources point to Kashmirimal’s pilgrimage activities.\textsuperscript{60} These pilgrimages could be very grand events. Details from the patronage activities of Kashmirimal’s partner, Bachhraj, who was a Jain merchant, are illuminating. In 1789, Bachhraj sponsored his guru’s [teacher] pilgrimage that had an entourage comprising 10 bullock carts, 10 horses, camels, and 200 companions.\textsuperscript{61} In 1790, Bachhraj sponsored his guru’s travel from Murshidabad, near Calcutta, to Lucknow. This time the guru traveled with 500 companions, 50 carriages, bullock carts and 7 kingly palanquins.\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{10.jpg}
\caption{Illustration 10: ‘A Thakoor Dwaree’ in Kashmirimal’s haveli. Source: Ames Library of South Asia, University of Minnesota.}
\end{figure}

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\textsuperscript{59} ‘The Thakoor-Dwaree’ [Area dedicated to a shrine, prayer room] in Prinsep, \textit{Benares Illustrated in A Series of Drawing}.
\textsuperscript{60} Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1794-1795, volume no. XI, Letter no. 118, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{61} Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1788-1789, volume no. VIII, Letter no. 1481, p. 620.
\textsuperscript{62} Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1790-1791, volume no. IX, Letter no. 677, p. 163.
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If piety was important for the overall well-being of merchants, so was the accumulation of titles. Such accumulation was only possible through the cultivation of relationships. Like his Jain partner Bachhraj, who secured the title of Raja by 1787, Kashmirimal too had become Raja by 1793.63 This is particularly striking because there were many charges of fraud, from several quarters, against Kashmirimal during the late 1780s. Among those complaining against him were the Raja of Banaras, East India Company officials, and other elites.64 Records from 1795 reveal that Kashmirimal and his son continued to enjoy the favor of the East India Company and the Nawab of Awadh who bestowed khilats upon them.65 Furthermore, the family continued to be politically and economically relevant within the mercantile community as is evident from the ways in which other merchants sought to forge ties with them and hence increase their social capital. A merchant based in Calcutta made a gift of two elephants to Kashmirimal’s son Kashinath.66 This economy of exchange was in keeping with the culture of ruling elites. Elephants were especially popular as gifts, and regularly exchanged between the members of the elite class.67 Merchant-banking families therefore accumulated different forms of capital in support of their family, business and social status. However, such accumulations were only possible through careful regulation of the household where hierarchies of gender and age shaped the opportunities to accumulate capital, in all its

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63 Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1792-1793, volume no. X, Letter no. 1162, p. 252
65 Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1794-1795, volume no. XI, Letter no. 1055, p. 261.
66 Calendar of Persian Correspondence 1794-1795, volume no. XI, Letter no. 1157, p. 286.
67 For instance the Nawab of Awadh received a male elephant from the ruler of Nepal; see Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, October 1795, Basta no. 1, volume no. 2, p. 113. See also Foreign Department, Secret and Political Proceedings 9-28 August 1787 (84-A) for details of the gift of a female elephant to the Mughal Prince Jahandar Shah by a noble.
References to a Persianate lifestyle involving Muslim concubines, profligacy and indulgence, in opposition to the lifestyle of the pious and austere Hindu merchant, oversimplifies the problems of generations and gender within both kinds of households. These characterizations considerably overlook the ways in which gender inflected generational shifts; the ways in which the movement of individual women to positions of authority within such households depended not on individual skills of accounting for instance, but on successful networks of relationships. Thus, rather than remain a narrative about androcentric family firms, this chapter draws out the ways in which different groups of women were critical to the consolidation of colonial legal regimes in the region. The ways in which the mercantile families regulated capital, managed their heirs’ fiscal and social obligations, and navigated the successes and failures of different generations in the colonial courts, contributed to the success of particular branches of the business household. Such engagements were crucial to the establishment of mercantile families in the Banaras region and, at the same time, key to the consolidation of colonial rule. A dispute within Kashmirimal’s family that came to the court in 1792 illustrates this process.

In 1790, Ganga Bai, a widow, submitted a petition to the court requesting the return of certain properties, jewelry, and sums of money left to her by her deceased husband Pendimal. Sources suggest that Pendimal was Kashmirimal’s brother. Ganga

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68 Residents Proceedings August 1792, Basta no. 35, volume no. 58, pp. 123-128.
69 Sources are unclear about the precise nature of their relationship. However, Kashmirimal is referred to as Pendimal’s sons’ uncle. See Residents Proceedings August 1792, Basta no. 35, volume no. 58, p. 124. Moreover, as I will show later, the famous merchant-banker had direct control over the business and matters concerning Pendimal’s sons.
Bai had been married for just five years when her husband passed away. At the time of their marriage, Pendimal had three sons with his first wife. Two of these sons, Vizirimal and Jwalanath, appear to have been older than or at least as old as Ganga Bai. Both Vizirimal and Jwalanath were married and involved in the business, which they took charge of immediately after their father’s death. Ganga Bai’s petition suggests that Pendimal’s sons Vizirimal and Jwalanath resisted her marriage to their father and rebelled when she came into the house.\textsuperscript{70} Given the maturity of her stepsons, one can assume her husband was elderly when they married. This may also explain Ganga Bai’s childlessness. Given the brief tenure of the marriage, she had not attained the authority to adopt a son. Her youth, the brevity of her married life, and her lack of a child may explain her inability to form a substantial faction within the multi-generational household.

After her husband’s death, Ganga Bai became dependent on her mother-in-law, the oldest woman in the family. Under her mother-in-law’s supervision and care, Ganga Bai partook of the substantial resources of the family.\textsuperscript{71} Even though Ganga Bai was knowledgeable about the financial accounts of her dead husband, this was worthless without the support of other members in the family-firm.\textsuperscript{72} Notwithstanding such skills, Ganga Bai could not claim authority within the household to control a business on her own or on the behalf of another, such as a stepson or step-nephew.

In her petition, Ganga Bai noted that after Pendimal’s death, her stepson Vizirimal “deceitfully” brought her to Banaras from Jammu, where her husband lived, and placed

\textsuperscript{70} Residents Proceedings August 1792, Basta no. 35, volume no. 58, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{71} Chatterjee, \textit{Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India}, pp. 99-108. Also, see discussion on historiography on motherhood in the first chapter.
her under the care and charge of her widowed mother-in-law. Pendimal’s mother had a supervisory role over the property, effects, and the household. According to Ganga Bai, she was well cared for in Banaras by her mother-in-law. However, 11 years after her mother-in-law’s death, which was approximately around 1779, Ganga Bai became destitute, and dependent upon creditors.

Ganga Bai argued that she lost the wealth bestowed upon her by Pendimal when her stepsons removed her to Banaras. She claimed that her husband had left his house and wealth in Jammu to her, and the houses of business to his three sons by the first wife. Further, Ganga Bai claimed that she had left her jewels behind in Jammu when she came to Banaras after Pendimal’s death. She asserted that her stepsons advised her against carrying her jewelry on the treacherous journey and kept it for themselves.

In the petition, Ganga Bai noted that she had approached the colonial courts only after having exhausted other means of arbitration. By that time, her elder stepson Vizirimal had died and the younger stepson, Jwalanath, was in charge of Pendimal’s business. Ganga Bai claimed that when Jwalanath refused to help her, she requested Jwalanath’s uncle Lala Kashmirimal to intervene as he had been presiding over such matters within the mercantile community.

Since 1786 at least, Kashmirimal had arbitrated on matters concerning the merchant community. For instance, he resolved a dispute between an agent to a

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72 Residents Proceedings August 1792, Basta no. 35, volume no. 58, pp. 131-133.
73 Ibid., p. 126.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
prosperous Khatri merchant and two Banaras jewelers.\textsuperscript{76} The agent had accused the jewelers of cheating him out of 2,800 rupees. Kashmirimal resolved this dispute by making the jewelers pay 1,400 rupees to the agent. That the sum was exactly half of that demanded by the agent is particularly revealing of how processes of arbitration prioritized restoring relations and placating disputing parties.

Though Kashmirimal had successfully resolved disputes within the community, he refused to intercede on Ganga Bai’s behalf. Ganga Bai wanted him to arbitrate on her dispute with her stepsons because he was a member of the family and shared her concerns about not revealing the family secrets.\textsuperscript{77} Ganga Bai also knew that Kashmirimal had custodial authority over the family’s jewels, and she invited his arbitration for that as well.\textsuperscript{78} Her opponent Jwalanath attested her claim and agreed that the jewelry and other effects were indeed under Kashmirimal’s control.\textsuperscript{79}

Ganga Bai’s efforts to attract senior family males to arbitrate the dispute were unsuccessful. Instead, the males of the family closed ranks against her and excluded her from all decisions regarding management of the business. When Ganga Bai asked Kashmirimal to intercede, he reminded her, “Jwalanath is your son, therefore make him understand your claim and take it from him.”\textsuperscript{80} Ganga Bai reported that she “returned to the said person [Jwalanath] and said him – you are my son and I am your mother, therefore it is necessary that you should protect me because I am [illegible in original]
Was she trying to remind her stepson of his social responsibilities? Or was this affective language simply another articulation of claims to authority? When asked about the jewels by Ganga Bai, Jwalanath accepted her claims to maternal authority, but denied all knowledge of her jewels. In the court proceedings, Jwalanath said, “She is my mother, she is my all, and I look upon her in the same light [sic] that I looked upon Pendy [sic] Mull [sic] my father, but I know nothing of these jewels.”

Kashmirimal’s widowed mother was not only related to all the men within the family but was also the senior-most woman in the household. She occupied a powerful position in the household as she regulated the monthly allowances of the household members along with her son. Following her husband’s death, Ganga Bai had disputed with the older woman over her monthly allowance. Ganga Bai received 75 rupees a month when her husband was alive; however, the family reduced her monthly allowance to 25 rupees after his death. According to Ganga Bai, Kashmirimal and his family had discussed the question of monthly allowance and even considered increasing it. However on the question of the jewelry, Kashmirimal’s mother once told her that “Viziry [sic] Mull [sic] is not under my command take them from him.”

This case reveals that the role of these older women remained important in the processes Bayly has identified as the consolidation of family firms. Importantly, the simultaneous consolidation of one branch of the family and the fraying of another often depended on the senior-most woman’s authority. This authority was also crucial to the

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., p. 157.
83 Ibid., p. 156.
84 Ibid., p. 158.
85 Ibid., p. 156.
processes that regulated the wealth of the family.

In the case against her stepson, Ganga Bai argued that her deceased husband had presented her with jewels worth 200,000 rupees.\(^{86}\) In addition, she claimed that another, more expensive, set of jewels had been bought by her husband from members of the Mughal nobility. Though he had not presented her those ornaments, her husband had allowed Ganga Bai to wear them.\(^{87}\) When court officials inquired how Ganga Bai was claiming the more expensive Mughal jewels if she had not been gifted them, her lawyer argued on her behalf that

> when people give jewels to their wives to ornament themselves with they never take them back, and as they do not take them back – it is improper that the son should take them, therefore my mistress has claimed the said jewels....\(^{88}\)

Court officials then asked Jwalanath’s lawyer whether Ganga Bai’s contention was true; Jwalanath, however, denied the claim.

The proceedings reveal there had been a dispute in the family over certain jewels. Jwalanath denied knowledge of any jewels at one point in the proceedings, and at other times, argued these jewels were with his uncle Kashmirimal.\(^{89}\) During the early days of the court proceedings, Jwalanath argued that a *mahajan* could not afford to purchase the jewels belonging to members of the Mughal nobility.\(^{90}\) Ganga Bai’s lawyer retorted that merchant-bankers whose business stretched from Multan to Bengal were amongst the

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\(^{86}\) Ibid., p. 142.
\(^{87}\) Ibid.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 143.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., p. 135, 158.
\(^{90}\) Ibid., p. 137.
wealthiest people and could surely afford to purchase such jewels.\footnote{Ibid.}

Different female members of the household may have been allocated, or presented with, resources such as jewels but they were generally kept together either in the service of the business or for safekeeping.\footnote{Ibid., p. 153-155.} Ganga Bai reported that her husband also gave jewelry to his son’s wives but kept all the jewels together within the establishment.\footnote{Ibid.} If any jewelry was taken out and given to the women in the family, those were the cheaper jewels categorized as “khatree [sic] jewels.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 156.} When her eldest stepson asked Ganga Bai to present some of the Mughal jewels to her youngest stepson’s bride, Ganga Bai suggested they gift the “khatree [sic] jewels” instead.\footnote{Ibid.}

Even as Ganga Bai played the role of the welcoming mother-in-law, she complained that she did not have the power to command disbursement of the jewels among her stepsons and their wives as her stepsons ignored her advice. Nor was she able to determine her own monthly allowance. As noted earlier, the family reduced her monthly allowance to 25 rupees when her husband died. According to her, this minimal sum outraged her so much that she refused to accept it, and resorted to borrowing from creditors instead.\footnote{Ibid., p. 157-158.} Subsequently, she accumulated a debt of 7,000 rupees excluding the interest.\footnote{Ibid., p. 145.} This debt became a key point of contention in the mercantile family. Indeed, when Ganga Bai refused to abide by the expense accounts laid out by her female elder, Kashmirimal’s mother, she effectively compromised her ties to the family.
This process produces interesting insights into the interpellation of family members within an established nexus of management and expenses. Defining this was not only the disbursements of money but also obligations of family members to abide by set portions for the greater benefit of the household. Obligations within the nexus were in themselves determined by considerations of age, authority and power between men and women, older men and younger women, and older women and younger women. Only certain members of the household had the power to accumulate cultural, symbolic, social and economic capital. Thus, despite the performance of charity being a suitable act for a widowed woman, her family refused Ganga Bai this privilege when she expressed her wish to perform it.98

Ganga Bai flouted the established familial conventions on expenditure and accumulated massive debts. In so doing, she defied ties of deference within the family and compromised the position of the household and business. By going against established practices, then, Ganga Bai effectively compromised her place in the family. However, in the late eighteenth century she could approach the colonial courts to recover money and other resources from the family. When it became clear to her that it would be difficult to prove ownership over the jewelry she claimed was hers, Ganga Bai argued that she was willing to end the dispute on certain conditions. She argued that she would give up her case if the court decreed that Jwalanath pay her debts amounting to 7,000 rupees exclusive of interest; provide her with a house, food, clothing, two slave girls, and

98 Ibid., p. 179; see for an example of an elite widow’s charitable and pious practices at various holy places in the Banaras city. She was always accompanied by a servant on visits. The latter was charged with the duty of dispensing the “charity money” for his mistress at the various sites.
sufficient money to perform public piety.\textsuperscript{99}

Even at this point, Ganga Bai expressed her reluctance to live in her stepson’s home. She wanted a separate establishment.\textsuperscript{100} These demands extended beyond the monthly allowance of 25 rupees that her family allocated her, and which was the reason behind Ganga Bai’s reluctance to rejoin the household. These arrangements, however, threatened to disrupt the tightly managed economy of the mercantile household. Consequently, Ganga Bai’s stepson Jwalanath tried to settle the dispute outside the colonial courts by offering to pay her 25,000 rupees if she agreed to sign away any further claims.\textsuperscript{101}

Jwalanath’s attempts to permanently sever financial ties and familial obligation with his mother prompted Ganga Bai to renew her claims to the jewelry in the colonial court. However, as she was unable to provide any evidence to prove ownership, the court pandit decreed that Jwalanath pay the debts accumulated by Ganga Bai, and provide her with a house and food, as she was his mother and the widow to the deceased Pendimal.\textsuperscript{102}

During the late eighteenth century, colonial courts provided an opportunity to women who were at the margins of their families to reorient disbursements of resources amongst family members. Women like Ganga Bai, who could only claim a meager allowance from their marital households, used colonial law to their advantage and extracted substantial sums from their affinal kin. These processes produced challenges to household management and regulation practices that had been central to the constitution

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 145.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., pp. 149-150.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 159-160.
of the mercantile family, and consequently of colonialism itself.

Caste and Gender Relations under the Intersecting Interests of Upper-caste Males and the Colonial State

In August 1792, court officials adjudicated on a dispute between a Brahman widow, Bini Bai, and her brother-in-law, Balkishan Dixit. Both Bini Bai and Balkishan Dixit belonged to the Deccani Brahman caste of the Chitpavan jati. Chitpavans were one of the non-priestly, literate Brahman sub-castes with a history of scribal service in state bureaucracies from the sixteenth century onwards. They had been able to use their skills and religious prestige to accumulate land and hereditary offices under regional states in north and south India, as well as establish money-lending businesses.

Chitpavan Brahmins were favored even more when the Chitpavan Peshwa dynasty came to spearhead Maratha politics during the eighteenth century. Banaras itself received extensive patronage of brahmanical learning and piety under the Maratha rulers. The city already had a vibrant community of Brahmins from the Deccan since at least the sixteenth century. However, Maratha patronage greatly increased the presence of Deccani Brahmins in the city as rulers came to the city on pilgrimages accompanied by thousands of Brahmins.

Bini Bai’s affinal kin lived in Banaras and the Deccan, and ran what appears to be

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104 Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India*, p. 67
a small money-lending business. Before her husband died, she lived with her father-in-law, and sisters-in-law in Banaras. Her brother-in-law Balkishan Dixit, who earned a living as a moneylender and by performing the services of a pandit, lived in the Deccan. After her husband’s death, Bini Bai quarreled with her father-in-law and left Banaras for the Deccan. Members of the Maratha nobility, namely, Balaji Gobind, a Maratha overlord and representative of the Peshwa, gave her shelter and she received an annual sum in charity. For the next seventeen years, Bini Bai lived a peripatetic life under the patronage of nobility. She returned to Banaras only after her father-in-law’s death, when her brother-in-law took over the family business.

