



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Nawabi Karnatak: Muhammad Ali Khan in the Making of a Mughal Successor State in Pre-colonial South India, 1749-1795**

Wibulsilp, P.

### **Citation**

Wibulsilp, P. (2019, April 9). *Nawabi Karnatak: Muhammad Ali Khan in the Making of a Mughal Successor State in Pre-colonial South India, 1749-1795*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/71028>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/71028>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/71028> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Wibulsilp, P.

**Title:** Nawabi Karnatak: Muhammad Ali Khan in the Making of a Mughal Successor State in Pre-colonial South India, 1749-1795

**Issue Date:** 2019-04-09

# **Nawabi Karnatak**

**Muhammad Ali Khan in the Making of a Mughal Successor State in**

**Pre-colonial South India, 1749-1795**



# **Nawabi Karnatak**

**Muhammad Ali Khan in the Making of a Mughal Successor State in  
Pre-colonial South India, 1749-1795**

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van

de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,

op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof. mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,

volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties

te verdedigen op dinsdag 9 april 2019

klokke 13.45 uur

door

Pimmanus Wibulsilp

geboren te Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

in 1986

**Promotor:**

Prof. dr. J.J.L. Gommans (Universiteit Leiden)

**Promotiecommissie:**

Prof. dr. M.L.M. van Berkel (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)

Prof. dr. J.F.J. Duindam (Universiteit Leiden)

Prof. dr. D.E.F. Henley (Universiteit Leiden)

Dr. A. Singh (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)

Dr. C.M. Stolte (Universiteit Leiden)

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgement</b>	ix
<b>List of illustrations</b>	xi
<b>List of abbreviations</b>	xii
<b>Maps</b>	xiii
<b>Introduction: The Nawab's Perspective</b>	1
<b>Part I: Aurangzeb's Legacy: War and Migration</b>	35
Chapter 1: Military Service, Migration, and Settlement	37
1.1 Mughal Expansion into South India	37
1.2 Migration and "Zamindarization"	41
1.3 The Emergence of the Southern Mughal Successor States: The Deccan and Karnatak	47
Chapter 2: The Walajahs	53
2.1 The Walajahs and the Mughals	53
2.2 Walajahi Karnatak	55
2.3 The Nawayat-Walajah Wars	56
2.4 Muhammad Ali Khan: Sole Ruler of Karnatak	63
2.5 Relations with the Mughal Emperors	68
<b>Conclusion to Part I</b>	73

<b>Part II: The Making of the Karnatak State</b>	77
Chapter 3: Nawabi Dynasty	87
3.1 Nasab	87
3.2 Succession	93
3.3 Affiliations	112
Chapter 4: Nawabi Sword	117
4.1 The South Asian Military Labor Market	117
4.2 Nawabi Self-Fashioning	122
4.3 People of the Sword	125
Chapter 5: Nawabi Pen	149
5.1 Early Modern South Asian Courts	149
5.2 Nawabi Self-Fashioning	153
5.3 People of the Pen	155
Chapter 6: Nawabi Religion	175
6.1 The Role of Religion in Early Modern South Asia	176
6.2 Nawabi Self-Fashioning	183
6.3 Religious Groups	187
<b>Conclusion to Part II</b>	203
<b>Part III: Embracing the Europeans</b>	211
Chapter 7: Economic Encounters	217
7.1 Rulers and Trade	217
7.2 The Nawab as Merchant: Textiles, Rice, and Pearls	223
7.3 The Nawab as a Revenue Farmer	239
7.4 The Nawab as Real-Estate Investor	250
7.5 The Nawab and Trade	252

Chapter 8: Cultural Encounters	257
8.1 European Material Culture at the Nawab's Court	257
8.2 Triangle: Nawab, Company, and King	263
8.3 Tripartite Ritual Battles	269
Chapter 9: Military Encounters	297
9.1 Clashes of Interests in the Joint Force	297
9.2 Nawabi Efforts at Military Reform	303
9.3 The Irreversible Context	312
<b>Conclusion to Part III</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>339</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>351</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>355</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>359</b>
<b>Samenvatting</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	<b>379</b>



## Acknowledgement

This thesis has received great support from a number of institutions, teachers, scholars, and friends. First and foremost, I am sincerely grateful to the Anandamahidol Foundation, Thailand for providing the scholarship that made this dissertation possible. The guidelines do not permit me to thank my master and PhD supervisor, Jos Gommans, for his patient guidance, numerous advice, and inspiration throughout a decade-long process of training a Thai student to become a historian of South Asia. Sincere appreciations also go to the members of the promotion committee: Maaïke van Berkel, Jeroen Duindam, David Henley Anjana Singh, and Carolien Stolte, for their insightful comments. I am thankful to my teachers at Chulalongkorn University, especially Dhiravat na Pombejara and Bhawan Ruangsilp, for their assistance and moral encouragement.

My archival research was mainly done at the British Library in London, the Dutch National Archives in The Hague, the Tamilnadu Archives in Chennai, and the Leiden University Library. I wish to express my appreciation to all the staff members of these institutions for their help. Also, I would like to thank to Bernard D. Sami and L. Shelvanathan of Loyola College, Chennai for their friendship and enormous assistance during my first trip to “Madras.” In order to benefit from these archives, I am also indebted to my Dutch and Persian language teachers René Wezel, Hugo’s Jacob, Ton Harmsen, and Gabriëlle van den Berg.

Words will not be enough to express my gratitude for the Encompass Programme which initially brought me to the Netherlands and gave me a chance to participate in the lively Tanap-Encompass-Cosmopolis community. This wonderful, international family has provided me constant academic advice, discussion, and invaluable friendship. Special thanks go to Leonard Blussé, Alicia Schrikker, Charles Jeurgens, Marijke van Wissen, and Monique Erkelens.