Upon her return to Banaras, Bini Bai demanded a share in the inheritance of her father-in-law’s property. After an initial round of arbitration involving other Brahmans from their community, Bini Bai was awarded an annual sum of 40 rupees. Dissatisfied with this amount, she approached the court and, following an appeal, was able to get an increase in the amount by 12 rupees. However, in 1791, Bini Bai once again complained against Balkishan Dixit in the colonial courts. The ensuing dispute between Bini Bai and her brother-in-law over inheritance was refracted through politics involving entire communities. These complexities informed the very practices of early colonial law and colonial policy.

In her petitions to the court, Bini Bai noted that Balkishan Dixit had excommunicated her when she returned to Banaras, and demanded a share in her father-in-law’s property. After an initial round of arbitration involving other Brahmans from their community, Bini Bai was awarded an annual sum of 40 rupees. Dissatisfied with this amount, she approached the court and, following an appeal, was able to get an increase in the amount by 12 rupees. However, in 1791, Bini Bai once again complained against Balkishan Dixit in the colonial courts. The ensuing dispute between Bini Bai and her brother-in-law over inheritance was refracted through politics involving entire communities. These complexities informed the very practices of early colonial law and colonial policy.

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in-law’s property.\textsuperscript{112} Balkishan Dixit had also forbidden other Brahmans in their community to have any dealings with her.\textsuperscript{113} In addition to this, he had reneged on paying Bini Bai the allowance due to her annually. Bini Bai then claimed that this forced seclusion from her family and community had driven her into debt.\textsuperscript{114}

Proceedings reveal that Balkishan Dixit had indeed challenged Bini Bai’s caste status by stating she had violated gender and caste norms. He asked court officials how they could rely on the word of a woman who “moved from place to place ... chooses to stay out for 17 years and sends her husband’s brother to the wind and don’t act obediency [sic] to him....\textsuperscript{115} Balkishan Dixit insinuated that Bini Bai had flouted norms of respectability by quarreling with her father-in-law, and leading an independent and peripatetic life.

Bini Bai challenged her excommunication by employing caste-based practices to support her case. This compelled her brother-in-law to negotiate with her. She challenged the latter by performing a \textit{dharna} against him for thirteen days in a Banaras-city temple.\textsuperscript{116} As Singha has pointed out, a \textit{dharna} was a fast unto death undertaken against an adversary in order to address a grievance or clear a debt.\textsuperscript{117} Moreover, it aimed to compel the adversary to negotiate terms. A \textit{dharna} became even more urgent if the person fasting was a Brahman – a person responsible for a Brahman’s death became a great sinner for which there was no expiation.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 207
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 205.
\textsuperscript{116} Resident’s Proceedings, Basta no. 35, volume 59, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{117} Singha, \textit{A Despotism of Law}, p. 88.
Bini Bai succeeded in scaring Balkishan Dixit who also began fasting against her until finally a Brahman pandit intervened and negotiated a deal between them. Balkishan Dixit vouched that if Bini Bai could get other Brahmans to eat food cooked by her, the provisions for which he would provide, he would pay her debts.\textsuperscript{118} Bini Bai also signed a voucher accepting this challenge; no doubt, Balkishan Dixit thought this an impossible feat. However, she did fulfill the conditions mentioned in the voucher. It is difficult to determine how Bini Bai was able to convince members of her community to eat food she had prepared, and effectively consolidate her status as a chaste Brahman widow after her excommunication. However, her success reveals that such sanctions were not irrevocable. Meanwhile, court officials arrested Balkishan Dixit after he refused to honor the vouchers.\textsuperscript{119} Consequently, he demanded that his case be decided according to the \textit{shastras}.\textsuperscript{120}

During the late eighteenth century, colonial officials frequently drew upon extant indigenous systems of dispute resolution for such cases.\textsuperscript{121} Officials relied upon the more context-sensitive processes of arbitration that took customary practices such as \textit{dharna} into consideration when textual law proved too abstract. Thus, Duncan, the British Resident at Banaras, told the disputing parties to resolve the case through the arbitration of members of their caste instead.

As Niels Brimnes has shown in the case of early colonial Madras, colonial officials recognized arbitration as a critical aspect in the management of disputes that

\textsuperscript{118} Resident’s Proceedings, Basta no. 35, volume 59, pp. 18-19.
\textsuperscript{119} Resident’s Proceedings, Basta no. 35, volume 58, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 188-189.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 201
came to the courts in this period.\textsuperscript{122} Brimnes relates that early colonial courts in Madras discouraged disputants from using the colonial courts even as the former eagerly sought them out.\textsuperscript{123} Early colonial courts participated as simply one more “contractor in power” in the juridical structures of pre-colonial India, characterized by a notion of “layered sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{124} In this political economy, indigenous forms of dispute management and the colonial courts were not “mutually exclusive” but largely “complementary.”\textsuperscript{125}

Evidence from late eighteenth-century Banaras qualifies any presumptions on the hegemony of colonial law in this period. Yet, it also complicates arguments that underscore complementarity between colonial law and extant practices of jurisprudence. As Singha has shown, officials struggled to come to terms with pre-colonial practices of judicature. The Resident at Banaras had difficulty in dealing with disputants’ extant

…rights to use force and violence to press a claim, or to defend special privileges in revenue payment and, the invocation of a field of arbitration which could challenge the justice of decisions taken in the Company’s *adalats* [courts, italics mine] and even overturn them.\textsuperscript{126}

Sources reveal that the Resident at Banaras was keen to try cases under the newly formulated civil Hindu law in the courts. Thus, in the proceedings from another case of inheritance between yet another widow and her brother-in-law, the Resident Duncan admonished court officials for handing the case over to local community members for arbitration.\textsuperscript{127} He argued instead that the court should have decided this “simple claim of

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p. 518.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p. 522.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Singha, *A Despotism of Law*, pp. 88-89.
\textsuperscript{127} Resident’s Proceedings June 1792, Basta no. 34, volume no. 55 part II, pp. 520-522.
inheritance” under the dictates of Hindu law. The dispute between Bini Bai and her brother-in-law was, however, more complicated. The case – with its intersecting issues of caste status, gender hierarchies and inheritance – hinged upon the practice of dharna which had wider implications for colonial agrarian policies.

Since the late 1780s, when colonial officials introduced land-revenue reforms, they had been hard pressed to find ways to deal with Brahman cultivators and landlords who resisted payments in revenue by performing dharna and threatening to harm themselves. The British Resident had struggled to find ways to intervene in these sacred practices, and interpellate the sacred person of the Brahman within colonial law without compromising the position of the Company. This explains why he was more inclined towards arbitration in this particular case.

Duncan urged the disputants to seek redress outside the courts through arbitration by members of their caste. However, even as the Resident suggested arbitration, Bini Bai’s brother-in-law Balkishan Dixit insisted that the dispute be resolved according to the shastras. Balkishan Dixit argued that Bini Bai’s claim on him to clear her debts was invalid because she had coerced him into writing and signing the voucher by performing dharna, which the shastras did not sanction. In the subsequent proceedings of the case, correspondence between the Resident at Banaras, court pandits, and disputants focused particularly on the practice of dharna: was it a legal practice sanctioned by the shastras?

The key issue raised by Balkishan Dixit – and subsequently posed to court pandits

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128 Ibid., p. 533.
129 Singha, A Despotism of Law, pp.86-105.
130 Ibid., p. 99.
131 Resident’s Proceedings, Basta no. 35, volume 58, p. 191.
was whether a voucher that had been signed under the threat of Bini Bai’s dharna could be regarded as valid. Balkishan Dixit pointed out that he had only entered into a contract under the duress and coercion of the dharna.\textsuperscript{133} He asserted that the shastras did not sanction extraction through practices such as dharna; he requested “the arbitration of pandits of the dharmasastry [sic] to settle the case.”\textsuperscript{134} Subsequently, the British Resident Duncan posed the following question to the city court pandits and the Banaras college pandits: “if anyone shall by force of dherna [sic] and dint of fasting extract an akrarnama or engagement from another person, is such akrarnama valid according to the Matackera [sic] or not?”\textsuperscript{135}

Further records on this case are unavailable so we do not really know the final court decree but the case is nonetheless important. It reveals that during the late eighteenth century disputants persistently signaled the shastras. Of course, disputes were being resolved using the shastras long before the advent of colonial rule. However, as Derrett has pointed out, they were “not in force universally, nor even, as a matter of obligation....”\textsuperscript{136} Relative to customary law that was subject to growth and mutation – and thereby potent in its applicability – the shastric works were unconcerned with contemporary legal developments.\textsuperscript{137} This explains why arbitrators may have looked to more context-sensitive customary practices to resolve disputes.

In the early colonial context, Balkishan Dixit’s insistence on using the shastras as the sole juridical authority to decide the case coincided with colonial interests regarding

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., pp. 198-200.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., p. 198 and 203.
\textsuperscript{135} Resident’s Proceedings, September 1792, Basta no. 35, volume no. 60, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{136} Derrett, Religion, Law and the State in India, p. 191.
the practice of \textit{dharna}. As has been pointed out by Singha, by the end of 1792, colonial officials had been able to resolve tensions emerging from the performance of \textit{dharna} by Brahmans.\textsuperscript{138} Thus, the British Resident Duncan proclaimed that anyone who practiced \textit{dharna} would be banished from the Banaras \textit{zamindari} [land-revenue settlement] and their claims would be dismissed.

Balkishan wielded patriarchal authority and power to excommunicate Bini Bai, the widow, from both the family and caste-based community. In the colonial courts, Balkishan argued emphatically that Bini Bai had transgressed norms of chastity that upper-caste widows were supposed to observe. During each phase of the court proceedings, Balkishan drew attention to Bini Bai’s deviance. Bini Bai defied her brother-in-law several times. She resorted to practices like \textit{dharna} to contest excommunication, mobilized members of the community to support her cause, and dragged Balkishan to the courts even to claim shares in the inheritance.

The dispute between Balkishan and Bini Bai, however, demonstrates that the early colonial state upheld male authority in the family. In collaboration with upper-caste male consanguines, the colonial state consolidated the hegemony of civil Hindu law over other forms of juridical authorities. This process was counterpoised to the interests of women who held a marginal position in their families. Engagements in familial disputes based upon civil Hindu law provided the early colonial state with both the language and authority to thwart challenges to its sovereignty. Upper-caste male invocations of laws based on the \textit{shastras} abstracted practices like \textit{dharna} from their political and economic

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., pp. 192-194.  
\textsuperscript{138} Singha, \textit{A Despotism of Law}, p. 103.
context. In so doing, male disputants participated in the institutionalization of civil Hindu law. I have argued that the institutionalization of civil Hindu law through familial disputes informed colonial policies regarding the land-revenue structure and was thus critical for the making of colonialism.

**Conclusion**

Familial disputes that animated newly established colonial courts in late eighteenth-century Banaras were integral to the institutionalization of colonial law. In this period, relationships between women and men, and older women and younger women, shaped the contours of mercantile families and firms. I have examined cases from three different mercantile families to illustrate that females with outsider status lost out to insiders, differently constructed in each case. These women became prone to social marginalization and sought arbitration from community members, and, later still, the colonial courts as potential allies. By seeking out colonial courts, these widows were able to secure themselves against material impoverishment. However, this process was double edged. I argue that even as widows sought to break up the households that marginalized them, early colonial law fostered and upheld upper-caste male authority.

Thus, in the first household under examination, the widow of a Sikh lost out to the blood-brotherhood of a Khatri lineage. In the second, the junior wife from Jammu lost out to the entire male lineage based at Banaras who rallied behind the elderly, maternal head of the family and her son. Even as the court decree ensured her maintenance as sanctioned by the shastras for widows, the bestowal of this decree only consolidated her marginal status in the family. In the third case, the excommunicated Brahman widow
found herself hard pressed to demand recompense as her brother-in-law urged court
officials to dismiss her claims by invoking the *shastras*. I have argued that these disputes
were critical to the institutionalization of Hindu law in colonial courts and the
consolidation of colonial authority.
Chapter 5:
Fading Mughal Orders or Restoration of Hierarchy: Literati Contests about Caste and Gender

Introduction

By the early nineteenth century, service gentry men from Kayastha, Khatri, Brahman and Agarwala caste groups had managed to take advantage of the market in land. Together, they purchased forty-one percent of the lands on auction.\(^1\) The same groups actively participated in the expanding cultivation economy of north India, in trade, and, above all, in banking, offering cash advances to revenue farmers on crops.\(^2\) In this chapter, I argue that colonial agricultural reforms, which resulted in new demand for taxes, provided an opportunity for merchants to ingratiate themselves with older landed elites through money-lending. By following the careers of a few individuals and families, I illustrate the ways in which these new colonial classes emerged from older middlemen groups of the Nawabi and Mughal polities.

I contend that colonial education and office-work empowered mercantile and scribal groups to harness older competitive energies to reorganize the recognition of caste-based prestige. These groups, skilled in language and accounting, introduced Puritan sexual codes and English ideas of race and class into vernacular idioms. Regional associations of these scribal and mercantile groups gave material form to these vernacular idioms of competitive rank in the shape of nationalist politics during the second half of the nineteenth century.
Colonial Counters to Mughal Order in Banaras

During the early years of its rule, the Company, much like other regional powers, had relied upon Mughal authority to claim legitimacy over its conquered territories. Mughal authority was centered upon the *baraka* or charisma of Timurid royal blood, and continued to wield political and social legitimacy long after the decline of the Mughal Empire.³ This explains why eighteenth-century regional states and the East India Company vied for control over the person of the Mughal Emperor and Mughal princes.

In this contest for power, the Marathas established control over the Mughal court in Delhi, an important symbolic center. From there, after 1772, they sought to co-opt the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II. Meanwhile, the East India Company wooed the Imperial Prince Jahandar Shah.⁴ Officials argued that as the Emperor had allied with the Marathas, it had become urgent to secure the allegiance of the Prince:

He [the Prince] is the only person of the reigning family not under the absolute control of the Mahtrattas [sic] and whilst he continues under protection of the Vizier [Nawab of Awadh] and of the Company, their usurpation must be incomplete, but if he should fall under their power it will be perpetuated and the consequences of their being permanently established in the authority of the empire would be truly alarming to the peace of the vizier’s and the company’s dominions….⁵

Jahandar Shah was therefore moved by the East India Company officials with his family to Banaras. He had proved ineffective in the tussle for power between the

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¹ Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, p. 369.
⁴ Col. William Palmer to the Governor General, Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 12 April 85 (12), Major Browne to Governor General John Macpherson, Foreign Department Secret Proceedings, 9-26 April 1785 (68-A), p. 947.
Marathas and the East India Company and had been unable to secure his father’s allegiance to the latter. This was reflected in the colonial government’s engagements with the family. The Prince’s role in the East India Company’s political maneuvers was much reduced by 1787. When Jahandar Shah requested that the Company bestow a *jagir* to his son in Banaras, officials responded that they could not make any land grants that would eat into the revenue collections. However, the Company ordered the Nawab of Awadh to assign pensions for the Prince and his large, polygynous household. After Jahandar Shah’s death, these pensions were reduced from 300,000 rupees to 25,000 rupees per month. This amount was hardly adequate for the Prince’s elaborate household and expenses.

After Jahandar Shah’s death, colonial officials continued to deny his family any rights in land. Indeed, officials were set against making new grants or allowing members of Jahandar Shah’s family to wield their rights over *jagirs* which they had held for a long time. This is evident from a petition by Jahandar Shah’s wife, Qutlugh Sultan Begam to colonial officials in 1809 when she requested that the state restore a *jagir* that had belonged to her late husband and had been lost as different rulers fought to establish control over the declining Mughal center of Delhi.

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5 Col. William Palmer to the Governor General, Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 12 April 85 (12).
7 Ibid., pp. 242-243.
8 Governor General’s Assistant to Deputy Secretary to the Government in Foreign Political Department, 22 May 1834 (75).
9 Extract from Political Letter from Bengal Dated 4th August 1809 in Board’s Selections 1810-1811, IOR/F/4/309/7070, pp. 863-864.
Records from 1787 reveal that the Begam had enjoyed the revenue from Jahandar Shah’s *jagir*. These records show that Jahandar Shah had been instructed by his father Shah Alam II to take care of Qutlugh Sultan Begam’s expenses. The revenue from the *jagir* had thus been readily extended to the Begam. However, Qutlugh Begam argued that she had lost control over the *jagirs* when the weakened Mughal state, centered at Delhi, was besieged by the onslaughts of ambitious regional rulers such as the Sikhs, Rohilla Afghans and the Marathas, as well as the East India Company. By 1803, however, the British had defeated the Maratha rulers to take control over Delhi.