I certainly would not have finished this long project without all my Thai, Dutch, and international colleagues and friends who have provided me with a wide range of support during difficult times in the form of thoughtful discussions, research advice, proofreading, sweet consoles, bitter threatening, as well as laughs, food and shelter. My special thanks go to Pojanat Suthipinittharm, Manjusha Kurappath, Archisman Chaudhuri, Mahmood Kooria, Nierik Sitton, Alex Mallett, Paula Koning, Norifumi Daito, Ariel Lopez, Esther Zwinkels,

Muhammad Gibran, Yedda Palemeq, Nakao Pacidal, Yasrul Huda, Widaratih Kamiso, Lennart Bes, Jinna Smit, Tilla Visser, Lalin Kovudhikulrungsri, Saroj Rujisanskul, Onanong Nuchuchua, Chalermwut Sriporm, Tanat Preeyanont, Sujeeporn Tuntipong, Bee Wiangthong, Narongsak Kidsom, Thep Boontanondha, Kwan Suriyavuth, and Teerapa Pirohakul.

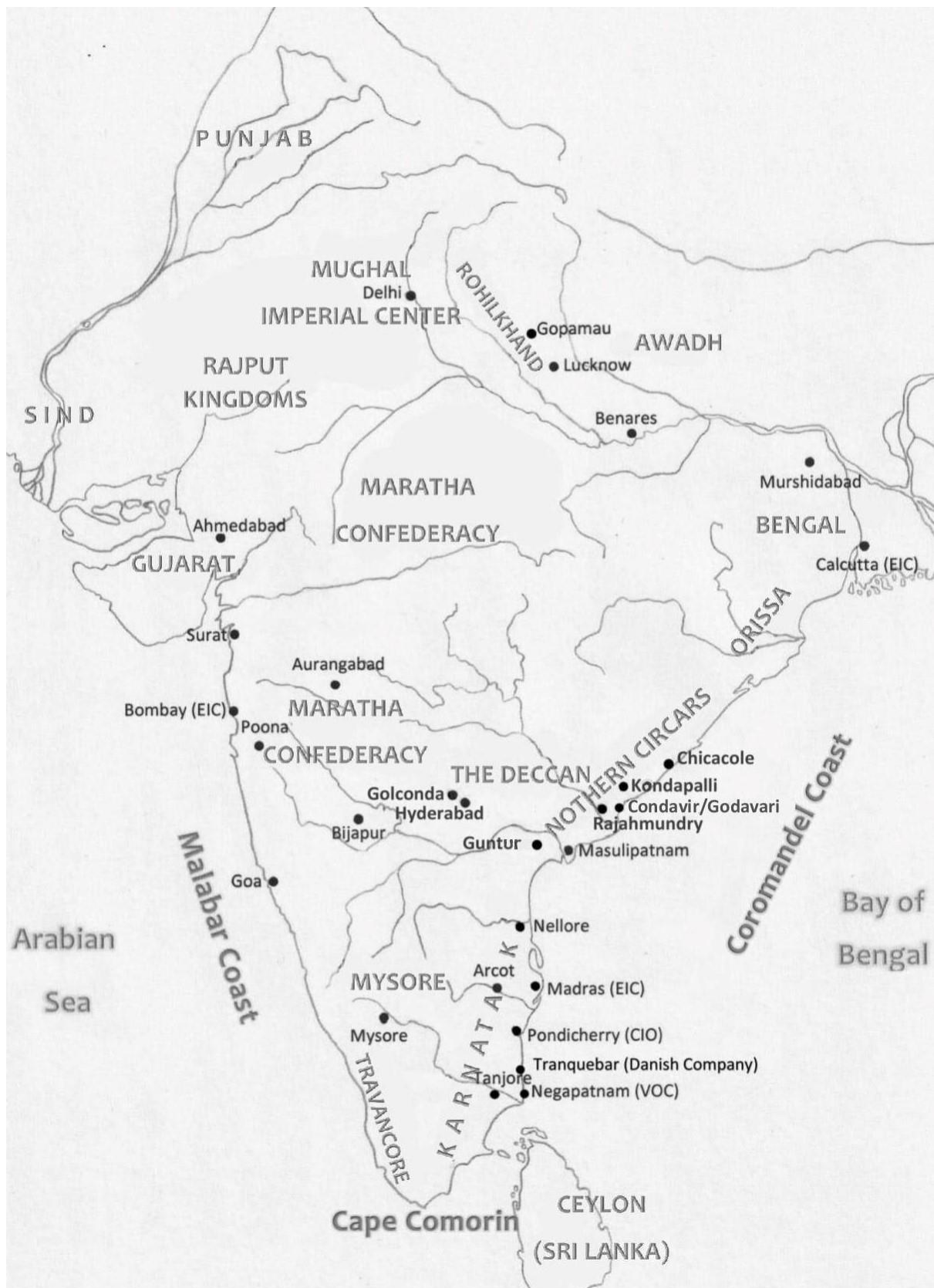
Finally, it would have been impossible for me to finish my PhD without limitless patience, understanding, and support from my family. Thank you very much mom, dad, Salee, Kun-Ya, Pa-Noi, Pooh, EG, Ruya, Ple, Pop, Tukta, Ya-Da, Pa-Tan, and Keaw.