Qutlugh Begam’s request to be restored to her deceased husband Jahandar Shah’s *jagir* was in response to frustrated ambitions for the Delhi throne. After the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II’s death, officials had decided to place his second oldest son, Akbar Shah II, on the throne of Delhi in 1806. Qutlugh Sultan Begam challenged Akbar Shah II’s accession by arguing that only her son, Mirza Haji, could succeed to the throne as he was the lineal heir in the event of Jahandar Shah, her husband and imperial Prince’s death. Percival Spear has noted that after Jahandar Shah’s death, his eldest son Mirza Khanim Bakht was a hopeful Prince. It is not possible to determine which of Jahandar

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10 Foreign Secret Proceedings, 7-26 February, 1787 (79), pp. 840-842.
12 Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, pp. 32.
13 Fort William Council to W. A. Brooke, Agent to the Governor General in Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 24 December 1806, no. 63-64.
14 Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, p. 41. My sources from the India Office Records and the National Archives only mention three sons of Jahandar Shah who were considered as heirs—apparent in the family, Mirza Khurram Bakht, Mirza Haji and Mirza Shegoftah. See Letter to the Secret Committee by Governor-General Cornwallis and Fort William Council, 6 November, 1788 in IOR Political and Secret Department, L/PS/5/20, 5 Jan 1778- 25 Aug 1794, p. 330, Letter from Fort William Council to W. A. Brooke, Agent to the Governor General Foreign Department, Secret Branch, 24 December 1806, no. 63-64. Also see letter to N. B. Edmonstone, Secy to Government in the Secret Department by W Brooke Agent to Governor General dated 15 December 1806 in Foreign Department, Secret Branch 24 December, 1806, Consultation: S 24 December 1806 (29).
Shah’s sons was the heir-apparent. But as Spear has argued, Jahandar Shah’s son did not succeed to the throne because the British government rejected his claim stating that under Islamic law a “grandson could not claim his grandfather’s inheritance if his father was already dead”.\(^\text{15}\) In addition, Shah Alam II had declared his son Akbar Shah the heir apparent.\(^\text{16}\)

When Qutlugh Sultan Begam’s efforts to place her son on the throne of Delhi were to no avail, she tried to regain Jahandar Shah’s \textit{jagir}. She was turned down as officials argued that the pensions assigned to her family were substantial and adequate.\(^\text{17}\) It may be argued that British officials’ decision to deny Qutlugh Begam and her family any rights in land was related to their aversion towards competing seats of power. Officials and their allies such as the Nawab of Awadh were not interested in accommodating a Mughal royal court in Banaras.\(^\text{18}\) Thus by 1787 the Prince complained that the Raja of Banaras, Mahipnarain, was “neglecting” him, and failing to pay the deference due to a Mughal Prince.\(^\text{19}\)

Jahandar Shah’s letter of complaint reveals that the Prince had established his court in Banaras. Landed elites under pressure from Company officials and the Raja of Banaras for balances in payment of revenues, sought out Prince Jahandar Shah for support and protection.\(^\text{20}\) Deference to the Mughal family by those seeking protection and

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\(^{15}\) Spear, \textit{Twilight of the Mughals}, p. 41.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Extract from Political Letter from Bengal, 4 August 1809, Boards Selections 1810-1811, IOR/F/4/309.

\(^{18}\) Before moving to Banaras, the Company had placed the Imperial Prince in the care of the Nawab of Awadh. However by 1786, the latter complained against the Prince’s elaborate court rituals and requested that the Company find some other place for him. See Gabriel Harper minister with the Mughal Prince Jawan Bakht to John Macpherson, Foreign Secret Department, 27 September, 1786 (1).

\(^{19}\) See \textit{Calendar of Persian Correspondence}, Letter no. 1627, Volume no. 6, p. 417.

\(^{20}\) See \textit{Calendar of Persian Correspondence}, Letter no. 1627, Volume no. 6, p. 417. For more examples of contestations between the Prince and the Raja of Banaras and the former’s complaints of how his
social prestige continued several years after Jahandar Shah’s death. For example, a former diwan of the Raja of Banaras was able to obtain the title of Raja from one of Jahandar Shah’s sons.\textsuperscript{21}

Colonial officials wanted to reduce the political power of the Mughal Princes by refusing to acknowledge the titles bestowed by them.\textsuperscript{22} However, this process was not straightforward. In 1791, Duncan reported to the Governor General that the deceased Prince’s family, led by his widow Qutlugh Begam had established a “distinct jurisdiction”.\textsuperscript{23} Duncan complained that the Mughal family, which was living in Shivala, the former palace of Raja Chait Singh that had been taken over by the Company after Chait Singh’s rebellion, had begun presiding over legal matters in the Shivala area and its neighboring markets. Duncan noted that he was successful in preventing Mirza Haji, the eldest son of Prince Jahandar Shah from assuming similar powers even though he “built a house in the old fort at the opposite extremity of the city of Banaras and established a gunge [Ganj, a small fixed market] around it [and] was lately desirous of hoisting the royal flag there.”\textsuperscript{24}

Members of Jahandar Shah’s family resisted colonial efforts to reduce their powers. For instance, when one of Qutlugh Begam’s servants approached the colonial dependents were being treated by the Raja and his dependents, see Banaras Duncan, Basta no. 21, volume no. 6, May 1788, pp. 204-205 and 218.
\textsuperscript{21} Letters issued by the Governor General, Basta no. 3, Volume no. 12, Year 1813-1815, pp. 152-153.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Banaras Duncan, Basta no. 8., Volume no. 46, January 1791, pp. 91-92.
\textsuperscript{24} Letters Issued by the Agent to the Governor General, October 1795 to December 1796, Basta no. 1, volume no. 1, pp. 118-119.
courts in order to collect arrears of his unpaid salary from the said Begam, the former objected to the authority wielded by “foreign courts” over her.25

Illustration 11: Shivala: Inner compound (left) and Main entrance to the palace (right).

The British met the threat posed by such sovereigns by denying the family a permanent property and land base in the city of Banaras. Duncan conceded that officials had made a mistake in allowing the family to reside in Shivala as it had provided a base for them to establish their own jurisdiction.26 Although the family was not formally removed from Shivala until the late nineteenth century, British officials continued to assert that the family was only a tenant in the land, and the property allotted to them was for residential purposes alone. Company officials were supported in this endeavor by claims made by other propertied men who argued that some of the land occupied by the family belonged to them.27 Although these claimants were unable to verify their assertions, colonial officials used these opportunities to remind Mughal family members that they were mere tenants. However, Jahandar Shah’s family members continued to

25 Resident’s Proceedings, Basta no. 30, volume no. 41, February 1791, pp. 213-220.
26 Banaras Duncan, Basta no. 8, Volume no. 46, January 1791, pp. 92.
27 Letters Issued by the Agent to the Governor General, October 1795 to December 1796, Basta no. 1, volume no. 1, pp. 135-136, 140, 194-195.
state that the land had been allotted to them by the government when they had first come to Banaras.

Officials expressed their regret in establishing the Mughal family in the Shivala.\textsuperscript{28} In a document dated as late as 1835 officials stated,

The Shewallah [sic] where the branch of the Delhi Royal Family descended from Prince Mirza Jehandar [sic] Shah, by his lawful wife Kootluq [sic] Sooltan [sic] Begum, now reside comprises besides the dwelling houses, a number of Temples of Mahadeve [sic, Lord Shiva], whence it was so designated…”\textsuperscript{29}

Descendants of the Mughal royal family continued to occupy Shivala until the early twentieth century when it was finally sold to the then Raja of Banaras.\textsuperscript{30} Later records reveal that colonial officials sold properties in Shivala to the descendants of the Raja of Banaras in a bid to forcibly evict the family.\textsuperscript{31}

If the position of the Mughal family was tenuous, their engagements with bankers, moneymakers and other agents and managers in their service made them even more vulnerable during the early nineteenth century. Bankers, moneymakers and scribal groups had been gaining power since the eighteenth century. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate upon the careers of two bankers, Sheo Lal Dube and Patnimal who rose in power through their engagements with beleaguered ruling elites.

\textsuperscript{28} Banaras Duncan, Basta no. 8, volume no. 46, January 1791, pp. 91-92.
\textsuperscript{29} Extract Letter, Board’s Selections 64641-64656, 1836-1837, Volume 1601, IOR/F4.1601, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{30} Later records also reveal that some members of the family had built houses in the Shivala area and compound. They had even sponsored the building of mosques by the late nineteenth century. Varanasi Collectorate Department, List no. 3, Dept. no. I, Year 1896, Box no. 13, File no. 2. However, when they tried to sell the houses the government challenged such sales by stating that the land [on which the houses were built] belonged to the government. The same argument was used to evict descendants when the government decided to sell the Shivala area to the Raja of Banaras. See Varanasi Collectorate Department, List no. 3, Dept. no. VI., Box no. 14, File no. 128.
\textsuperscript{31} See Varanasi Collectorate Department Records, List no. 11, Dept. II, Year 1921, Box no. 2, File no. 175.
Records from the late eighteenth century reveal how the Brahman Sheo Lal Dube rose to power from a relatively poor economic background through dubious means. As a banker, he ingratiated himself with ruling landed elites through huge advances of capital. When these elites were hard pressed to repay debts, he took over their revenue farms. Rising revenue demands under the East India Company increased the dependence of ruling elites on bankers and money lenders. Records tell us that rural magnates fell into arrears with the government and became indebted to men like Dube.

Sheo Lal Dube also used other means to gain rights in land. These included setting up a network of spies who observed both local colonial officials and rural magnates to gain information about Dube’s enemies. The same networks were used to provide incriminating details to colonial officials on rural magnates who defaulted on their revenue payments. Dube used this information to curry favor with the Company. Thus in 1788, the British Resident Duncan reported to the Governor General that Sheo Lal Dube was “well disposed” to provide information that he had covertly acquired on a rural magnate’s revenue engagements.

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32 Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays*, p. 332.
33 Jaunpur Collectorate Records, Extract from Duncan’s Record 1787 to 1791 and Copies of Correspondence from 1842 to 1848 relating to the re-arrangement of Parganas in the Jaunpur District, Vol. 8, p. 19 and 34.
34 Such dependence did lead to indebtedness. For the debts owed by Kulb Ali to Sheo Lal Dube see Jaunpur records, p. 46. Also see Banaras Duncan, Basta no. 5, volume no. 27 (I), p. 205 for more instances in which Sheo Lal Dube had advanced money to other landed elites who too were subsequently in debt.
35 Banaras Duncan, Basta no. 2. Volume no. 6, pp. 151-159.
36 See Jaunpur Collectorate Records, Extract from Duncan’s Record 1787 to 1791 and Copies of Correspondence from 1842 to 1848 relating to the rearrangement of Parganas in the Jaunpur District, Vol. 8, p. 21.
37 See Jaunpur Collectorate Records, Extract from Duncan’s Record 1787 to 1791 and Copies of Correspondence from 1842 to 1848 relating to the re-arrangement of Parganas in the Jaunpur District, Vol. 8, p. 24, 25, 27.
Dube devised other means to gain rights in land which included using strategic familial practices and labor. The colonial Magistrate complained to the Secretary to the Government on 30\textsuperscript{th} July 1805 that Sheo Lal Dube had expanded his influence in Jaunpur through the “permanent influences of family and local attachments, false witnesses and great wealth”.\footnote{See letter from I. Deane, Magistrate at Jaunpur to George Dowdeswell, Secretary to Government, Judicial Department, Fort William in Commissioners Office Duncan Records, August 1785, Basta no. 2, Volume no. 6, p. 157.} The official pointed out that Sheo Lal’s son-in-law and chief agent Jai Gopal Pandey who was a \textit{tehsildar} carried out Dube’s plans. He complained that Pandey,

…by means of an illegal and iniquitous mortgage attempted to turn a man out of his estate, prevented the Ryots [peasants] from paying the revenue to him [the said landlord] and after making him ostensibly in balance [of revenue payments due to the government], sent a police \textit{darogha} [italics mine] and police peons to attack his property….\footnote{Banaras Duncan, Basta no. 2. volume no. 6, p. 159.}

In 1816, Dube, his son-in-law, and grandson were charged for making fictitious sales and purchases of land.\footnote{See letter from I. Deane, Magistrate at Jaunpur to George Dowdeswell, Secretary to Government, Judicial Department, Fort William in Commissioners Office Duncan Records, August 1785, Basta no. 2, Volume no. 6, p. 157.} When landlords defaulted on revenue payments and the estate fell into arrears and debt, it was auctioned off. At these auctions the landlords of such estates bought the estate under the names of their agents, but more often under those of their trusted relatives. Defaulting landlords were therefore able to retain their rights in such estates without having to pay past accumulated debts. The buying of land under fictitious names or under the names of relatives had become a popular practice after the introduction of the Permanent Settlement.

Such practices made colonial officials increasingly suspicious of men like Sheo Lal.\footnote{See letter from I. Deane, Magistrate at Jaunpur to George Dowdeswell, Secretary to Government, Judicial Department, Fort William in Commissioners Office Duncan Records, August 1785, Basta no. 2, Volume no. 6, p. 157.} However, these men wielded enough power to challenge even officials. For instance, in 1823 the banker Patnimal from the mercantile Agarwala caste was able to
regain rights to a certain village even after it had been taken over by officials.\textsuperscript{42} Patnimal had formerly bought rights from one Roshan Khan, adopted son of the deceased holder. Officials negated the transfer of rights on the basis that Roshan Khan was not the heir. Patnimal retaliated by launching a case in the provincial courts. The courts upheld the transfer on the basis that Roshan Khan had rights to the inheritance as he was the deceased’s brother’s son. Patnimal’s descendants were thus able enjoy those rights in land until at least the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{43}

Men from service gentry backgrounds who were accumulating rights in land simultaneously ingratiated themselves with the Mughals in Banaras. Patnimal and his family had extended loans to the Mughal family on their heritable pensions.\textsuperscript{44} These relationships with the Mughals had increased the prestige of such service gentry men as they became regulars at the Mughal court in Banaras. However, while they gained from their proximity to the foremost ruling elites, these service gentry diminished the power and authority of these ruling families when they demanded that their debts be paid.

By the 1830s, Patnimal’s sons and other moneylenders began pressing members of the Mughal family with demands for debt repayment. The urgency of the demands by Patnimal and others like him was linked to wider shifts in the political economy. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, agricultural expansion was undertaken to meet the demands of the export market. Colonial officials and British private planters invested capital borrowed from these indigenous bankers and merchants for the production and

\textsuperscript{40} Banaras Collectorate, Basta no 4, volume no. 18, 1816-1821, pp. 64-66.
\textsuperscript{41} Banaras Duncan, Basta no. 2, volume no. 6, pp. 151-159.
\textsuperscript{42} Banaras Collectorate, 1822-1826, Basta no. 4, volume no. 17, pp. 254-255.
\textsuperscript{43} Oldham, \textit{Historical and Statistical Memoir of the Ghazepoor District}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{44} Residency Records, Year 1834-1836, Basta no. 4, Volume no. 20, pp. 41-43.
marketing of indigo, cotton, sugar and other products like opium. However, the European financial crisis of 1830 had an adverse impact on India’s export economy leading, among other things, to the collapse of indigo exports.

These developments occurred at the same time as the “decline of the Indian ruling powers whose seats of government had formed the principal centers for the consumption of luxury goods” and the decline of the military labor market following the establishment of the Company’s hegemony.\textsuperscript{45} In the aftermath of the depression in 1830, there was a widespread shift in land rights as the agrarian economy lost its vitality. Merchants and moneylenders, themselves hit by depression, tried to recover their money from debtors.

Further interrelated shifts in the political economy in early nineteenth century northern India shaped the fortunes of ruling elites. In the 1830s, northern India experienced devastating famines which fueled resistance from landlords, cultivators and others in the countryside. This resistance was countered by the colonial state that had become more authoritarian through the process of ordering the indigenous population and disciplining its own revenue-gathering bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{46} Instabilities in the agrarian structure shaped colonial interventionist measures which were aimed at centralizing the economy under the colonial state. In this context, pre-colonial elites and their lifestyles were increasingly seen as debauched and characteristic of a bygone past, incapable of handling the crisis or bringing about change.

\textsuperscript{46} See Sanjay Sharma, \textit{Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 79-134 and p. 159
These dual processes directly eroded the prestige and authority of the Mughal family in Banaras. I argue that the erosion of the authority of pre-colonial elites which included the Mughal family was tied to the rise in power and prestige of service gentry. In the context of the Mughal family, managers and agents of the family accumulated capital through service. This was despite some of them belonging to an entirely different economic stratum from bankers like Patnimal. For example, Giridhar Lal, the Mughal family’s scribal agent and superintendent of affairs that included handling the disbursement of pensions for members of the family, received a monthly salary of 50 rupees. He, however, had been able to increase his income by lending money to members of the family he served.47 During the 1830s, Jahandar Shah’s descendants entered into prolonged disputes with Giridhar Lal over debts and charges of embezzlement.48 In 1834, the agent tried to recover 70,000 rupees of accrued debt from Salim-ud-din Bukht, one of the Mughal Princes.49 A year earlier, various members of the Mughal family charged Giridhar Lal with embezzling large sums of money from them.50 In one case of embezzlement, he was charged with cheating the deceased Qutluh Sultan Begam out of 50,000 rupees.51 However, Giridhar Lal claimed the deceased Begam had lent him a principal sum of money at his request and given him permission to invest it as he pleased.

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47 For Giridhar Lal’s monthly salary see Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, 1817-1820, Basta no. 3, Volume no. 14, p. 263 and Letters issued by the Agent to the Governor General, 1820-1822, Basta no. 3, Volume no. 15, p. 39 for the money he made through money-lending.
48 Letter from W. Gorton agent to Governor General, Benares to Mr. Secretary Machaughten, Board’s Selections 1834-1835, Jul 1832-Jul 1834, IOR/F/4/1475, p. 32.
49 Governor General’s Assistant to C.E. Trevelyan, Deputy Secretary of Government, Foreign Department, P.C. 22 May 1834 (74).
50 Letter to the Governor General by Syed un-nissa Begum dated 14th July 1833, Complaint against Giridhar Lal from Sultan Begum, daughter of the late Mirza Khorum Bukht to the Governor General, dated 26th July 1833, Letter from W. Gorton Agent to Governor General, Benares to Mr. Secretary Machaughten, Board’s Selections 1834-1835, Jul 1832-Jul 1834, IOR/F/4/1475, p. 32
provided he returned the principal. The agent had claimed rights to the large sums in the 1820s stating that he had increased the sum by money-lending and gaining rights over mortgaged villages.