## **Lists of Illustrations**

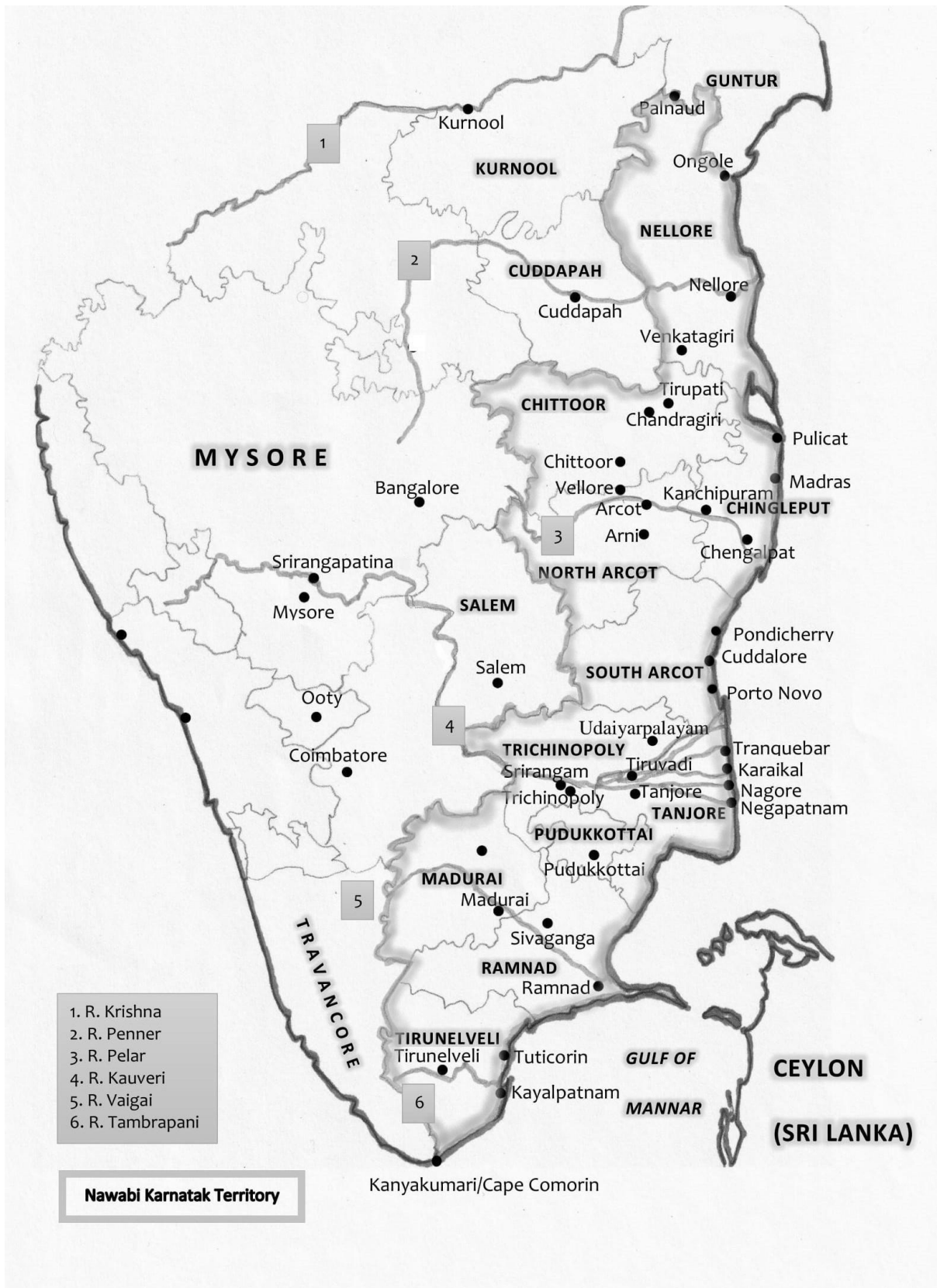
- Page 57      Diagram showing the two camps of the trans-regional alliances during the Nawayat-Walajah wars
- Page 93      Diagram displaying Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and his other four male siblings from three different mothers
- Page 101     Table showing the values of jagirs the Nawab granted to his family members according to his estimation in 1760
- Page 115     Diagram displaying the marital links between the children of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and the children of his full brother, Abd al-Wahhab Khan, and of his full-sister, Choti Begam
- Page 241     Table showing part of the expected land revenues of the Madras Presidency from November 1778 to November 1779
- Page 258     A painting of the Chepauk Palace, printed on a postcard (1907)
- Page 262     Portraits of (1) Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan Walajah of Karnatak (r.1749-1795)  
(2) King Louis XV of France (r. 1715-1774)  
(3) King George III of Britain (r. 1760-1820)  
(4) Empress Catherine II of Russia (r. 1762-1796)

## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>BL</b>	British Library, London
<b>CIO</b>	(French) Compagnie des Indes Orientales
<b>CPC</b>	Calendar of Persian Correspondence: Being Letters, Referring mainly to Affairs in Bengal, which Passed between some of the Company's Servants and Indian Rulers and Notables, 1759-1795
<b>DGP</b>	Diary of George Paterson
<b>DM</b>	Despatches to Madras
<b>EIC</b>	(British) East India Company
<b>HOME</b>	Home Miscellaneous Series of Indian Records
<b>IOR</b>	India Office Records and Private Papers
<b>JB</b>	Letter Book of James Buchanan
<b>MMSC</b>	Madras Military and Secret Consultations
<b>MP</b>	Madras Proceedings
<b>MPP</b>	Madras Public Proceedings
<b>NA</b>	(Dutch) National Archives, The Hague
<b>TA</b>	Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai
<b>VOC</b>	(Dutch) Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie



*Map 1: South Asia in the second half of the eighteenth century*



Map 2: South India in the second half of the eighteenth century

## INTRODUCTION: The Nawab's Perspective

Arcot is recorded in modern literature as having been the site of Mughal army's campsite in the late 1680s, during the campaign to conquer parts of southern India. By the end of the seventeenth century, it was the capital of a new Mughal province (*suba*)—known as the suba of Arcot or the suba of Karnatak (aka the Carnatic)<sup>1</sup>—that was ruled by a Mughal governor (*subadar*) who had the title of *Nawab*. Not unlike the other Mughal provinces of Awadh, Bengal, and Hyderabad, the suba of Karnatak gradually became a *de facto* independent state in the eighteenth century and remained so until it accepted British authority in 1801 (the state was formally absorbed into the Madras Presidency only in 1855). Throughout its existence as a self-governing polity, it was ruled by two dynasties: the Nawayats (1710-1744) and the Walajahs (1744-1801). One particularly fascinating period in the history of Karnatak is the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, the second Walajah ruler, whose rule covered almost the whole of the second half of the eighteenth century, from 1749 to 1795.

Muhammad Ali Khan, began his reign in desperate conditions. Although he proclaimed himself the new Nawab of Karnatak after his father was killed in battle, gaining control over the whole province was a daunting task. He had not received acknowledgement of his position as the legitimate ruler from either his overlord—the Mughal emperor—or his subjects—various groups of Karnatak's population. Moreover, he was surrounded by many stronger regional power-holders who wanted to expand into Karnatak; these were, particularly, the Deccan Nizams, the rulers of Mysore, the Marathas, and the two European East India companies, those of the British and the French. As a result of these precarious circumstances, Muhammad Ali Khan almost lost his position as Nawab of Karnatak. At the beginning of the 1750s, he lost his capital, Arcot, to Chanda Sahib, and only the fort of Trichinopoly remained in his possession. However, not only did he manage to regain the throne and re-establish his sovereignty, he also led Karnatak to its zenith as an independent state. By the 1770s, he had expanded his territory to cover the present-day districts of Nellore and Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, Chingleput, North Arcot, South Arcot, Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappalli), Tanjore (Tanjavur), Pudukkottai, Madurai, Ramnad (Ramanathapuram), and Tirunelveli in the state of Tamilnadu.<sup>2</sup> At this time, the Karnatak state was also faced with expanding British imperial power, as many other South Asian states—such as Bengal, Hyderabad, Awadh, Mysore—also were. In this, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and his state

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “the Carnatic” refers to English usage. Like the Nawab himself, I will use the Persian “Karnatak (کرناتک).” in this study, both for the region and the Nawabi state (hence Nawabi Karnatak). For further details on the origins and meanings of the term, see Chapter One.

<sup>2</sup> Kunjukrishnan Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic, 1701-1801* (Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara University, 1966), 1-2.

forged relations with the British that were far stronger than those of any of his contemporaries.

The 46-year reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan saw the rapid transition of Karnatak from a province at the edge of the Mughal Empire to an independent state and then a territory under the British's supremacy. Considering such rapidly-changing circumstances, it makes an excellent case study for at least two reasons. First, as a region, the formation of Nawabi Karnatak occurred in a frontier zone that was spatially and temporally bounded by three different politico-cultural worlds: the Perso-Islamic Mughal, the Western European, and the local South Indian. The area had become home to and was the battleground of various groups of people from different religions and ethnicities, such as local Tamils, migrants from the Deccan, North India, Arabia, and Persia, and Europeans. Many important questions can be asked regarding Karnatak's development as a polity. How did the process of state-formation work on the ground? What strategies did the Nawab employ to consolidate and maintain his hold on power in the face of various external forces and internal divisions? How did elements from the three different political and cultural worlds (or systems) interact with one another, and to what extent did they play a role in and shape the characteristics of this Nawabi state? Were there any unique policies that resulted from this unusual situation? How was Nawabi Karnatak of the late eighteenth century similar to or different from other contemporaneous states? All these questions lead to the second main aspect that this study will investigate: the agency of the local Nawab, who was at the center of and played one of the most critical roles in this process. In his unique position as ruler of this frontier polity, the Nawab seems to have played at least three overlapping political roles: Mughal officer; principle ally of the rising power in the area, the British; and local South Indian ruler. It is interesting to see how he managed to maintain these three different positions. Did these roles conflict with or help one another? The Nawab's case can also provide us with a good illustration of how individual South Asian actors perceived both themselves and this period of dynamic transition, and how they attempted to shape their own destiny. As John Gurney remarked in 1973, "Only occasionally do we hear Indians speak, know what they think, [...] their private lives, their hopes and fears, joys and privations, we are usually ignorant. This is regrettable when we seek the real response of Indians to Europeans, still more so in

understanding the relationships of Indians with each other.”<sup>3</sup> This statement refers to the case of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, and the problem described persists in historical research.

Despite its potential as a major case-study, the history of the Karnatak state under this Nawab has either not received the attention it deserves or, in some cases, has been variously misinterpreted. Before discussing the aims of this study, let us examine the modern historiography of eighteenth-century South Asia and explore the place of Karnatak in recent historical debates in order to indicate some problems to which this study may contribute the solutions.

### **The Historiography of Eighteenth-century South Asia**

As mentioned previously, I view Nawabi Karnatak as the meeting point—spatially and temporally—of three different worlds: Mughal, European, and South Indian. This study will combine all three perspectives. As such, it is necessary to engage with three interconnected fields of eighteenth-century historiography in this introduction: (a) the collapse of the Mughal Empire and the formation of post-Mughal states; (b) the transformation of South Asia to a region dominated by the British; and (c) local developments in eighteenth-century South India.

#### **a. The Mughal Empire and Post-Mughal States**

With regard to the development of indigenous polities, the collapse of the Mughal Empire is one of the most dramatic events that historians have examined. From the nineteenth century at least to the 1970s, two historiographical approaches dominated. The first saw the personality, ability, and specific policies of rulers as being the chief determinants of the empire’s fate.<sup>4</sup> The second approach, influenced by Marxism, has dominated the debate since the 1950s, as Marxist-oriented scholars and historians of the later-modern period began to posit new explanations for Mughal decline in more functionalist or structural terms rather than simply focusing on individuals. Moreover, their orientation shifted from politico-cultural

---

<sup>3</sup> John D. Gurney, “Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot,” in *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History Presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland*, ed. Anne Whiteman, J. S. Bromley, and P. Dickson (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973), 220.