Whether Giridhar Lal was allowed to keep the money is uncertain. However, he was removed from the position he had held for fifty years. During his years of service, Giridhar placed members of his own family in lucrative positions of service under the Mughal family. Members of his family no doubt benefited from the nexus of pensions and debt surrounding the Mughals in Banaras. This is why Giridhar Lal’s son, already involved in the affairs of the family, was keen on taking over his father’s appointment after the latter was removed. Colonial officials were, however, opposed to making Giridhar Lal’s appointment hereditary.

Giridhar Lal’s engagements with the Mughal family reveal how service gentry flouted norms of deference towards their royal employers as the latter became mere pensioners of the colonial government. Mughal Princes in the family complained that Giridhar Lal had not shown them the respect due to princes. Their complaints did not elicit the sympathy of the colonial officials who underscored the “insignificance” of such

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52 Ibid.
53 See Letter from W. Brooke dated 1st April [consultations date, 6 June 1823] to H Prinsep, Persian Secy to Government and Enclosure in a letter from Agent Benares dated 1st April 1823 of a translated version of an arzee from Giridhur Lal in IOR/F/4/1017, Board’s Selections, 1828-1829.
54 Extract from Letter, Board’s Selections 64641-64656, 1836-1837, Volume: 1601, IOR/F4.1601, pp. 111-112
55 Ibid., pp. 180-181.
56 Letters to the Governor General, 1841-1843, Basta no. 5, Volume no. 22, pp. 244-245.
57 Extract from Letter, Board’s Selections 64641-64656, 1836-1837, Volume: 1601, IOR/F4.1601, p. 199.
58 Ibid., pp. 123-125.
royal families that had become mere pensioners of the government, and cumbersome ones at that.\textsuperscript{59}

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the expanding colonial power had reduced the resources available to ruling elites. In addition, colonial officials made every effort to undercut their authority, and their ability to confer legitimacy, in a bid to establish its hegemony. These reorientations shaped the practices of service gentry groups as did the shifts in colonial policies to be examined in the next section.

**Ideologies and Policies in Forging an Authoritarian Colonial State**

The reforms undertaken by the government in the early nineteenth century marked the beginning of high colonial rule. The period was marked by widespread shifts in colonial policies that were shaped by intersecting ideologies of liberalism, utilitarianism and evangelism. These policies, implemented by the authoritarian colonial state, reshaped relations between indigenous elites and service gentry groups as the colonial state undercut the authority of ruling lineages and landholding elites.

In the 1820s and 1830s, colonial officials introduced a range of land-revenue reforms in India which compromised the revenue collecting and rent collecting rights of elite proprietary groups. These reforms were influenced by Ricardo’s rent theory and the writings of Utilitarian thinkers.\textsuperscript{60} Colonial land-revenue reforms further reduced the authority of ruling elites by curtailing their public patronage. As Utilitarian thinkers asserted the right of the state to ownership of land, officials instituted various stipulations

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{60}
to revoke grants of revenue-free land that had been made by potentates to their dependents or those which had been made for charitable and religious purposes.\footnote{61}{Metcalf, \textit{Land, Landlords, and the British Raj}, pp. 68-69.}

Meanwhile the colonial state asserted its monopoly over patronage through discursive and structural interventions in philanthropy. As the colonial state established itself as a philanthropic state, it delegitimized elite forms of charity and patronage. Indigenous elites were stereotyped as “indolent” in colonial discourses, their practices of charity were categorized as “ad hoc, disorganized and dispersed”.\footnote{62}{Sharma, \textit{Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State}, p. 266.} These discourses were supported by structural shifts. In the 1930s, the colonial state simultaneously asserted its authoritarian power and philanthropic undertaking vast public works in aftermath of the widespread famines.

Sanjay Sharma has argued that the colonial state’s massive public utility projects towards what was categorized as public welfare were informed by its self-perception; of the state as benign yet authoritarian in service of subjects who had to be regulated.\footnote{63}{Ibid., p. 136.} These public works were shaped by an emerging ideology according to which the state became both the “sole repository of ultimate authority but also the effective and perhaps the final source of benevolence and philanthropy.”\footnote{64}{Ibid.}

Early nineteenth-century political thinkers upheld British civilization as culturally superior and at the peak of progress. This superiority of culture was yet to be achieved by its colonies. To this end, liberal thinkers in collaboration with evangelicals argued that it

was Britain’s duty to civilize its colonies. Colonial discourses underscored India’s social backwardness and focused, in particular, on the condition of Indian women. It was argued that reform in Indian women’s position would resolve other underlying problems such as religious beliefs and the caste system. Indian social reformers debated on Indian womanhood to shape reforms like the abolition of Sati in 1829. Scholars have argued that reform for women in the early nineteenth century became a critical site through which Indian social reformers regained national honor even as British reformers used gendered discourses to legitimize colonization. As I will show in later sections, these early contestations shaped the ways in which late nineteenth-century nationalists politicized the women’s question in anti-imperialist struggles.

Gendered discourses on the civilizing mission were based upon colonial difference. These enabled the state to deny colonized peoples the rights of a modern subject underpinning British ideologies in the period. Colonial difference was manifested in the foundations of the state and was therefore central to its constitution. In the early nineteenth century colonial difference shaped the authoritarian policies of the colonial state.

During the 1830s the colonial state introduced various legal reforms in order to create a centralized system. These reforms were projected by officials as being transformative of Indian society. Colonial officials introduced a centralized legislative

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67 Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments, pp. 16-22.
council at the all India level which superseded the provincial councils that had hitherto had powers in law-making. The new legislative council was charged with the duty of codifying Indian law. Liberal policy makers, such as Macaulay, upheld codification as central to the civilizing mission. As Singha has shown, legal jurisdiction was racially structured. Thus, in the newly reformed criminal courts, British and Indian subjects were liable to different punishments even under a common penal code.

British liberal ideologies were most clearly manifested in the introduction of western education and the English language as the medium of study in the 1830s. These reforms marked a shift from earlier policies where officials had fostered the study of Indian languages. In the 1830s liberal reformers promoted western knowledge in place of indigenous knowledges that were categorized as primitive. By introducing western education, the British government aspired to produce rational individuals who appreciated colonial rule and could be recruited in service of the government. However, Seth has argued that western education was “not aimed simply at producing clerks to staff the lower ranks of the colonial administration.” Instead, western education presumed a subjectivity that was informed by a certain deportment which was found lacking in the colonized subject. Seth has suggested that the rhetoric of this ‘lack’ in Indian subjects was central to the colonial enterprise. Once again, officials supported these arguments by using gendered discourses that highlighted the lack of women’s education in Indian

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69 Singha, A Despotism of Law, pp. 289-291.
70 Ibid., pp. 290-291.
72 Ibid., p. 47.
society. As I will elaborate in a later section, these gendered colonial discourses shaped the ways in which service gentry groups refashioned themselves.

The policies implemented by the authoritarian colonial state during the early nineteenth century reshaped relations between indigenous elites and service gentry groups as the colonial state undercut the authority of ruling lineages and landholding groups. The aforesaid were watched closely by participant and adaptive service gentry groups as they sought colonial education in government schools and colleges, and service in the colonial bureaucracy and equipped themselves with the requisite skills for such recruitment. Significantly, as I will show in a later section, this process informed the ideological underpinnings and ethics of service gentry groups.

**Shaping the Colonial Public Sphere in Nineteenth-Century Northern India**

The processes through which service gentry groups refashioned themselves were complex and took place in multiple and intersecting publics. It may be useful here to provide an overview of the historiographical debates on the public sphere in colonial north India. Broadly, the public sphere as defined by Habermas was an integral aspect of liberal bourgeois society in which sovereign male individuals “form a public body” with the freedom to congregate, express and circulate their opinions on matters concerning their welfare.\(^{75}\) This discursive sphere operated outside the purview of the state and brought itself to bear on state policies through rational debates and discussion. Distinct from the private sphere pertaining to the home, family and religion, which too was

\(^{71}\) Ibid., p. 27.
\(^{74}\) Ibid.
outside purview of the state, the public sphere was an intermediary space in which private individuals came together to dwell upon issues relating to the common good.\textsuperscript{76} Such understandings of a public sphere, which was an ideal at best even in Britain, have shaped the historiography on colonialism in India.

Nineteenth-century colonial reforms marked the onset of a new cultural politics in northern India which was articulated by upper-caste Hindus and Muslims of service gentry groups. As mentioned in the previous section, the colonial state became vested in the introduction of western education and other public works in order to project its status as a morally responsible and benevolent government. Such efforts at transformation of Indian societies and the socialization of colonized peoples were inflected with relations of power and negotiation. Service gentry groups realigned their socio-cultural and political identities within this context.

In his book on the middle class in colonial north India, Sanjay Joshi has argued that service communities of Kayasthas, Khatris and Ashraf Muslims constituted themselves as the new middle class by engaging in a “new cultural politics”.\textsuperscript{77} New cultural politics was constituted by “a new set of beliefs, values, and modes of politics” which “distinguished the middle class from other social groups.”\textsuperscript{78} Joshi has astutely pointed to the significance of cultural investments by the service community through which these communities reshaped social hierarchies.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{76} See Davidoff and Catherine Hall, \textit{Family Fortunes} for the discussion on the emergence of separate and gendered public and private spheres.
\textsuperscript{77} Sanjay Joshi, \textit{Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., pp. 7-8, 23-58.
As has been highlighted by Joshi, processes of cultural reorientations were complex. He draws upon Sumit Sarkar’s work to complicate scholarship on the middle classes in colonial India that has either deprived colonial subjects of agency by foregrounding the pervasiveness of colonial discourse or reified the “fragment” or pre-colonial social roles and behavior and their role in constituting the middle class. Instead Joshi argues that colonial modernity, as constituted by the middle classes, was fractured, in that it was shaped by multiple and contradictory pressures, it included support of older hierarchical structures as much as an investment in newer ones.

Beginning with the early nineteenth century, service gentry groups actively shaped and participated in a novel intellectual and cultural milieu. Mercantile and scribal communities in the Banaras region had participated in the inculcation of an Indo-Persianate intellectual climate. During the eighteenth century, British Orientalists fostered Sanskrit learning. The region had already been an important center for learning in Sanskrit and the city of Banaras was home to thousands of Brahmans who had migrated to the city over centuries. British officials founded the Benares Sanskrit College in the city in 1791 with the intention of institutionalizing and administering Sanskrit knowledge. This college was subsequently patronized by elites and upcoming members of service gentry groups. However, patronage patterns of educational institutions became more complex with the rise of Anglicists in Banaras who stressed the superiority

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81 Joshi, Fractured Modernity, pp. 8-9.
82 Dalmia, The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions, p. 117
83 Ibid., pp. 94-100.
84 Ibid., pp. 100-101.
of the English language and western knowledge. This process was further spurred with the increasing activities of Evangelical missionaries in the region who contributed to the civilizing mission.

Normative colonial discourses on reform envisioned the emergence of an intelligentsia from indigenous literate service groups that would be influenced by British norms and morals. Such an intelligentsia could subsequently be used to help further the colonial enterprise. As has been pointed out earlier, the process involved a selective implementation of British liberal ideals and practices in colonial India. The dissemination of British norms through colonial education was, however, much more complex.

As Veena Naregal has noted, in order to establish colonial hegemony through a “selective conferment of modernity”, the state devised various means to disseminate modern ideas and practices as widely as possible. Therefore even as colonial authorities upheld the English language “as the paramount symbol of the ideal order” it also relied upon vernacular languages to establish its hegemony. The vernacularization of western education was hinged upon the introduction of print, and the standardization of vernacular languages.

Literate service communities now refashioned themselves, and their normative understandings of society, based on colonial discursive productions on western learning. This would provide members of these communities with lucrative jobs, social mobility and opportunities for power-sharing. Colonial educational policies provided a space for

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85 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
cultural and political negotiation between colonial rulers and service community intelligentsia as British officials and members from Indian intelligentsia served on educational societies from the early nineteenth century. In addition to such societies, the formation of voluntary organizations from the 1830s as well as the production and circulation of printed texts provided the intelligentsia of the service community with opportunities to participate in social and cultural transformations.

Such forms of participation in the public domain were particular to colonial modernity as the colonial project prevented the establishment of a civil society in India. Ideally, a civil society was constituted by an association of sovereign individual subjects whose relations were regulated by the market and law. This civil society was independent and outside of the state. In colonial India, however, such a civil society was not amenable to the colonial project. Instead, scholars have argued that rather than sovereign individuals, colonial society was constituted by communities forged by ties of “blood, religion, culture and territoriality”. Tanika Sarkar has shown how the establishment of the liberal colonial state in India was organized around a compact between the colonial state and the caste and religion-based communities of colonized peoples. These communities were given sovereignty over religious beliefs and questions relating to inheritance and marriage under the domain of personal laws. Such communities were in fact modern constructs of homogenized collectivities that had been

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88 Ibid., pp. 66-67.
89 Gyan Prakash, ‘Civil Society, Community and the Nation in Colonial India’ in Etnografica, VI, no. 1, 2002, pp. 27-39.
91 Prakash, ‘Civil Society, Community and the Nation in Colonial India,’ p. 27.
reified through colonial efforts and the upcoming service gentry groups who eventually articulated a community-based politics of claims.\footnote{Mrinalini Sinha, \textit{Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 7-8.}

The colonial state had begun compiling censuses from the 1820s. As Cohn has shown in his essay, by the middle of the nineteenth century, officials argued that religion and caste were essential organizing factors in colonized Indian society.\footnote{Cohn, \textit{An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays}, pp. 242-243.} According to Cohn, as officials classified caste groups within the four-fold hierarchical Varna order, they generated the objectification of caste identities as “Indians were confronted with the question of who they were and what their social and cultural systems were.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 248.}

In this context, Lucy Carroll argued that the objectification and classification of caste in colonial censuses affected the ways in which caste groups defined themselves as they competed for service positions in the colonial state.\footnote{Lucy Carroll, ‘Colonial Perceptions of Indian Society and the Emergence of Caste(s) Associations’ in \textit{Journal of Asian Studies}, 37, no. 2, 1978, pp. 233-250.} British officials collected and classified data on castes and religious groups, which they used to ascertain which groups dominated public services and raise questions over the monopoly of public services by certain groups.\footnote{Cohn, \textit{An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays}, pp. 242-243.} Officials used the hierarchical classification of caste groups along with essentializing assumptions surrounding characteristics of particular caste groups to determine recruitment into public services.\footnote{Cohn, \textit{An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays}, pp. 242-243.}

Studies that underscore colonial construction of caste identities have, however, been challenged by Norbert Peabody and Sumit Guha. Peabody has argued that it is misleading to cite caste-based enumeration as purely a colonial enterprise. Pre-colonial
states created tabulations where “households, rather than individuals, were enumerated because one of the principal non-agricultural forms of taxation was a house tax.”  

Household lists were caste sensitive as tax rates were based upon caste status. Peabody has argued that studies that have overlooked pre-colonial forms of enumeration have negated the agency of indigenous actors in the process. Early colonial officials frequently drew upon such household lists in their efforts at enumeration. Indigenous informants from literate scribal and mercantile groups insinuated “caste as the basis of social differentiation into the early colonial exercise of counting people” to further their own agendas as officials relied upon them to compile lists. Such agentive roles enabled scribal and mercantile groups to make themselves indispensable within the colonial bureaucracy.

Sumit Guha has drawn attention to pre-colonial practices of enumeration and their centrality to the political and fiscal management of states. He has challenged studies that have underplayed social stratifications in pre-colonial societies by showing how enumeration was dependent upon extant social differentiation, identities and memberships which were themselves policed by community members. In pre-colonial polities, caste memberships were regulated, contested and carefully managed at local levels by chiefs and potentates who represented the “size and reach” of the communities they headed to higher authorities. Even the narrow focus on the role of enumeration in

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98 Ibid., p. 243.  
100 Ibid., p. 829.  
101 Ibid., p. 822.  
103 Ibid., p. 154
the politicization of identities by scholars who underscore colonial agency is problematic. Instead, he has pointed to other mediums such as iconic symbols through which group identities were identified and invoked.\textsuperscript{104} Community was a social reality even before the advent of colonial rule which could nonetheless be more aggressively asserted in the public sphere following the emergence of print culture.\textsuperscript{105} These insights are critical for understanding the engagements of service gentry groups in north India and the ways in which they refashioned themselves.

Service groups from Kayastha, Agarwala and Khatri backgrounds in the Banaras region were able to improve their socio-economic status due to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth shifts in the political economy. Their success may be contrasted with Muslim families which rose in power in northern India through elite service backgrounds in soldiery, revenue administration and scholarship under Islamicate states since the medieval periods. Muslim gentry had been able to gain heritable rights in land but, by the early nineteenth century, they too suffered a decline under colonial land-revenue reforms and the reduction of the regional kingdom of Awadh.\textsuperscript{106} On the other hand, Kayastha, Khatri and Agarwala men from mercantile and scribal groups benefited from such realignments and subsequently shifted allegiances from the ruling elite patrons and their polities to the colonial state.

As I will show, the realignment of hierarchies of deference enabled scribal and mercantile groups to seek more than employment and other economic benefits. They accumulated titles and prestige through patronage activities that included the

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 155.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., pp. 159-160.
\textsuperscript{106} Bayly, \textit{Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars}, pp. 349-359.
philanthropic styles of ruling elites and those of the colonial state. People from service community groups refashioned their patronage practices in response to colonial discourses. Such refashioning also included the inculcation of pre-colonial practices and values that were also transformed as a result.