<sup>4</sup> In this framework, the Mughal downfall was mainly the consequence of the deterioration in character of the Mughal ruling elites from the late seventeenth century. Some scholars suggest that Emperor Aurangzeb’s program of promoting orthodox Sunni Islam while suppressing other sects and religions led to the alienation of numerous groups of imperial nobles and triggered peasant uprisings in many parts of the empire. As a result, the empire’s unity was rapidly destroyed. Other scholars emphasize Aurangzeb’s exorbitant Deccan campaigns, which, they argue, drained the country and people of wealth and energy, and thus accelerated the empire’s downfall. See, for example: Jadunath Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzib, 1618-1707* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1930), 1-5, 460-465; Sri R. Sharma, *The Religious Policies of the Mughal Emperors* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 168-170; Sri R. Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs Limited, 1951), 194-196; Ishwari Prasad, *The Mughal Empire* (Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1974), 584-608, 629-637.

to politico-economic aspects. For them, problems generated by the main imperial administrative systems or institutions—such as *mansabdari*, *zamindari*, and *jagirdari*—led to tensions between various groups of people.<sup>5</sup> For example, Irfan Habib has suggested that the Mughal mechanism of revenue collection was innately flawed. Since *jagir* assignments were transferred frequently, Mughal nobles had no reason to invest in agricultural improvements and focused instead on simply overtaxing the people to squeeze the maximum possible profit out of the land. This oppressive system led to widespread rural exploitation, which in turn provoked peasant migration and rebellions led by local zamindars.<sup>6</sup> Satish Chandra proposes the term “the crisis of jagirdari system” for this situation. Central to the growth of this crisis, he argues, was the increasing inability of the Mughal fiscal and administrative institutions to collect and distribute revenue and maintain law and order in large parts of the empire. This was the result of a combination of factors, including excessive demands for revenue, the short-sighted policies of the Mughal nobles, court factionalism, and the assertiveness of the zamindars.<sup>7</sup> Offering a different perspective, Saiyid Nurul Hasan has highlighted increased clashes of interest between different groups of people—such as the Mughal government and the zamindars or different groups of zamindars—as being the main cause of the jagirdari crisis and the fall of the empire. Such tensions dated back to the empire’s heyday, but, both during and after Aurangzeb’s reign, the conflict intensified and central government became too weak to prevent the empire from breaking up.<sup>8</sup> To sum up, before the 1970s historians mainly viewed eighteenth-century South Asia through the unifying framework of the Mughal Empire; in their view, with the downfall of the imperial center, India, inevitably, entered a period of political chaos and economic crisis traditionally characterized as the “Dark Age.”<sup>9</sup>

However, from the 1970s, scholarly interest gradually shifted from the Mughal imperial center to various regional polities as a result of the assumption that regional-level changes could have been among the factors that fueled imperial decline. This also marked a methodological shift from the monolithic/macro-perspective (the empire) towards a more micro-focus (region), which in turn resulted in an explosion of studies on state-formation

---

<sup>5</sup> The mansabdari was the Mughal system of rank-holding, and it was used to entice prominent military and civil officers to serve the Mughal emperors as nobles and officers. A *mansabdar* or rank-holder was allowed to share the imperial prestige and wealth in the form of royal titles, hierarchical ranks (*mansab*), and assignments of land revenue (*jagir*). *Zamindars* were local gentry, chieftains, or landlords, many of whom were considered *mirzas* (princes) in their home areas. They were integrated into the Mughal administration and usually functioned as intermediaries in administration and revenue collection between the imperial government and various layers of the local population. The jagirdari denoted granting individual mansabdars the right to collect land revenue from lesser land-holders and cultivators in the areas assigned to them (i.e. the jagir lands).

<sup>6</sup> Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 319-333.

<sup>7</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1972), xlv-li.

<sup>8</sup> Saiyid Nurul Hasan, “Zamindars under the Mughals,” in *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 297-298.

<sup>9</sup> Seema Alavi, “Introduction,” in *The Eighteenth Century in India*, ed. Seema Alavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

within various regional polities. The most important areas studied so far are: Bengal, Awadh, and the Deccan (Hyderabad)—the so-called Mughal “successor states,” because the governors of these former Mughal provinces led them to independence—and the Punjab (the Sikhs), Maharashtra (the Marathas), Rajasthan (the Rajputs), and Rohilkhand (the Rohilla Indo-Afghans)—the post-Mughal “warrior states,” based on local ethnic or sectarian groups and led by prominent local rulers who sought to establish independence in various regions formerly under Mughal sovereignty. Studies have also been produced on the emergence of the states of Mysore and Travancore in South India, which had indirect or virtually no links to the Mughal Empire.<sup>10</sup> Some examples of this trend are discussed here.

In Muzaffar Alam’s study of zamindar-led peasant rebellions in Awadh and the Punjab in the first half of the eighteenth century, it is argued that these movements were not caused by agrarian crises and oppression by the elites. On the contrary, they were the consequences of economic growth, which were themselves the outcome of increasing commercialization and monetization in those regions in the period following the heyday of the Mughals. The local zamindars had become wealthier and more powerful, and thus could refuse to comply with Mughal commands. In Awadh, the Mughal provincial governor was able to turn the local zamindars into collaborators who helped him establish an independent domain, the Nawabi state of Awadh. However, in the Punjab, a similar attempt failed and led to chaos.<sup>11</sup> Two other scholars, Richard Barnett and Karen Leonard, have emphasized the importance of the transfer of resources from the center to various regional domains. According to Barnett, because the imperial center weakened in the late seventeenth century, more revenue, wealth, and groups of service-people escaped the Mughal’s control, moving to various regional political centers and benefiting local social groups who then quickly emerged as powerful forces.<sup>12</sup> Leonard highlights in particular the role of indigenous banking firms, which had been the indispensable allies of the Mughal court. In the period 1650-1750, these banks began to reorient their economic and political support towards the emerging regional rulers. This, she argues, led to Mughal bankruptcy.<sup>13</sup> Another prominent scholar, Christopher A. Bayly, works on central and eastern North India (Awadh, Benares, Bihar, and

---

<sup>10</sup> For a good introduction to the historiographical debates surrounding the post-Mughal states, see: Alavi, “Introduction,” 1-56; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Introduction,” in *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-71.

<sup>11</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-1748* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 310-318.

<sup>12</sup> Richard B. Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801* (Berkeley-London: University of California Press, 1980), 5-9.

<sup>13</sup> Karen Leonard, “The ‘Great Firm’ Theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire,” in *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 408-413.

Bengal) from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. According to him, this period was characterized by the growing prosperity of a cross-caste “intermediary class”—consisting of service gentries, merchants, and scribes—and its involvement in regional state-formation.<sup>14</sup> Other scholars, such as Burton Stein, André Wink, and Dilip Menon, have proposed various models outside the traditional framework of the Mughal agrarian structure with which to examine the development of eighteenth-century polities. Stein, focusing on the Mysore Sultanate, emphasizes the concept of “central military fiscalism,” which meant that troops were paid by the central government instead of by the zamindars and jagirdars, and the centralizing trend in eighteenth-century polities as opposed to the previous “segmentary state” model of polities that held sway in medieval South India.<sup>15</sup> Wink proposes using the concept of *fitna*, which has been used to understand Mughal rulership, to explain the rise of the Marathas.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, Menon, who has studied the Travancore state, suggests that profits from trade rather than revenues from the agrarian sector fueled the process of state formation in that region. Therefore, unlike other post-Mughal states, Travancore did not experience state centralization and did not possess intricate revenue-collecting systems.<sup>17</sup>

With the growth of regional studies, many new political and economic frameworks or concepts have been invented and utilized to analyze the developments of eighteenth-century South Asian polities. Knowledge of each of the regions has been gradually acquired through discussions of their forms of government, administrative apparatus, revenue system, military management, mercantile and social conditions, etc. Influenced by the rise of Marxism in the 1950s and subaltern perspectives in the 1980s, scholars have also brought to the historiography of regional Indian state-formation many formerly-neglected non-political elite classes in society, such as merchants, bankers, scribes, petty land-holders, and craftsmen as agents of political and social change.<sup>18</sup> Scholars have realized that the Mughal Empire’s

---

<sup>14</sup> Christopher A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 577-595.

<sup>15</sup> The “segmentary state” is a model that Stein borrowed from an Africanist, Aiden Southall, and applied to many medieval South Indian states. According to him, such polities existed as a state only because the hundreds of petty local chiefs within its domain ritually acknowledged the overlordship of a ruler. However, each local chief maintained complete autonomous power in his territory. See: Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 21-23, 272-275; Burton Stein, “State Formation and Economy Reconsidered: Part One,” *Modern Asian Studies* 19, 3 (1985): 387-388, 400-403.

<sup>16</sup> André Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 21-35. The concept of *fitna* will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

<sup>17</sup> Dilip Menon, “Houses by the Sea: State Experimentation in Malabar, 1760-1800,” in *Mapping History: Essays Presented to Ravinder Kumar*, ed. Neera Chandoke (Delhi, 2000), 162-163, 166. For more examples of prominent regional studies developed within the “revisionist framework,” see also: Philip B. Calkins, “The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal, 1700-1740,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29, 4 (1970): 799-806; John F. Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Stewart Gordon, “The Slow Conquest: Administrative Integration of Malwa into the Maratha Empire, 1720-1760,” *Modern Asian Studies* 11, 1 (1977): 1-40; Frank Perlin, “State Formation Reconsidered: Part Two,” *Modern Asian Studies* 19, 3 (1985): 415-480; Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire: Punjab in the Seventeenth Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); Jos J. L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710-1780* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> The pioneer of subaltern studies or “history from below,” which was established in the early 1980s, was the Bengali scholar Ranajit Guha. He and his followers examined colonialism from “subaltern” viewpoints. The subalternists first drew inspiration from Marxism, but later

eventual fate may cause the complexities and varied historical experiences of each state or region to be overlooked. From one area to another, local resources, trajectories, processes, and outcomes—all elements that could shape their nature—varied. Words like variety, dynamism, mobility, and realignment are now used to describe this century, one which was previously referred to as the “Dark Age.” Substantially revising long-held assumptions of and approaches to eighteenth-century Indian history, recent studies are, therefore, collectively referred to as “revisionist” writings.

With regard to Karnatak, there exists currently no systematic and comprehensive study of it as a post-Mughal successor state. Most of the new analytical tools, concepts, and frameworks from the recent trend of revisionist writings have not yet been utilized in research into the region. It is thus a goal of this study to construct a history of Karnatak state-formation that will interact with these revisionist questions, concepts, and approaches, where applicable. I will trace how Karnatak emerged as a Mughal province and under what circumstances it became an independent state with dynastic rule. This will include an examination of: how the Nawabi dynasty was organized; what was the main state apparatus created or maintained by the Nawab and its main features; who were the state’s allies and enemies; and how the ruler coped with the fact that there were many new groups of people ascending the social, political, and economic ladder, as well as the changing political-economic circumstances of the late eighteenth century. Furthermore, I will try to highlight some of the main characteristics of Nawabi Karnatak by making comparisons with other states and rulers of the time. In so doing, I will not only reveal new information and perspectives on the history of Karnatak but also position it within wider debates related to post-Mughal states.

#### b. British Colonial Expansion in South Asia

Two of the main questions that historians have debated regarding the British colonial expansion in South Asia have been: What were the reasons for the East India Company’s transition to a colonial power? And: What factors lay behind or contributed to their success? Older accounts concentrate on Western elements—institutions and individual actors—as being active in this process while presenting South Asian ones as their inferior or foolish partners or enemies. The eighteenth century, especially the latter half, is often depicted as

---

gradually shifted their focus to incorporate more cultural aspects. One of Guha’s most significant and pioneering monographs is: Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). See also an introductory discussion to subaltern studies in Kate Brittlebank, “Introduction,” in *Tall Tales and True: India, Historiography and British Imperial Imaginings* (Clayton: Monash University Press, 2008), 2-3.

having seen a duel for empire between the British and the French, with the French threat to its trading interests being regarded as a central reason why the EIC started to transform itself into a territorial power. Others attribute the move towards colonization to an increase in production and trade in European markets, which in turn led to high demand for Indian goods and a drain of bullion from Europe; access to Indian revenue through political interference thus became an indispensable means by which the British could resolve this fiscal imbalance. Yet more studies have emphasized the role of British private traders in undermining the stability of the South Asian states and indirectly stimulating the Company's expansion.<sup>19</sup> The revisionist trend of regional studies and the growth of subaltern perspectives from the 1970s have also had a significant influence on this area of historiography. Broadly speaking, scholars with such views argue that it was not simply a one-sided and predetermined endeavor on the part of the Europeans to gain their benefits that resulted in their colonial expansion. In their establishment of colonial control, the British certainly could not act alone, and the role of local participants should be highlighted in order to present a more balanced historical picture. In Peter Marshall's words, for much of the eighteenth century, "it would be more appropriate to discuss the impact of Bengal on the British [than the British's impact on indigenous societies]."<sup>20</sup>