Scholars such as Partha Chatterjee have argued that as educated Indians were unable to participate in the public sphere in India and shape public opinion, they contested colonial hegemony by claiming the private as a sovereign space. Chatterjee has argued that educated Indians challenged discourses on colonial difference by upholding the private sphere as it came to represent an inner sanctum characterized by spirituality that was uncorrupted by western materialism.107 However, Bayly has argued against this analysis of the public sphere that creates polarities between East/spirituality and West/rationality, and undermines the spaces for debate and discussion within Indian knowledge systems and politics.108 Importantly, he has drawn attention to Indian literary cultures which facilitated debate and discussion through writing and oral communication. Wielding scribal skills, Kayasthas, Khatris and Agarwala service groups participated actively in these practices.

In a slightly different vein, Sandria Freitag has elaborated upon the role of alternate public spheres constituted by rituals and ceremonies in the formation of a collective public opinion in north India.109 Freitag argues that rituals and public ceremonials which were performed in public spaces had the capacity to produce

107 Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments, pp. 116-121.
109 Freitag, Collective Action and Community, pp. 191-192
collective opinion and protest.\textsuperscript{110} In the context of Banaras, Freitag noted that public ceremonials sustained a shared local culture in Banaras crossed caste, religious and socio-economic divisions.\textsuperscript{111} Freitag and Bayly’s arguments draw attention to the multiplicity of public spheres in colonial India both before and after the advent of print capitalism and western knowledge systems.

During the early nineteenth century, Khatri, Agarwala and Kayastha groups refashioned themselves as upper-caste lordly patrons on the one hand and civic individuals who were inspired by western rationality on the other by participating in public arenas outlined by Freitag and the bourgeois world as it emerged under colonial reforms. For example, the Agarwala merchant and agent Patnimal sponsored the construction of a bridge across the river Karamnasha, a tributary of the Ganges which divided the provinces of Bihar and Banaras.\textsuperscript{112} By sponsoring the construction of a bridge across the river, Patnimal addressed two separate requirements which operated within two distinct epistemologies. The bridge was constructed under the supervision of the antiquarian James Prinsep who had been engaged in various public works at the time. It was of strategic importance to the colonial state as it facilitated the movement of goods and troops across a river that often flooded during the monsoons.\textsuperscript{113} The river’s strategic location had not been lost on pre-colonial rulers either, and it had become an important

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} See IOR/F/4/1520/60037 Feb 1833-Apr 1834.
artery for transportation from at least the sixteenth century.\footnote{Anand A. Yang, \textit{Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Bihar} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 32} However, pre-colonial rulers such as the Marathas had also attempted to sponsor the construction of bridges across the river for religious purposes.\footnote{Lewis Sydney Steward O’Malley, \textit{Bengal District Gazetteers, Shahabad}, Volume I (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1906), p. 8.} The river, named as the “destroyer of religious merit” was notorious for its “polluting” waters and caused problems for pious Hindus and pilgrims.\footnote{Fisher and Hewitt, \textit{Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces}, p. 22.} I argue that by sponsoring the construction of the bridge across this river, Patnimal participated in two different publics which were nonetheless connected by the patronage activity of aspiring service gentry groups. In exchange for his contributions towards the British public works projects, the colonial state conferred the title of Raja on Patnimal.\footnote{See IOR/F/4/1520/60037 Feb 1833-Apr 1834.}

Patnimal’s legacy was carried on by his descendants as they sponsored hospital wards in his name.\footnote{Fisher and Hewitt, \textit{Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces}, pp. 139-140.} Similarly, his descendants continued to enjoy a degree of prestige in the public arena outlined by Freitag. This is evident from the celebrations surrounding the \textit{Bharat Milap} festival. The festival involved the reenactment of Lord Ram’s reunion with his brother Bharat after fourteen years of being apart. Thousands of people in the Banaras city participated in processions where they carried the idols of the two deities on the streets and to the houses of prominent members of the city who defrayed the expenses
of the festival. One of these houses belonged to Patnimal’s descendants who would greet the procession and worship the deities.

Men from service gentry groups were Janus-faced in their patronage practices. They accumulated prestige through participation in public works espoused by the colonial state as well as through the performance of public piety. In so doing, men like Patnimal were able to circumvent derisive utilitarian colonial arguments which framed indigenous forms of charity and patronage within discourses of religious superstition and wasteful expenditure, claim important positions and recognition within colonial structures of power, and claim authority and legitimacy within a hierarchical indigenous society.

This ability of wealthy service gentry men to combine both forms of philanthropy – the prescribed civic utilitarian and what officials considered religious – presents important qualifications to colonial discourses that emptied pre-colonial practices of piety of their political and economic import. Furthermore, they highlight the connections, and therefore qualify the perceived stark distinctions between civic and religious forms of philanthropy that Kayastha, Agarwala and Khatri groups performed during the nineteenth century. Their practices enabled them and their descendants to claim social and cultural capital wherein they were able to ingratiate themselves with colonial officials and reproduce hierarchical patterns of dominance practiced by ruling lineages through patronage and philanthropy.

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120 Fisher and Hewitt, *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces*, p. 147
121 Letter from the Magistrate at Mirzapur to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort William in Benares Collectorate, January 1812- April 1816, Basta no. 4 (a), volume no. 19 (I), pp. 357-358. See also North
Producing Colonial Servants in Service Gentry Households and Colonial Schools

Bayly has argued that the expansion of western education under British reformers and missionaries from the 1830s to 1850s was geared towards the dissemination of civic knowledge and evangelical ideals that addressed issues like literacy, disease and morality for example. According to Bayly, the concern over the spread of “useful knowledge” in these areas arose partly from colonial efforts at agrarian reconstruction in northern India which had acquired urgency after the famines in the 1830s. He has highlighted that Indians participated in the process through the establishment of native presses and the translation and subsequent circulation of useful English books into vernacular languages like Hindi and Urdu. Members of mercantile groups with a background in English education found employment in the newly established village and sub-divisional schools.

As Bayly has noted, British officials focused on the spread of literacy through the circulation of elementary textbooks. Texts on book-keeping and accounting, which elaborated upon the trade secrets and skills of mercantile and scribal groups, were published in multiple editions. These underscored how education in these fields and literacy could change the adversarial nature of relationships between rural moneylenders and peasants to the benefit of both.

Western Provinces Political Department, July to December, 1866, Volume no. 53, Commissioner Benares Division to Secretary to Government, North Western Provinces, 24th March 1866.
123 Bayly, Empire and Information, p. 215.
124 Ibid., p. 220.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., pp. 219-220.
Such texts were used to extend literacy and education as a universal value beyond the formal literate Kayastha and Khatri caste groups. A text titled *Kisanaupdesa* or “Advice for Cultivators”, a school textbook, outlines a fictional conversation between a westernized collector in the colonial bureaucracy and members of a cultivating, Rajput caste group that is revealing. Speaking on literacy and education, the collector faces stiff resistance from the cultivators who express their disgust at becoming like “Banias” in learning their skills. In his response, the Collector stated “Brahmans are higher up in the hierarchy than you and Banias are lower than you in the caste hierarchy”. In the story, the Collector exhorts the cultivators to look to Brahmans rather than Banias as reference points in educating their sons.

North India was a “literacy aware” society even as literacy and knowledge were acquired unevenly. While there were certain literate caste groups like the Kayasthas and Khatris, others relied upon access to and services of these literate groups. Such reliance was not considered demeaning. Amongst elites, the ability to accumulate knowledge and skills in literacy through control over literate castes was a sign of power and prestige. However, colonial discourses marked a radical change in these practices as ruling elites and upper-caste landlords were caricatured as ignorant. Sources from the

129 For an insightful history of the bania and the critical role he played for the East India Company during the eighteenth century, see Tithi Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 41-51
132 Ibid., p. 37.
1870s reveal that British professors expressed concern about the lack of education, and particularly an English education, for children of “high ranking” elites in north India.\textsuperscript{133} After 1857, the colonial state was preoccupied with ruling elites. The widespread impact of the 1857 Rebellion had threatened Britain’s confidence in its ability to maintain its hold over the colony. Ruling elites from landed families and upper-caste peasant cultivators played a large role in the revolt in many areas. They had suffered under colonial reforms that had led to forced sales of land, increased the influence of moneylenders, and dissipated their wealth and prestige.\textsuperscript{134} In the aftermath of the Rebellion, besides dispossessing rebellious magnates, the British sought to woo large landlords and magnates who, they assumed, would be able to channel the loyalty of subordinate landlords and peasantry.\textsuperscript{135}

The rhetoric about the ignorance of the elites and their need for colonial education were applied to the land-revenue records under the Court of Wards in late nineteenth-century India. The Court of Wards was established in India during the late eighteenth century under the aegis of the Physiocrat Philip Francis. Estates which were held by minors, women, and persons of “known incapacity” were put under the Court of Wards. Besides supervising the spending habits of incumbents and the education of minors, the

\textsuperscript{133} See Memorandum of Augustus Harrison of Bareilly College, Director of Education Records, North Western Provinces, Allahabad Archives, Box no. 2, File no. 27, 1871-1873.  
\textsuperscript{134} Metcalf, \textit{Land, Landlords, and the British Raj}, pp. 150-158. Metcalf offers a nuanced examination of the revolt by highlighting how local power relationships between magnates and peasant cultivators participation in the revolt was local power relationships between rural magnates and peasant cultivators shaped positions on loyalty (to the British) or against. Magnates did not always rebel against the British. Powerful loyal magnates had the power to suppress peasant groups but in regions where such magnates were absent, the revolt did take place. However, petty village landholders who were organized in clans and patrilineal kinships, held shared land tenures, and who had shared grievances were better able to rely upon these local bonds to muster a combined resistance.  
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., pp. 158-159.
Court of Wards was in charge of the management of the estate that could be released when a minor incumbent came of age.

As Anand Yang has argued, the officials sought to create loyal and subservient allies in the process. Records reveal that Court of Ward officials managed to create allies by interceding in familial disputes over inheritance amongst the incumbents. These intercessions were gendered as well as well as generational. The process involved a realignment of hierarchies of deference as older incumbents and family members found themselves hard pressed to control the younger generation. Officials took minor sons and daughters and younger members of families under their wing. In colonial discourses younger male and female incumbents were considered more pliable, eager to learn, and open to supervision. Male minors were often taken away from their homes, from under the supervision of “untrustworthy” teachers and placed in colonial schools to receive a western education. One minor gosain who was heir to a substantial math in Mirzapur and its property in the gosain order was removed from the influence of other gosains. He was instead placed a colonial school in Lucknow, which was established to educate boys from ruling families in the English language.

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137 See for instance triangular relationship between the Court of Wards, the Rajput older Rani of an estate in Mirzapur and her younger, literate Rajput daughter-in-law in which the Court of Ward officials supported the daughter-in-law. Petition of Rani Bedsaran Kuwar, Younger rani of Agori Barhar Estate for release of the Estate from the Court of Wards Management’ in Varanasi Division Records (Misc Files 1881-1923), List no. 2, Box no. 50, File no. 37, Year 1882. ‘Petition of Rani Bedsaran Koer of Agori Barhar Estate in the Mirzapur Estate’ in Varanasi Division Records (Misc Files 1881-1923), List no. 2, Box no. 30, File no. 21, Year 1882. ‘Rani Bindeshari Prashad Kuar [older rani] vs. Barhar Court of Wards’ in Varanasi Division Records (Misc Files 1881-1923), List no. 2, Box no. 58, File no. 5, 1884. ‘Release of the Agori Barhar Estate from the management of the Court of Wards, Mirzapur’ in Varanasi Division Records (Misc Files 1881-1923), List no. 2, Box no. 68, File no. 28, Year 1884.
138 ‘The Budget of Gosain Narain Gir’s Estate at Mirzapur and Benares District’ in Varanasi Division Records (Misc Files 1881-1923), List no. 2, Box. No. 6, File no. 90, 1901. See also Metcalf, *Land, Landlords, and the British Raj*, pp. 318-327 for an analysis on schools established for landlords.
Colonial efforts to reshape the morals and lifestyles of ruling elites were significant. Colonial officials underscored how ruling elites could be made to serve the colonial enterprise and provide leadership to other Indians. However, it was members of Kayastha, Khatri and Agarwala service groups who prevailed in dominating representation within the colonial bureaucracy and gaining political leadership. Their success was tied to their caste-based and gendered intellectual pursuits and literary productions which prepared service group families for both service in the colonial bureaucracy and political leadership.

Men from service families played a central role in disseminating western knowledge and the values exhorted by missionaries from the 1850s. The case of Raja Shiva Prasad is particularly illuminating. Shiva Prasad was a member a wealthy Jain mercantile family from Banaras and his education was typical of other members of such families at the time. He grew up learning Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic under private tutors, and at government schools when they were established in Banaras. His education in western learning at these schools enabled him to gain employment as a clerk in the colonial bureaucracy. He rose in status, prepared elementary textbooks in Hindu and Urdu which were translated from English texts, and participated in the establishment of Anglo-vernacular primary schools. As Ulrike Stark has noted, he eventually acquired prominence in the education service as a joint inspector of schools in the Banaras region. By 1860, Shiva Prasad had become the inspector of schools for three more regions in

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northern India. In another decade he was made a “Companion of the order of the most exalted Star of India” and awarded the title of Raja.

During the span of his career Shiva Prasad wrote and translated several textbooks for government schools. His literary contributions were featured in missionary texts such as the *Naya Kashikhand* or ‘The New Kashi’ [Banaras city] that was a futuristic story re-imagining the city of Banaras as a paragon of western values and beliefs under the influence of Christianity. In its preface, the author elaborates upon the greatness of the city of Banaras as a pilgrimage site and center for knowledge, trade and commerce. However, he also regrets the unsanitary conditions of the city and narrates his dream in which he found himself in an entirely unrecognizable Banaras. In this transformed Banaras, now a center of Christianity, the influences of the new religion could be perceived in the civic and technological advancements. Furthermore, the city was devoid of “naked, shameless ascetics” and there was not a single “bad-mouthed woman” in sight inducing the author to wonder whether he was in heaven. Baffled, he approached a book seller who gave him the *Naya Kashikhand*, a text that explained the metamorphosis of Banaras. Shiva Prasad was so inspired by it that he ensured its publication as soon as he awoke. *Naya Kashikhand* is a conversation between a father and his son. It depicts the son asking his father to elaborate upon Banaras’ past, the manner in which the spread of Christianity modernized the city, made it sanitary, and abounding in hospitals and schools.

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141 Ibid., p. 6-7.
142 Ibid.
As a prominent civil servant and educator, Shiva Prasad played a critical role in educating boys. In his book titled, *Larkon ki Kahani* or ‘Stories of Boys’ published in 1861, Shiva Prasad instructed his young male readers on norms of conduct through fictional short stories with different boys as protagonists.\(^{143}\) Importantly, his ideal protagonist was a Brahman boy who could combine his mastery in subjects like math and science, zest for modern technology with a deep knowledge of the *shastras*.\(^{144}\) Through his stories, Shiva Prasad taught boys how to conduct themselves in urban environments while simultaneously introducing them to the wider world. He drew their attention to the wonders of city life but cautioned them to cross roads and navigate city streets safely, avoid street drains and other urban hazards.\(^{145}\) In other stories, he informed his young readers about the natural and man-made wonders of the world.\(^{146}\) Each of the stories was layered with morals. Shiva Prasad instructed boys on the value of organization and the dangers of disorderly conduct and greed.\(^{147}\) He instructed them on the value of education in geography, math, chemistry and other subjects.\(^{148}\)

Paternal forms of impartment of knowledge were central to the social reproduction of boys who were suitable for service in the colonial bureaucracy. Thus another text published for government schools in 1867 titled *Buddhiphalodaya* or ‘The Awakening of the Fruits of Intelligence’ underscored how boys trained in morals would make good clerks and accountants in the colonial bureaucracy.\(^{149}\) In this text, the author elaborated on good parenting and its role in producing good boys capable of securing

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\(^{143}\) Shiva Prasad, *Larkon ki Kahani* (Banaras: Medical Hall Press, 1861).

\(^{144}\) Ibid., pp. 40-50.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., pp. 9-16.

\(^{146}\) Ibid., pp. 28-33, 40-50.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., pp. 1-6.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., pp. 17-19 and 40-50.
service jobs in the colonial state. In order to stress his point, the author presented examples of two boys who grew up as opposites of each other. The good boy named Subuddhi or ‘one with intelligence’ had been raised by an astute father and a cultured mother. Subuddhi’s father, aptly named Sudarshan or ‘good vision,’ had begun teaching his son to write and speak politely from the age of four. When Subuddhi turned seven, his father realized that he could not continue to impart the education his son required as Sudarshan had to work and could not take time off to oversee his son’s education. At the same time, he realized that it would be his fault if he failed to educate his son properly. Sudarshan was convinced that a private education from a pandit or a maulvi would not adequately prepare his son for government service. He therefore decided to send his son to a vernacular government school, and within three years Subuddhi became proficient in mathematics, history, geography and other subjects. Finally, Subuddhi’s learning was noticed by the Collector, who enthusiastically employed him.

Subuddhi’s story ended happily; however, the other boy named Kubuddhi or ‘Bad Intelligence’ led a different life, which told a very different story. His father Dudarshan or ‘evil outlook’ was lacking in education. Being lazy and foolish, Dudarshan was incapable of educating his son. Moreover, he indulged in bad habits, which his son inherited. To make matters worse, his wife was uncultured and not a good mother. Kubuddhi’s tragic upbringing informed his life as he had trouble finding government employment. When he finally did manage it, he lost the position because of his corrupt ways.