Christopher Bayly, whose work was referred to earlier, is one historian who follows this approach. He suggests that, while the British were capable of making conquests on their own, they could only maintain their position by aligning themselves with parts of local society. Their success was down to their ability to accommodate the new rising "intermediary class" in many Indian regional centers. Owing to their common political and economic interests, these local agents in northern India became British collaborators, financed their military conquests, and filled their administrative positions.<sup>21</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, in an article co-authored with Bayly, suggests that a similar phenomenon also occurred in South India, especially along the Coromandel Coast.<sup>22</sup> Prasannan Parthasarathi, also focusing on South India, agrees with Bayly that the British could only establish their power because certain South Asian social groups supported them, but he proposes a different explanation for

---

<sup>19</sup> See, for example: Lucy S. Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 365-414; Pamela Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India, 1784-1806* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 236-244; Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 146-184; 264-297, 330-339; Rudrangshu Mukherjee, "Trade and Empire in Awadh 1765-1804," *Past & Present*, 94 (1982): 85-102.

<sup>20</sup> Peter J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 261, see also 262-271.

<sup>21</sup> Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 276-317; Christopher A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 47-68.

<sup>22</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Christopher A. Bayly, "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 25, 4 (1988): 409-413.

why Indian merchants in the eighteenth century became British collaborators. According to him, not all merchants were experiencing political and economic prosperity. Some had been badly affected, and even excluded, from economic and political power by the new regional states and their practice of trade monopolies (of which Mysore and Travancore were prime examples). The only way that these merchants could regain their clout was by allying themselves with the European powers. As Parthasarathi highlights, it was not blind or unwise collaboration on the part of the local merchants; rather, they had their own specific reasons, ones generated by changing local circumstances. In other words, British colonization was, to a large extent, determined by conflicts between local, South Asian actors.<sup>23</sup>

Other revisionist scholars—such as Burton Stein and Pradeep Barua—have underscored the agency of the indigenous people as it related to early British colonial rule. Stein has pointed out the active role a South Asian ruler could have not only in state formation but also in shaping British India after his death. His study on Mysore suggests that the early nineteenth-century colonial officers followed many of the late Tipu Sultan’s policies when establishing British power in South India, such as eradicating zamindari dominance and following Tipu’s model of expanding the state monopolies.<sup>24</sup> Barua, who has studied military developments in the Mysore, Maratha, and Punjab states between 1750 and 1850, argues that local elements played a larger role in determining the nature of conflict with the British than has been previously assumed and that the final British victory over those regional powers was mainly down to their ability to adapt South Asian tactics to their own advantage and to exploit local politics.<sup>25</sup> In sum, revisionist scholars have promoted the idea that the establishment of British India was the outcome of complex interactions between European and local elements and that South Asians played active and critical roles in shaping historical developments during the early colonial period, either through collaborating or being agents of resistance. They have also stressed that the local contexts were crucial in determining South Asian-British relationships.

Almost all existing literatures relating to Karnatak under Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan have been under this historiography of British colonial expansion. The earliest “historical” writings containing references to late-eighteenth-century Karnatak were regional gazetteers and political narratives or biographies of some of the British protagonists who

---

<sup>23</sup> Prasannan Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants, and Kings in South India, 1720-1800* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 132-140.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, “State Formation and Economy Reconsidered,” 412-413.

<sup>25</sup> Pradeep Barua, “Military Developments in India, 1750-1850,” *The Journal of Military History* 58, 4 (1994): 613.

played crucial roles in strengthening the British presence in the region. These works were produced between the late eighteenth and the mid-twentieth century by EIC servants, British colonial officers, and “traditional” orientalist British scholars whose chief purpose in composing their works was to justify British colonial expansion in South India. Referring to Nawabi rule as “Mohammadan Government,” these British historians generally portrayed the period as a “dark age” when the Hindu majority of Karnatak was severely oppressed by the Muslim rulers, and presented Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan as a ruler who failed to manage his own government properly. As such, the British expansion and administration helped improve the lives and welfare of the local populations. The Eurocentric bias can be clearly seen here.<sup>26</sup>

Since the 1960s, the Karnatak state has received more attention from scholars. With particular reference to historical studies on the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, up to now, two monographs, two doctoral dissertations, and a few articles have been produced. The first monograph, by Kunjukrishnan Rajayyan (1966), deals with the basic structure and aspects of Nawabi Karnatak in the period 1701 to 1800. It gives wide-ranging but rather superficial information about the state’s geography, machinery of central administration, provincial management, and system of revenue, and offers a glimpse of its economy, society, and religious life. In this work, the author repeats the British orientalists’ depictions of Muslim rule as, essentially, “evil.”<sup>27</sup> However, for Rajayyan, the British were just as bad. From the 1750s, a colonial mindset is said to have governed their actions. Under the pretense of protecting the Nawab’s interests, they ruthlessly exploited the situation, causing the Nawab to take on huge debts and thus become bankrupt. According to Rajayyan, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan had neither the ability nor the imagination to adopt European technology to fight the British encroachment.<sup>28</sup> In sum, his principal aim was to portray two villains of the period. This is a good example of a recent phenomenon: the study of eighteenth-century South Asia from a (post-) colonial perspective, to which is added that of Hindu Nationalists.

John Gurney’s 1968 Ph.D. dissertation was the first study to focus specifically on the reign of the Nawab, and its specific subject of interest was the Nawab’s debts and their effect on his relationship with British institutions (the EIC and the British government) and various individuals in the years 1763-1776. He provided much new information regarding the Nawab and his court by utilizing various eighteenth-century British archives that had but rarely been

---

<sup>26</sup> See, for example: Arthur F. Fox, *North Arcot*, ed. rev. by Harold A. Stuart (Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1894), 90.