Texts published by missionary presses also stressed the moral education of boys. A text titled *Larakcharitra* or ‘Conduct for Boys’ provided short moral tales for school boys on the merits of courage, politeness, honesty, obedience, education and deference. School textbooks like these reveal how the constitution of colonial bureaucracy at the local levels required the social reproduction of a new generation of boys who had to be educated in a specific manner. This process was based at first upon the socialization of boys in schools. Boys, who read such textbooks in schools, would grow up to become perfect fathers. They would also choose respectable wives and ensure the reproduction of a new generation of amenable workforce.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, members of service gentry groups who were already aware of the significance of accumulating skills to secure service in state bureaucracies were among the first to take advantage of newer opportunities. It is no wonder then that they participated in teaching and educating newer generations of boys amongst them even as the imperatives of service implied that they would have to instruct [through their texts] men and boys who did not value literacy.

**Caste and Gender Hierarchies in the Late Nineteenth-century Literary Public Sphere**

In the previous section, I have elaborated how government schools and school textbooks written and translated by missionaries and advocates of western learning within the service gentry were essential to the socialization and social reproduction of colonial servants in public service. In this section, I will examine how members of Kayastha, Khatri and Agarwala groups in turn used the government and missionary institutions to

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consolidate caste hierarchies as part of the reshaping of the a distinctively colonial public sphere.

From the 1840s, Banaras witnessed the emergence of various lithographic presses under Indian ownership.\textsuperscript{151} It became a center of print culture in Sanskrit and Hindi literature under powerful patrons including the Raja of Banaras.\textsuperscript{152} Ulrike Stark has noted that by the 1860s, after the commercialization of print, texts in Hindi and Urdu were produced in large numbers signaling an expansion in readership.\textsuperscript{153} Men from learned and respectable Muslim families and other caste groups such as Kayasthas, Khatris and Agarwalas with a literary heritage dominated the printing and publishing business in the north as they built small and large presses based upon their economic status.\textsuperscript{154} These presses were subsequently used by members of these groups to produce values and beliefs which would solidify their status vis-à-vis upper-caste ruling elites as well as their competitors who belonged to lower caste than them, and improve their position within the colonial structures of power.

This preoccupation with caste hierarchies was related to both pre-colonial and colonial shifts. As Susan Bayly has argued, the establishment of regional kingdoms and polities during the early modern period had led to the widespread dissemination of Varna and jati norms.\textsuperscript{155} However, during the nineteenth century, colonial and Indian deliberations on caste status in India shaped the debates and political activities of service gentry groups in the public sphere. Nineteenth-century Evangelical missionaries

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\item \textsuperscript{151} Ulrike Stark, \textit{An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India} (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2009), p. 59.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Ibid., p. 61.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid., pp. 64-72.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Ibid., pp. 72-83.
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underscored how the caste system had crippled the Indian nation.\textsuperscript{156} Thus, as I have shown in the previous section, texts such as the \textit{Naya Kashikhanda} elaborated upon how the emergence of a casteless society and the modernization of Banaras could be attributed to missionary influence.

On the other hand, scholars have cautioned against homogenizing British opinions on caste. Susan Bayly has underscored the role of officials in sustaining caste norms and markers.\textsuperscript{157} Colonial discourses on caste were complicated further by race theorists who propounded the superiority of Aryan blood. British ethnologists identified upper-caste Indians as their Aryan cousins “descended from the same racial ‘stock’ as the white European, whose key ethnological endowment was the capacity to achieve ‘nationhood’.”\textsuperscript{158}

These arguments on caste shaped the reformist and revivalist movements which emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Revivalist movements, such as the Dharma Sabha or ‘Society for Righteousness,’ upheld brahmanical authority and norms. Even the so-called reformist movements like the Arya Samaj supported caste hierarchies with its founder, Dayanand Saraswati, championing the institutionalization of a caste system based upon merit rather than birth.\textsuperscript{159} However, he too envisioned an Aryan nation constituted by Aryan upper-caste men where castes did not intermix. Most significantly, Saraswati shifted his position on caste. Emphasizing the relevance of birth

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\textsuperscript{155} Bayly, \textit{Caste, Society and Politics in India}, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p. 111.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p. 119.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., pp. 128-129.
to caste status, he argued that the caste one was born into was determined by one’s deeds in their previous lifetimes.\textsuperscript{160}

During the late nineteenth century such arguments were integral to maintaining caste privilege. Yet, on the other hand, Dayanand Saraswati and other reformers used practices like \textit{shuddhi} to incorporate lower castes under an overarching Sanskritized Hinduism. This impetus to increase Hindu numbers was directly related to colonial policies regarding the devolution of authority to Indians. Following the revolt of 1857, the colonial government had decided upon bestowing limited local self-government through institutions such as the municipalities. These institutions paved the way for the introduction of other representative bodies.

Bayly has argued that these policies were influenced by British needs to devise means of imposing new kinds of taxes on service gentry groups without evoking a rebellion.\textsuperscript{161} Colonial officials used elections and nominations to choose members from different religion-based communities to form local public bodies. Guha has argued that numbers of community representatives became important in this context as community and national leaders internalized colonial practices of majoritarian politics.\textsuperscript{162} Majoritarian politics had emerged from colonial machinations towards maintaining control. When the limited provincial councils were introduced in the 1880s, officials allocated “seats in such a way that the government always had an “official majority”” over other competing interest groups.\textsuperscript{163} Guha has argued that such an emphasis on

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., p. 39.
\textsuperscript{161} Christopher Bayly, \textit{The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad 1880-1920} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 11-12.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
securing a majority was internalized by early nationalists who also sought safety in numbers as they vied for electoral majorities in decision-making bodies. It is in this context that revivalists and reformists in colonial north India vied to increase Hindu numbers to win majorities against Muslims.

The urgency of incorporating lower castes within the Hindu order produced anxieties over the maintenance of caste hierarchies. The same complexities were reflected among the supporters of orthodox movements like the Sanatana Dharma Sabha or ‘Society for Eternal Religion’ that also upheld the hierarchical caste order. Vasudha Dalmia has pointed to the leadership that magnates such as the Raja of Banaras provided as protectors of brahmanical authority by patronizing learning in Sanskrit and the pandits in Banaras.164 Yet even orthodox movements such as the Sanatana Dharma Sabha were reformist in that they fashioned a new national Hindu identity which was centered upon Aryan greatness.165 Hindu nationalists from Sanatana Dharma Sabha condemned Anglicized Indians’ sycophantic attitude towards the British; they claimed that these westernized Indians knew nothing about the ancient scriptures of India.166 Other targets included Kayasthas, who were caricatured as sycophantic clerks of uncertain caste status.

In Banaras, the Sanatana Dharma Sabha or ‘Society for Eternal Religion’ was led by Bharatendu Harishchandra. Harishchandra grew up in Banaras and belonged to a wealthy merchant-banking family of the Agarwala caste. The family had wielded power and influence from the Mughal period and continued to enjoy high status throughout the

165 Ibid., p. 133.
166 Ibid., p. 361.
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{167} Like other people from wealthy service gentry backgrounds, Harishchandra cultivated a complex lifestyle that accommodated diverse worlds, namely, learning in Persian, devotional poetry in the Vallabha Vaisnava tradition, as well as the new institutional shifts under colonial rule such as western education.\textsuperscript{168}

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Harishchandra was able to use his background and his multicultural education to become a prominent patron of festivals, a notable writer, and a Hindu nationalist visionary in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{169} However, the modern construction of an aggregate Hindu identity and the authority to shape such processes hinged upon claiming an upper-caste identity within the four-fold Varna order, and the brahmanical and Sanskritized Vedic religion that had come to characterize Hinduism. Thus in a text titled, \textit{Agarwalon Ki Utpatti} or the ‘Origin of the Agarwals,’ Harishchandra explained how his caste group was of the Vaishya Varna and followers of the Vedic religion.\textsuperscript{170} Vaishyas ranked after Brahman and Kshatriya Varnas and above the Shudra Varna.\textsuperscript{171} The first three Varnas were acknowledged as the twice born in the brahmanical tradition and could wear the sacred thread.\textsuperscript{172}

The text further secured an upper-caste status for north Indian Agarwalas as Harishchandra elaborated upon distinctions between different groups of Agarwalas. He claimed that the Agarwala caste comprised the westerners, who had settled in the northern regions surrounding Agra and Delhi, and the easterners, who were settled in the eastern provinces. Harishchandra traced his genealogy to the westerners who he stated

\begin{footnotes}
\item[167] Ibid., pp. 117-125.
\item[168] Ibid., pp. 117-118.
\item[169] Ibid., p. 129.
\item[170] Bharatendu Harishchandra, \textit{Agarwalon ki Utpatti} (Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1871).
\end{footnotes}
were superior to the easterners for, unlike the latter, they had continued to wear the sacred thread despite their service under Turkic and Mughal rule.

These assertions of upper-caste identity within the four-fold Varna were profoundly political. Associations like the Sanatana Dharma Sabha in Banaras were actively engaged in challenging the status of other caste groups such as the Kayasthas. These contests in turn provoked responses from Kayastha groups with similarly long histories of service and power in the region. During the late nineteenth century, Kayastha groups used their influence to claim a Kshatriya status.

In late nineteenth-century Banaras, prominent Kayastha families also produced texts challenging those produced by the Sanatana Dharma Sabha. In 1875, Kali Prasad, a Kayastha lawyer, published Kayasthavarnanirnaya or the ‘Decision on the Kayastha’s Varna Rank’. Writing specifically about north Indian Kayasthas who traced their genealogy to the deity Chitragupta, Kali Prasad drew upon various scriptural texts to prove that Kayasthas were not Shudras, as had been asserted by some. Instead, he claimed, Kayasthas were in fact Kshatriyas and therefore among the twice born castes. Moreover, Kali Prasad produced signatures of a large number of Brahman pandits from at least 7 different cities to support his contention. This included 96 signatures of pandits from the city of Banaras.

Such efforts to consolidate an upper-caste status resulted in the Rajput ruling elites, the archetypal Kshatriyas, feeling anxious about these claimants on the Kshatriya

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172 Ibid., p. 32.
173 Munshi Kali Prasad, Kayasthavarnanirnaya (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1875). For a summary of the conflicting positions on the Kayastha caste, see Sherring, Hindu Tribes and Castes, as Represented in Benares, p. 305
status. This is evident, for instance, in the insistence of a Rajput magnate – who in 1887 arranged for 10 two-year scholarships for the school and college education of students in Allahabad – that the scholarships be awarded only to “pure Kshatriya” students who were “recognized as Kshatriyas by Kshatriyas themselves” and not to Khatris, Kayasthas or clerical orders now claiming to be Kshatriya.\textsuperscript{174} However, these restrictions could hardly have mattered for Kayastha families. Prominent Kayasthas were investing in the education of Kayastha boys too. Kali Prasad himself used his wealth to found the Kayastha Pathshala [School for Kayastha Boys] in Allahabad.\textsuperscript{175}

The debates regarding caste-status and the Hindu nation depended on a two-pronged refashioning of familial practices of the upper castes. The male literati’s competitive claims about caste in the public sphere simultaneously prescribed norms for refashioning upper-caste households by imprinting a Puritan-style sexual code on the one hand, and distinguishing between upper-caste and lower-caste women within the household on the other. For instance, men like Harishchandra, himself an ardent devotee of the Vallabha sect, upheld a Puritan standard of sexual morality when he criticized other lay disciples such as himself for their zealous attachments to Vallabha ascetics.\textsuperscript{176} Other critics wrote texts like the \textit{Vallabha-kula Charitradarpana} or ‘A Mirror held up to the History of the Vallabha Lineage’ to elaborate on the lascivious practices of Vallabha

\textsuperscript{174} See Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, North Western Provinces and Oudh, to the Commissioner of the Fyzabad Division and letter from Raja of Bhinga to the Director of Public Instruction, North Western Provinces and Oudh, in Department of Education, Box no. 19, Serial No. 156, File no. F/IV-1.

\textsuperscript{175} See ‘A Brief Memoir and Reminiscences of the Late Munshi Kali Prasad’ in \textit{Kayastha Samachar} (Allahabad), August 1901, pp. 174-175.

ascetics involving lower-caste and Muslim prostitutes. Mister Blacket, the author of *Vallabha-kula Charitradarpana*, argued that the very *gosains* charged with the duty to articulate relations with the divine and guide their lay followers on the path to salvation were jeopardizing the salvation of their devotees. Blacket expressed his outrage at the ways in which the Vallabha ascetics destroyed the chastity of the wives and daughters of those lay followers. Indeed, aside from the *gosains*, the text elaborated upon the ways in which the bad influence of such men of religion could lead to the destruction of the upper-caste Aryan household. The author of the text castigated those women who left their husbands for another and became unchaste.

Blacket outlined the ways in which Vallabha practices adversely impacted service gentry families. In order to elaborate his point, he provided the example of a prominent Indian civil servant from a service gentry family who actively participated in public piety through patronage. However, the civil servant had been under the influence of profligate *gosain* and subsequently kept a prostitute who destroyed his household. Such a lascivious practice compromised his other good deeds. Blacket exhorted his readers to take charge of their homes and businesses to keep them safe from greedy and corrupt *gosains*.

The strengthening of Vaisnava devotional cults in the northern region thus established non-worldly asceticism as an ideal for men of religion and lay followers. Warnings of the dangers posed by immoral and greedy *gosains* were further strengthened

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177 Mister Blacket, *Vallabha-kula Charitradarpana*, 2nd edition (Allahabad: Dharmik Press, 1895). It is difficult to tell whether Blacket was a missionary or not for he is depicted as a devout Vaisnav in the text. Nonetheless, the text is useful for examining the nature of critiques being directed towards sects which invested in worldly desires during this period.

by creating anxieties over the households of lay followers and particularly the upper-caste women within them. In so doing, texts like the *Vallabha-kula Charitradarpana* engaged in creating a norm of social behavior for upper-caste women and men.

**Refashioned Familial Practices, Recast Family Histories**

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the colonial government introduced various coercive and discriminatory administrative reforms which were based upon racial and gendered discourses of difference.¹⁸⁰ Tanika Sarkar has demonstrated how conjugality and the middle-class home became the “last independent space left to the colonized Hindu” as British and Anglo-Indian law desisted from impinging upon “family relationships, family property and religious life.”¹⁸¹ The Hindu middle-class nationalist home then became much more than merely a refuge from the colonized world in which middle classes performed service under colonial rulers. Instead it became an enterprise, the publicization of which was central to the constitution of the middle-class nationalist struggle. This process did not presume conjugality but constructed it normatively in the public sphere through contests against any colonial interventions and reforms which touched upon family life.

Representations of the conjugal family presented it as based upon love in a hierarchical and patriarchal relationship between the upper-caste husband and his upper-caste wife. Scholars such as Judith Walsh have underscored how this relationship was based upon the constitution of a “new patriarchy” which was based upon the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 48-49.
consolidation of caste hierarchies and the internalization of Victorian norms.\textsuperscript{182} Within middle-class nationalist representations, this domesticity was centered upon the relationship between a benevolent husband and a companionate, educated and loving wife who was subordinated to her husband.

Records from the latter half of the nineteenth century reveal how members of prominent service gentry groups had begun to recast their familial histories within this context. Shifts from courtly lifestyles to public service under the colonial government shaped norms of respectability and familial practices espoused by service gentry groups in the late nineteenth century. The narrative of a descendant from a prosperous mercantile and public service Bengali Kayastha family, whose members lived in Bengal and Banaras, is illuminating.\textsuperscript{183}

The Mitter family was a large mercantile Bengali Kayastha family whose members had, however, actively sought service under the colonial state. The men of this family were well versed in Persian, Sanskrit, English and other vernacular languages. Most of them had been introduced to western learning and they had been able to use that to secure service under the colonial government. Throughout the nineteenth century, members strengthened their hold over offices by gaining honors through patronage of public utility projects while remaining staunch loyalists of the colonial government. There were other members like Promada Dass Mitter, a Sanskrit and English scholar and an Anglo-Sanskrit professor at the Benares College, who combined service with aspects

\textsuperscript{183} See \textit{An Account of the Late Govindram Mitter: “Naib Zamindar” in Mr. Holwell’s Days and of his Descendants in Calcutta and Benares by a Member of the Family} (Calcutta: National Press, 1869).
of resistance against colonial discourses. Mitter disputed claims that western philosophy and science were superior by pointing to the racial, religious and cultural prejudices inherent in them. 184

The Mitter family had invested widely to accumulate social and cultural capital. Thus aside from claiming titles from the British, members of the family maintained patterns of patronage towards public piety and temples. Such pluralistic experiences shaped the ways in which descendants wrote about their ancestors’ familial practices and reflected on the upper-caste women in their families.

The author of this family history traced the rise of their family to one Govindram Mitter who worked for the East India Company during the eighteenth century. Under his leadership, the family used its wealth to accumulate land and gain prestige and power through grand patronage activities. However, the family’s wealth dissipated under the indolence of Govindram’s son, Raghunath Mitter. A “great patron of learning and polite arts,” Raghunath Mitter was also an indolent person who maintained a “set of salaried dancing girls” and refused to attend to his estate. 185

These critiques were shaped by reformist and revivalist articulations on the upper-caste household as well as Victorian ideologies of domesticity in the period. A close analysis of the author’s reflections on marriages and women in the family is useful in this context. The author’s criticism of the social behavior of profligate ancestors is indicative

184 Promada Das Mitter contested British Orientalists who sought to revive the study of Sanskrit in the Benares College during the late nineteenth century. The Orientalists argued that Indian systems of learning in Sanskrit were not capable of providing a history of Sanskrit learning while the pandits themselves were ill equipped to “discuss intelligently historical and chronological questions”, see Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, p. 103.
185 *An Account of the Late Govindram Mitter*, p. 8.
of the ways in which such service gentry people refashioned themselves in a new social milieu. However, processes of refashioning were only derivative of western norms for the same writer also espoused the roles played by women in the not-so-distant past.

In a description of certain customs in the household of one of the family members, the author notes:

According to the established custom of the family, all the members of it, relations, dependents, and others, used to mess together in a large Hall....the number of these daily messmates was generally not less, and sometimes more than hundred, besides the female members of the family, the male and maid servants, whose number too was about a hundred or more....Now it is worthy of remark, that all these meals were prepared by the female members of the family, and not by any mercenary brahman cook, as is now-a-days in vogue. Every lady used to do the work by rotation, and did it with the greatest zeal and delight. They deemed themselves amply rewarded and very fortunate, if the dishes were relished by their relatives, and other gentlemen. Now-a-days it is considered a degradation, for a female member, to have ever occasion to cook for her husband or children, father or brother. Nor do the young ladies of these days know how to cook, nor wish nor try to learn it, even when it becomes a necessity on the occasion of a Brahman cook running away or falling sick....I do not know whether in some families the ladies would not like to see their husbands cook the meals.186

When the author praised a certain woman in his family, it was for piety and her selfless devotion towards her godlike husband.187 He showered praises on her for fulfilling her duties towards husband and children with love, forbearance and hard work even in face of her husband’s harsh treatment of her. The same woman’s husband is reported to have shed tears at her death. According to the author, such women were a rarity and, indeed, he laments how female education had changed the character of women:

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186 See An Account of the Late Govindram Mitter, pp. 11-12.
187 Ibid., p. 35.
Oh! What a change has now come over the spirit, thoughts and feelings of our ladies! “Little learning is a dangerous thing,” so the “little learning” which our native females are now obtaining, serves only to make them “dangerous things”...The system of their education should be altered and adapted to the habits and customs of the country.¹⁸⁸

As is evident in this extract, female education and the changes in “spirit” and “thoughts” of women were sources of tension within the upper-caste household. However, in spite of his arguments against change, the author’s emphasis on conjugal love between the husband and his upper-caste wife was truly novel. During the late nineteenth century, writers exhorted their readers to reshape their households along norms and practices of conjugality. As I will demonstrate, conjugality became the cornerstone of upper-caste and middle-class respectability in the period.

In the previous section, I have highlighted how authors produced fictional stories on morality and used examples of good and bad boys to emphasize their arguments. The same models were used to instruct women. Thus for instance in a text titled, Devarani Jethani ki Kahani: Ek Vridha aur Likhi Padhi Stri ki Sammati Se Pandit Gauri Dutt Ne Banayi or ‘The story of a relationship between an elder and a younger sister-in-law: Written with the approval of an old and educated woman’, the author elaborates upon the differences between two girls who married into a small mercantile or bania family.¹⁸⁹ The family comprised an aging merchant and his wife along with their two daughters and two sons. This was primarily a story about these two sons who were completely unlike each other. The elder son was a wastrel who roamed the streets and often got involved in

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.12.
¹⁸⁹ Pandit Gauri Dutt, Devarani Jethani ki Kahani: Ek Vridha aur Likhi Padhi Stri ki Sammati Se Pandit Gauri Dutt Ne Banayi (Meerut: Jiyayi, 1870).
fights. The father thus decided to involve him in the family business.\textsuperscript{190} The younger son was intelligent so his father sent him to a madarsah to study English. The two brothers found wives who complemented them. The oldest son was married to the daughter of a poor bania, who sold groceries in a small shop on the street-side, with an evil tempered wife. On the other hand, the younger son was married to the daughter of a tehsildar. She was a cultured and mature girl who had also been taught to write by her father.

As the story unfolds, the younger son and his wife became the perfect conjugal couple. The younger son was able to use his education to ingratiate himself with a government servant. The latter gave him his first government job. Finally this younger son replaced his mentor when he was transferred to another post. The younger son became a respectable government babu with a substantial monthly salary. Meanwhile, his wife took care of things at home. She had decorated her room with accessories such as a rug, pictures, armchairs, and bookshelves lined with books. This was appreciated by everyone who visited the house. She also proved to be the perfect companion to her husband; in their leisure time, she read the vernacular newspaper while he read the English one after which they talked about daily news. Her management of the household was exemplary. She rose early to pray and prepare meals for the entire family. She filled her leisure time by embroidering or teaching the girls in the neighborhood how to write, entertaining them by reading stories aloud. The older son’s wife was a complete contrast. Among the flaws which the author assigned to her were an evil temper, laziness, and the lack of hygiene. Further, the older son did not share the kind of conjugal love that his sister-in-law had found with his younger brother.

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
Needless to say, the couples hardly got along. The evil sister-in-law would make trouble every now and then. Finally the mother-in-law decided to step in and asked her husband to separate them. Thus both brothers began to live in separate homes with their wives and the parents divided their time between them. After the aged parents died in quick succession, the two brothers fought over division of the familial property. When the older brother resisted the division of his father’s property, the younger brother was successful in claiming a share by hiring a lawyer.

This text raises several important questions about the ways in which upwardly mobile upper-caste service gentry men were being exhorted to reshape their familial practices to gain respectability and capital. Texts such as Devarani Jethani ki Kahani played an important role in normatively consolidating professional men’s [engaged in government service such as the younger son in the story] control over capital. As Mytheli Sreenivas has shown in her study of colonial Madras, nineteenth-century professional men had to contend with “colonial administrators who retained the notion that property was a joint obligation [in the Indian subcontinent], and therefore limited individual property rights.”\textsuperscript{191}

Such understandings stemmed from the colonial state’s generalizations regarding Indian familial structures. Administrators applied notions that the evolutionary movement from primitive societies to modern ones was characterized by a shift from collective to individual forms of property.\textsuperscript{192} Since India was deemed as a traditional and stagnant society, officials recognized, and hence created the patriarchal joint family as an essential

\textsuperscript{191} Sreenivas, Wives, Widows and Concubines, p. 48.
organizing factor. As Guha has shown, this was in spite of the evidence collected by British officials.\textsuperscript{193} Colonial discourses on the joint family in India shaped the ways in which property relations were administered under colonial law.

Colonial arguments on the joint family were institutionalized through law as prescriptive Mitakshara doctrines were used as the foremost legal authority on the question of property rights. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Mitakshara law differentiated between property which belonged jointly to male agnatic kin and separate, individually-owned property.\textsuperscript{194} While the former was inherited or devolved to someone through survivorship, the latter was largely self-acquired or inherited from other family members. Under Mitakshara, “coparceners could also agree to partition their joint property, creating separate shares that were individually owned.”\textsuperscript{195}

Mercantile and professional men increasingly sought to partition their jointly held property as landed ancestral estates went into debt.\textsuperscript{196} The colonial state was averse to such partitions because of the threats they posed to revenue collections. Thus, it supported agrarian patriarchies and the heads of families over mercantile and professional men who had demanded partition. In the context of colonial north India, colonial jurists looked upon partition cases with suspicion as these were seen causing social fission and productive of individual rights.\textsuperscript{197} Thus officials placed the burden of proof of joint or separate holding of property on individual families demanding separation.

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\item \textsuperscript{193} Ibid., pp. 97-107.
\item \textsuperscript{194} Sreenivas, \textit{Wives, Widows and Concubines}, p. 49.
\item \textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{196} Ibid., p. 48.
\item \textsuperscript{197} Leigh Denault, ‘Partition and the Politics of the Joint Family in Nineteenth-century North India’ in \textit{Indian Economic and Social History Review}, 46, no. 1, 2009, pp. 46-49.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Texts like *Devarani Jethani ki Kahani*, however, do not merely suggest that upwardly-mobile professional men with independent means of income sought partition from certain joint family enterprises for reasons of economy and respectability. They were also exhortations to such separations. How could a government babu, who had risen above his family, remain tied to a petty shop without sullying himself? Partition could also safeguard the earnings of the government servant against the claims of a failing family enterprise. I argue that conjugality and the literate woman became integral to gaining respectability, as well as for claiming and protecting capital from the family enterprise.

The constitution of middle-class respectability including conjugal love, service and a particular deportment rested upon the reform of the upper-caste woman. In this, one finds parallels with reformist texts which targeted sharifs from Muslim service gentry backgrounds as they moved into government service from older traditions of courtly employment. Ruby Lal has elaborated how reform within the sharif household became a critical means of preserving respectability for Muslim service gentry as they moved into government service. She has argued that the shift caused “class anxiety” amongst these groups as “well established benchmarks of courtly/sharif behavior” were no longer accessible to them. In this context, women too were charged with the responsibility of “recuperating” respectability by managing the home.

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199 Lal, ‘Gender and Sharafat: re-reading Nazir Ahmad,’ p. 16.
200 Ibid., p. 17.
The reformist texts like *Devarani Jethani ki Kahani*, and those examined by Ruby Lal, could be said to address readership from distinct socio-economic backgrounds. However, Lal’s insights on the role of *sharif* women in the household are important for the ways in which they highlight how the performance and embodiment of ideals of domesticity by such women were integral to the constitution of *sharif* respectability. She has argued that the “object of the reformers was not to transform her [the *sharif* woman] but to preserve family, community and culture through her.”

These tensions are also reflected in *Devarani Jethani ki Kahani*. Even as the reformist writer underscored conjugal love between husband and wife, the young, literate wife was still charged with the duty to listen to her elders. When her *tehsildar* father heard about the partition between the two brothers, he wrote a letter to his daughter instructing her to obey her mother-in-law at all times, perform the delegated duties and labor as was befitting of girls from respected families. He instructed her that only by fulfilling such duties would she prove that her education had been worthwhile. The author included other instructions through the letter thereby teaching a young girl how to conduct herself in her affinal home, and how to love and respect her affinal kin.

The exhortations to the upper-caste wife to maintain the spiritual and physical health of the household were inter-generational. They took the form of gendered instructions by elder men and women to younger females. These instructions were a critical part of the education women received in their homes. During the late nineteenth century, most textbooks which preached education for upper-caste girls and young

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201 Ibid., p. 27.
women were produced with the approval of the director of public instruction. Such education was directed towards inculcating norms of deference towards upper-caste elders among young girls and women.

**Nationalizing Lower-Caste Labor and Upper-caste Managerial Skills in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries**

Late nineteenth-century efforts by service gentry groups to claim middle-class status and respectability were based upon maintaining an upper-caste status. In the previous section, I have shown how the educated upper-caste wife was important to such endeavors. In this section, I draw attention to how the hierarchical relationship between upper-caste patrons and lower-caste servants, based upon rituals of purity and pollution, and unequal reciprocity, was essential to the new upper-caste family. I argue that the caste-based labor of lower-caste servants in the household was upheld by middle-class nationalists as the model to be emulated and defended.

As I have shown earlier, prominent members of service gentry caste groups used the literary public sphere to assert their upper-caste identities. Furthermore, patrons from different castes, including the Kshatriyas, provided scholarships for upper-caste boys in government colleges and schools. There are other records showing that some patrons

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202 See for instance Ramaprasada Tivari, *Sutaprabodha* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1871). This text contained moral precepts in verse for girls and women in different stages of their lives, as young girls living with their parents to when they become wives, mothers and daughters-in-law.

203 Sreenivas, *Wives, Widows and Concubines*, p. 44.

204 See for example the scholarships given by Sheoraj Singh and Hurry Raj Singh for students of the Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes, scholarships given by Jay Kishen Das for a “high caste Hindu” in the 1880s in Director of Education, North Western Provinces, Allahabad Archives ‘Endowment of Scholarships by Raja Jai Kishore Das of Moradabad and Others’ in Bundle no. 3, Box no. 4, File no. 52. See also ‘Rule for Management of the Hewitt Kshatriya High School, Benares, 1909’ in Varanasi Collectorate Records 1893-1925, List no. 4, File no. 4, Department no. XXVI. Government, United
provided scholarships without any caste, or sometimes even religious, qualifications. Records of schools opened in the name of the Arya Samaj founder, Dayanand Saraswati, and other patrons during the early twentieth century show how schools could be opened to students of all castes. Nevertheless, the nationalist public sphere created a space for different groups to assert their caste and religious identities. Young men and women were being shaped as respectable upper castes through instructions in colonial schools and in the literary public sphere: while boys were being prepared for respectable service under the colonial government, girls were being readied for service in upper-caste households.

This evidence from colonial north India offers an important counterpoint to the argument that caste differentiation came to rest solely within the household where the upper-caste woman became a signifier of caste differences. In the context of colonial Punjab, Anshu Malhotra has shown that caste hierarchies were maintained by controlling the sexuality of the upper-caste women under the aegis of reformist movements such as the Arya Samaj. She has argued that as Arya Samajis reconceptualized the caste order that enabled the inclusion of lower castes through the universalization of markers of caste status, such as the wearing of sacred thread, they marked women and the management of their sexuality as the “hallmarks of caste status.” According to Malhotra, as communitarian politics, in which religion was used to create a homogenized Hindu

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Provinces, Educational Department, List no. 10, Box no. 193, File no. 519, Year 1920 for scholarships reserved for Khatri boys.

205 See for example some scholarships that did not have any caste restrictions or at times even religious restrictions during the 1880s in Director of Education, North Western Provinces, Allahabad Archives ‘Endowment of Scholarships by Raja Jai Kishore Das of Moradabad and Others’ in Bundle no. 3, Box no. 4, File no. 52.

206 See ‘Acquisition of 4.79 acres of land to Ved Vidyalaya and Dayanand School’ in Varanasi Collectorate Records, List no. 6, Department no. VIII, Box no. 17, File no. 65, Year 1917-1919. See also ‘Batuk Prasad Khatri Industrial School’ in Varanasi Collectorate Records, List no. 7, Department no. XV, Box. No. 80, File no. 136, Year 1923-27.

207 Malhotra, Gender, Caste and Religious Identities, pp. 2-3
religion became the “public face” of upper-caste nationalists, caste was necessarily driven into the “covert domain” of household. While Malhotra’s argument may be qualified, it is nonetheless crucial to understand how caste-based hierarchies shaped middle-class households, discursively and in practice, and how the politicization of the upper-caste woman strengthened caste boundaries in the public sphere.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, service gentry groups such as the Chitraguptavashi Kayasthas of north India began to deploy endogamy to marginalize lower-caste family members. In familial disputes on inheritance, Kayastha women were upheld as “lawfully married” and their children as being “of the pure blood”. They were allowed to inherit property of the deceased Kayastha males over the lower-caste women, categorized as concubines, and their “illegitimate” children. Such cases took on wider connotations for the Kayastha community for “respectable members of the Chitraguptavansi Kayastha community” comprising lawyers and other administrative officers banded around such cases.

As I have noted earlier, north Indian Kayasthas had been engaged in securing an upper-caste status for themselves during the late nineteenth centuries. Disputes over inheritance were especially important in this context. Consequently, Kali Prasad, a Kayastha patron, included discussion on such disputes in his text Kayastha Ethnology. The Kayastha Ethnology was compiled specifically with the purpose of providing support for the argument that Kayasthas were not Shudras but in fact Kshatriyas of the twice-born

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208 Ibid., p. 2 and 34.
210 Ibid., p. 97.
caste. Inheritance disputes played an important role in this process as familial practices became a vital ground for both claiming upper-caste status and fixing caste boundaries.

In 1878 a case was filed in the civil court of Mirzapur district in the Banaras region by two sons of a deceased Kayastha magnate and a lower-caste Koeri [non-elite tilling and cattle-keeping people] woman claiming their father’s considerable estate.\textsuperscript{211} In making their claims, the sons of the Koeri woman challenged the rights of two half-sisters who were the offspring of their father’s union with a Kayastha woman.

The deceased Kayastha magnate had four children - two sons and two daughters - with the Kayastha woman who was described as the “lawfully married wife of his [the deceased Kayastha male’s] biradari [read as caste here]” in the case proceedings.\textsuperscript{212} The Koeri woman was referred to as “unmarried.”\textsuperscript{213} The sons of the Koeri woman claimed that they had held their father’s property jointly with their half-brothers [born of the Kayastha wife]. They based their claims upon categorizations of the Kayasthas as Shudras. The sons of the Koeri woman argued that according to Hindu law, illegitimate children could inherit property along with the legitimate children from the lower castes or Shudras. However, the Kayastha wife’s sons had since died and the Kayastha widow and her two daughters had inherited the property. The Koeri woman’s sons now argued that on matters of inheritance, Hindu inheritance law states that “widows were entitled to maintenance only” and “daughters and daughter’s children and other gentiles would also be excluded [from inheritance] in such a case.”\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., pp. 95-97.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., p. 95.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
In the next stage of the court case, the judge ordered that both the plaintiff [the lower-caste “illegitimate” sons] and the defendants [the Kayastha “legitimate” daughters] prove whether there were any distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate sons amongst Kayasthas.\textsuperscript{215} Interestingly, both parties now began proving or disproving whether Kayasthas were lower-caste Shudras or not, particularly as the case gained a lot of attention from the north Indian Kayastha community. While the lower-caste brothers were able to find only one witness who argued that Kayasthas were Shudras, the defendants were able to produce many more authorities in the form of prescriptive Sanskrit texts, prominent Brahman pandits, Brahman scholars, and prominent Kayastha lawyers and officials.\textsuperscript{216} The latter attested that according to the customs of the Chitraguptavansi Kayasthas, illegitimate children were not considered members of the “brotherhood” nor did they have any rights to inheritance.\textsuperscript{217} Furthermore, they asserted, “Chitraguptavansi Kayasthas are included among the Kshatriyas and not Sudras…”\textsuperscript{218}

The judge agreed with the defendants’ witnesses and ruled in favor of the daughters born of the Kayastha wife. Aside from this particular case, there were others such as the one involving two sons of a Kayastha man, the first born of a Kayastha woman [product of an endogamous marriage] and the other another born of a Malee [gardener of the lower caste] woman. In this case too, the judges ruled in favor of upper-caste males based upon both shastras and customs.\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., pp. 96-97.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., p. 95.
During this period, Kayastha men and women were able to direct their influence and resources towards consolidating upper-caste hierarchies in both the middle-class home and the public sphere. By 1901, they were publicizing the successes outlined above through caste-based newspapers such as the Kayastha Samachar or ‘Kayastha News’. It is significant to note that during the time when Kayastha leaders generated interest in such cases, the Kayastha Samachar was on its way to making a transition from a “caste to a national newspaper” that addressed questions on Indian progress.220

These disputes illustrate the intimate connections between upper castes and lower castes even as lower castes only appeared as distant servants within upper-caste households in exhortative literature. These processes were strengthened as lower-caste wives, concubines and their offspring were increasingly categorized as “servants” in colonial records in cases of large landed families that could no longer afford to sustain them.221

Service gentry groups actively participated in recasting the lower castes as servants. They were considered outside the family, but their labor was acknowledged to be critical for establishing a respectable household. Men from service gentry groups exhorted their readers to form stable patronal relationships while observing the norms of purity and pollution with lower-caste servants in newer settings. They further instructed the young, upper-caste, and educated grihaswamini how to conduct herself around the

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221 See ‘Case of Mst. Lakhpatti Kunwar, 1892’ in Varanasi Collectorate Records, List no. 3, Box no. 12, File no. 20.
lower-caste servants for only their [the grihaswamini and the lower-caste servants’] combined labor could reproduce the nationalist family.

From the late nineteenth century, upper-caste male writers began instructing young girls and women in the colloquial dialects and languages which women from the communities actually used so as to make the lessons easier. Often such lessons were imparted by the male author in the feminine voice in order to the chaste and obedient upper-caste girl or, alternatively, the corrupt lower-caste one. Francesca Orsini has elaborated upon this practice of voicing women in her work on the literary public sphere in north India between 1920s and 1940s. These processes of voicing are central to understanding how upper-caste womanhood was socially and discursively produced by contemporaneous structures of power.

In a text titled, Stridharmasara or ‘Advice on the Duties of Women’, the author who was from the Khatri caste begins by stating that he was writing to teach Khatri and Saraswat Brahman women their duties as prescribed by the shastras. He went on to offer advice on how his upper-caste female students should conduct themselves in their affinal household. In order to teach this, he assumes the voice of a young girl who, with deference and temerity, prays to her mother-in-law to forgive her ignorance, and teach her how to fulfill her duties in the household. Then assuming the author’s voice, he explains why she [the upper-caste girl] was chosen for marriage after a careful

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223 See preface of Munshi Jivaram Kapur Khatri, Stridharmasara (Mathura: Gurjar Yantralaya, 1892). In northern Indian cities such as Banaras, Khatris and Saraswat Brahmins had formed a cohesive group. Saraswat Brahmins became family priests of Khatris and the two caste groups often entered into business partnerships. See Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, p. 179.
224 Khatri, Stridharmasara, p. 2.
investigation of her caste status instead of a girl from a “neech kul” which could be translated either as a depraved or a lower-caste family.\textsuperscript{225} Instead, the upper-caste girl or young woman gets to manage the labor of the lower-caste casual laborers and “bandhe kamin” [bonded laborers] in the household.\textsuperscript{226} As the sole manager of the household income, she is instructed to set aside money towards various requirements. In the case of the servants, the author instructs her to give more wages to casual laborers. Servants were to be paid their wages on a monthly basis instead of accumulating their wages over a longer period of time for fear that they would steal otherwise. As for the bonded laborers who received something in kind from their patrons during festivals, she was instructed to give them more in order to encourage them to work harder.\textsuperscript{227}

Texts such as \textit{Stridharmasara} show how the upper-caste woman’s managerial skills were critical to maintain the equally significant lower-caste labor in the household. There were general injunctions against socializing with lower-caste women. However, educated upper-caste women were instructed to use lower-caste labor without sullying themselves.\textsuperscript{228} Thus Maina, the educated protagonist of \textit{Ritiratnakara} or ‘Treasury of Good Manners and Customs’ was able to draw upon the local knowledge of a lower-caste woman when she set up home in a new neighborhood and city.\textsuperscript{229} When Maina moved into her new home, a “Kaharin” [lower-caste woman] who lived in a hut nearby

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., p. 3.
\item\textsuperscript{226} See Gyan Prakash, \textit{Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Bonded laborers were usually lower-caste agricultural laborers who had entered into debt with their upper-caste patrons or \textit{jajmans}. The patrons and clients thus initiated a relationship of dependence where the social reproduction of this relationship rather than payment of debt gained importance. Such relationships often guaranteed the patron household access to the labor of the bonded agricultural laborer’s wife and children.
\item\textsuperscript{227} Khatri, \textit{Stridharmasara}, p. 15.
\item\textsuperscript{228} Tivari, \textit{Sutaprabodha}, p. 10.
\item\textsuperscript{229} Ramaprasada Tivari, \textit{Ritiratnakar} (Allahabad: Government Press, 1872).
\end{itemize}
expressed her desire to secure a place as a servant in Maina’s home.\textsuperscript{230} The lower-caste woman promised that she would spend day and night in the service of her mistress. Maina in turn looked favorably upon this request and benevolently told the lower-caste woman that she appeared honest and could therefore be of use. Maina informed her that she would talk to her husband about her situation and let her know. In yet another paternal gesture, Maina changed the lower-caste woman’s name from Dasiya [woman of an impure caste] to Ramdasi [female devotee of lord Ram]. This prompted an effusion of gratitude from Ramdasi who stated that only a woman from a respectable household could be so generous. She went on to state that Maina’s behavior was completely unlike that of lower-caste women who married into upper-caste households and caused utter destruction.

Before their first meeting came to an end, Maina asked Ramdasi to prepare food for the other male servants she had brought with her and to wash the utensils.\textsuperscript{231} Ramdasi performed these chores with enthusiasm. After completing her work in the kitchen, Ramdasi massaged her mistress’ feet and washed them with warm water. Maina followed this narrative with a description of how the household servants cleaned the house under her supervision.

The next order of business for Maina was to assess the social status of her neighbors and seek potential friends. Once again, Maina relied on Ramdasi, her servant, to inform her about their caste statuses.\textsuperscript{232} When Ramdasi gave Maina the names of a few respectable women from the neighborhood, Maina asked Ramdasi to approach them on

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., p. 8 and 10.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., p. 12.
her behalf to request for a meeting. We are told that this cautious socialization was the hallmark of upper-caste women.\textsuperscript{233}

Maina thus sets up her home and her family in the community by using caste-based labor. She subsequently becomes a respected figure in her community of upper-caste friends. With the household labor well taken care of, Maina now had time to devote herself to the issues and trials of the Hindu nation. She begins by instructing her husband Lalaji to speak Hindi and learn Sanskrit instead of leaning towards “Muslim” languages like Persian and Urdu.\textsuperscript{234} She found an equally respectable educated upper-caste woman to give her home-based instructions.\textsuperscript{235} Under her teacher’s direction, Maina studied grammar, math, as well as Sanskrit and Hindi literature.\textsuperscript{236}

Later in the text, the author introduces a new character, an Englishwoman, who was greatly impressed with Maina and her teacher after meeting them. She states, “I was under the impression that women in this country were not knowledgeable or educated but after meeting you, I realize was wrong [translation mine].”\textsuperscript{237} The Englishwoman then inquired why so few women were educated in India.\textsuperscript{238} Maina’s teacher answered that women’s education and the fate of the Indian nation were tied to the progress of the Hindi vernacular.\textsuperscript{239} She argued that since Hindi was the most widely spoken language in the country, women would learn faster if instructed in it.

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., p. 13. 
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., pp. 20-21. 
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., pp. 26-27. 
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., pp. 28-29. 
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., p. 92. 
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
Maina’s teacher’s response to the Englishwoman illustrates the intricate connections between nationalism, the Hindu identity and the Hindi vernacular. Hindi and Hinduism were powerful idioms in the nineteenth century. Men like the merchant-banker Bharatendu Harishchandra mobilized a nationalist identity using these idioms. Dalmia has argued that the articulation of this indigenous political and cultural identity was emancipatory in that it enabled nationalists to vocalize dissent on political and social issues. It was exclusive of Muslims and lower-caste groups. However, in spite of their exclusion, lower castes were essential to the articulation of upper-caste nationalist identity. They were the “Other” of the upper castes, and performed the menial labor in the household.

Late nineteenth-century discursive constructions of the upper-caste household hinged upon the relationship between the upper-caste mistress and the lower-caste servant. Aside from payments in kind or in money, this relationship was constituted by a paternalism which invoked deference from the lower-caste servant. As I have shown in this section, labors of the upper-caste mistress and her lower-caste servants were fundamental to the respectability of the middle classes and consequently, to the nationalist endeavor. I have also shown how these discursive efforts were supported by the marginalization of lower-caste wives, concubines and their children from upper-caste households during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such lower-caste female and male members could only find representation in their families as deferent servants to the upper-caste manager-wife.

240 Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*.
241 Ibid., p. 436.
242 Ibid., p. 437.
Conclusion

Service gentry groups in northern India were agents of social change. In this chapter, I have shown how members of these groups channeled their resources to gain capital and social prestige in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As I have demonstrated, such accumulations required participation in multiple publics as service gentry groups sought to secure upper-caste status and middle-class respectability in the nineteenth-century. I have shown how caste and familial practices — both lived and exhorted — were central to this process. These long-term histories help elaborate why caste, family, and gender relations, shifting at all times, became central to middle-class nationalism in colonial India.
Conclusion

The region of Banaras was made up of a nexus of households and kinship relationships between the eighteenth and nineteenth century. These relationships were structured and differentiated by age, caste and occupational hierarchies. The Rajas of Banaras had created an expansive lineage politics by establishing polygynous intra and inter-caste marriage patterns that ensured a resource pool of male heirs. These same processes enabled rulers to subordinate rival landlords through multiple, bride-taking marriages. They simultaneously marginalized the claims of collateral and agnatic kinsmen who had been organized in land-sharing, corporate and exogamous caste groups called *biradaris*.

This structure itself generated conflict. From the eighteenth century itself, and well into the nineteenth, the colonial state was quick to mobilize such conflict for the consolidation of their influence among contending segments of these kinship networks. Though the larger context of colonial rule was provided by the military and economic structures of colonial commerce between 1740 and 1780, the immediate occasions for the intervention of the Company were disputes over inheritance and succession in these networks of kinship. Competitors who strove to deny other household members their rights to inheritance used caste-based practices and discourses on endogamy to both consolidate their upper-caste status and marginalize lower-caste wives and their offspring.

Upper-caste competitors called into question the multiple forms of intra and inter-caste marriages that had constituted family and state in eighteenth-century polities. These shifts informed inheritance patterns. Definitions of legitimate sonship were defined more
strictly on the basis of endogamous marriages. In the context of the Banaras rulers, these arguments upheld the claims of upper-caste female lineal descendants and their male children over those of sons born of women from lower castes. I have demonstrated that these examinations offer an important nuance to a history of gender relations. Even as patrilineal inheritance remained the norm, gender hierarchies between sons and daughters were complicated and could at times be disrupted by hierarchies of caste.

Colonial interventions strengthened male and upper-caste authorities in families. This was beneficial for upper-caste males. However, even if not so intended, such male power was often usurped or surreptitiously deployed by the elderly female kin of such upper-caste males. Older women were especially important in the management of large mercantile households. These women had managed to attain positions of authority as mothers of merchant sons and as cultivators of hierarchical, age-based relationships with younger members of the family. I argue that such women played an essential role in ensuring the accumulation of mercantile capital by managing the dispensation of allowances amongst family members and ensuring that younger members fulfilled their obligations to the family. I stress that the supervisory and management skills of older women enabled merchants to accumulate the different forms of capital that ensured the reproduction of the mercantile firm and consequently the early colonial state.

While individual colonial officers might have supported such age-based hierarchies, the extension of colonial judicial authority was more often enabled by the junior branches and lower-ranking members of similarly elaborate households. Women, especially those who were unable to establish themselves in positions of authority in small, middling and large households, sought out colonial courts for control over
resources in the mercantile family. Such women gained serious privileges by approaching the courts.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the colonial state used caste and gender hierarchies simultaneously to foster shifts in political economy that were favorable to the extensions of colonial authority. Colonial land-revenue regulations in particular highlighted the ways in which British officials constructed meanings of gender especially in terms of property-ownership. Eighteenth-century British principles of property-ownership corresponded with constructions of femininity and masculinity to deny Indian women political power and ownership of property. Colonial policies reshaped hierarchies of rank and age between elite women and their male kin, producing important shifts in the political economy of the region.

At the same time, these legislative and economic interventions also reinforced caste hierarchies between women. Upwardly mobile service gentry groups simultaneously benefited from, and reinforced, such distinctions. I have pointed to how these groups made political, economic and cultural investments to secure lucrative service under the colonial state. In the colonial period, service gentry groups accumulated prestige and other kinds of capital through ties with colonial authorities. These groups, hailing from literate service caste groups of the eighteenth century, adapted to the widespread shifts under way in the nineteenth century to refashion their authority. These groups used their facility with scribal cultures to insinuate themselves into the higher echelons of caste hierarchies on the one hand, and the leadership of nationalist politics on the other. I have demonstrated the centrality of certain normative and lived familial practices to both.
In the latter half of the nineteenth century, service caste groups reconstituted their scribal authority by means of creating and controlling a literary vernacular public culture. In the journals and newspapers as well as the short stories and novels that emerged from this period, the reconfiguration of upper-caste families as endogamous households was explicit. The upper-caste wife and the laboring, lower-caste servant were separated by rituals of purity specific to the upper castes. Upper-caste women’s deferential behavior towards all men in authority was also central in such reconfigurations.

At the same time, the patronal relationships that such service caste groups established with their lower-caste servants became a central, defining characteristic of the upper castes. This was critical to the subject formation of the upper-caste wife. Upper-caste women benefited by their growing dominance over their lower-caste relatives in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century polygynous service gentry families. As we see through the reading of ‘edifying literature’ for women in chapter five, late nineteenth-century nationalist discourses also charged upper-caste women with the duty of maintaining caste hierarchies over lower-caste domestic servants. In the discursive sphere, they were charged with the duty of maintaining caste hierarchies over lower-caste servants.

I have argued that such histories are critical for understanding subject formation among upper-caste women who participated as beneficiaries in caste consolidation. From the late nineteenth century, this group of upper-caste women came to lead nationalist politics, especially women’s movements for the right to vote in the early twentieth century. This deeply imprinted the structures of late colonial and post-colonial society.
Glossary

_Adalat_: Court

_Ashraf_: Respectable Muslims

_Babu_: Clerk

_Banias_: Petty moneylender

_Baraka_: Spiritual power

_Bhakta_: Devotee

_Birdar_: Brotherhood, patrilineage

_Caravansarai_: Travelers’ home

_Chauki_: Police or customs post

_Chela_: Disciple

_Dargah_: A Sufi shrine

_Darogha_: Chief station officer

_Dharma_: Righteousness

_Dharna_: Fast unto death undertaken against an adversary in order to address a grievance

_Diwani_: Revenue rights

_Diya_: Blood money

_Faqir_: Ascetic

_Farkhati_: Deed of release

_Ghat_: Embankment

_Gomashta_: Commercial agent

_Gosain_: Armed Shaiva ascetic, also used for Vallabha priests.
Grihaswamini: Upper-caste mistress of the home

Guru: Teacher

Haveli: Palatial house

Hircurrah: Agent, peon, courier

Hundi: Mercantile note of credit

Jagir: Land revenue assignment

Jama: Assessed revenue

Jotedars: Rich farmers from dominant landed groups in effective possession of land

Kazi: Islamic judge and public notary

Khilat: Robe of honor bestowed by a superior to an inferior dependent

Kisas: Retaliation

Kishuarpan Grant: A grant of land to Brahmans

Kotwal: Police chief and urban administrator

Kotwali: Police Station

Maafi Grant: A free charitable grant of land usually made to saints and learned people

Madarsah: Islamic School

Mahajan: Merchant-banker

Math: Residence of Hindu ascetic orders

Mauza: Administrative and territorial unit comprising of several villages

Maya: Illusion

Milkiat: Property

Mohur: Coin

Murshid: Spiritual guide and teacher
Naib: Deputy

Nazarana: Ritualized gift to a lord

Pargana: A territorial administrative unit comprising of a number of villages

Patshala: School

Pir: Title for a charismatic Muslim Sufi teacher

Risaladar: Head of a mounted cavalry

Sahu: Merchant-banker

Sangat: Congregation of devotees

Sharif: High-born

Sherbet: Sweet drink

Sampraday: Order

Sanad: Title deed, a document conveying rights

Shastra: Antiquated scriptural texts

Sheikh: Learned scholar

Shuddhi: Purification

Sicca: Silver coin

Silsilla: Order

Talukas: Revenue subdivision

Tehsildar: Indian official in charge of collecting revenue on behalf of the colonial government who was allowed to keep 10 percent of the revenue collections for himself.

Tirtha: Holy site

Zamindar: Landlord
Zamindari: Land-revenue settlement

Zenana: Women’s apartments
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