<sup>27</sup> Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 19, 30-31, 37, 39, 41-45, 112.

<sup>28</sup> Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 11-12, 25, 30, 83.

used before. Nevertheless, his work is strongly Eurocentric in its approach to and interpretation of this period. First, Gurney chose the Nawab's debts as his main focus, considering them to be "the central feature of this period." Second, Gurney suggests that the main causes of the Nawab's debts were his unnecessarily extravagant court, his "misplaced generosity" in bribing both Indians and Europeans, and the military expenses he incurred while attempting to fulfil his imprudent political ambitions. All of these contributed to his debts "without any definite benefits" for himself, eventually leading him to lose power.<sup>29</sup> Reflecting on these two points, Gurney replicates the views and judgments of many eighteenth-century British (such as George Paterson) regarding the Nawab's actions and makes little attempt to understand the ruler's approach from a local perspective. It is correct that the issue of debt was at the center of the activities of almost all British institutions and individuals who dealt with the Nawab at that time because, for the British, getting the Nawab to repay his debts was their chief concern, one which dominated minds and shaped policies in both London and India. As such, the expenses incurred by the Nawab in other areas were considered to be harmful to British interests and, therefore, unnecessary and unreasonable. Yet, arguably, for the Nawab as an eighteenth-century South Asian ruler, the opulence of his court, financial patronage of his followers, and military expansion together formed the basis of his rule; repaying his debts to the British was far from his main concern. The history of Karnatak in Gurney's thesis is, therefore, another history of British expansion, crowded with British actors who were the drivers of developments. The Nawab continues to play the role of subordinate victim. Though Gurney sometimes describes how the Nawab used his debts to cause difficulties for the British to his own advantage, the author views them as mostly unimportant and as resulting in only short-term gain. He stresses that the Nawab, though cunning, had no foresight to reorganize his country, thus allowing himself to be manipulated by groups of British political and economic adventurers.<sup>30</sup> To be fair to Gurney, in 1973 he published another article that did indeed focus on Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan.<sup>31</sup> Innovative for the time, his intention in writing was "to let Indians speak." He tried to bring us close to the person of the Nawab and his courtly milieu by tracing specific accounts in both the diary of George Paterson and the *Ruznama* that reveal aspects of the Nawab's personality, such as his warmth, sense of humor, flaws, fears, and anger.<sup>32</sup> This article, more than any previous works, reveals the Nawab as a real person, with his own voice and thoughts. However,

---

<sup>29</sup> John D. Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot, 1763-1776" (Doctoral Dissertation; Oxford University, The United Kingdom, 1968), 10, 37-38, 76, 321.

<sup>30</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 16, 18, 211-213, 237, 266, 283.

<sup>31</sup> Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 222-241.

<sup>32</sup> Both these primary sources will be discussed in a subsequent section.

probably due to the limited space of his article, Gurney fails to provide enough historical context that would have helped convey the Nawab's worldview and policies, as Gurney had intended. In his work, the Nawab comes across simply as a sensitive human being with diverse temperament.

In the decade after Gurney's work, during the boom of revisionism in eighteenth-century South Asian regional studies, appeared the works of James Phillips and Nallathagudi Ramaswami. Phillips' Ph.D. thesis, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," investigates the relationship between the British and the Karnatak Nawab in the years 1775-1785. Referred to by the author himself as a study of "indirect British imperialism," Phillips' chief objective was to examine the factors that led the EIC to gain political control over South India. Therefore, like Gurney's thesis a decade earlier, in Phillips' work the British are still the main protagonists. Furthermore, the Nawab's debts to the British remain at the center of the discussion.<sup>33</sup> However, Phillips seems to have been influenced by the "revisionist trend" in eighteenth-century South Asian research that was developed during the 1980s and which emphasized the role(s) of local agency in British expansion; his work gives the Nawab a far more important role in influencing British individuals and British policies towards South India than had previous studies.<sup>34</sup> Phillips' article "A Successor to the Moguls," published two years later, is another important contribution, as the author paid attention to Karnatak in its local, South Asian context. In this article, Karnatak is viewed as a Mughal successor state and the Nawab is presented not merely as a passive ally of the EIC but also as a local ruler who attempted to establish his own powerbase and solve various internal problems. However, as in his thesis, Phillips' article's general idea is that, in the 1770s and 1780s, there was a rapid reduction in the Nawab's authority. The author cannot, therefore, avoid downplaying the Nawab's success—including his contribution to various schemes of state-formation—and underlining his failures.<sup>35</sup>

Ramaswami's work, published in 1984, is a narrative history of the political events of eighteenth-century Karnatak. As may be expected, the long reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan receives the most attention, though as descriptive history it has little contextual analysis or critical discussion. Furthermore, since the author relied heavily on various eighteenth-century European sources and later colonial writings to forge his narrative, his work is

---

<sup>33</sup> James Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India: The Nawab of Arcot, the East India Company, and the British Government, 1775-1785" (Doctoral Dissertation; Dalhousie University, Canada, 1983), 21-31.

<sup>34</sup> I will discuss the "revisionist trend" further in the following sections.

<sup>35</sup> James Phillips, "A Successor to the Moguls: The Nawab of the Carnatic and the East India Company, 1763-1785," *The International History Review* 7, 3 (1985): 364-389.

dominated by British protagonists and their actions and contains much of the Eurocentric bias of earlier colonial writers. However, this work also contains new information about the Nawab's life besides the issue of his debts, especially his wars against other powers, both inside and outside his territory. His study also provides a long-term perspective, because it covers the whole period of the Nawab's reign, as well as those of his predecessors and successors. Furthermore, much more explicitly than did earlier scholars, the author presents the Nawab as having made the best possible use of all opportunities generated by the "corruptions" of British individuals in order to fight, inch-by-inch, European encroachment. Ramaswami also proposed a new and very important perspective on the debt issue. He pointed out that, cleverly, from around the mid-1760s, the Nawab ended his practice of borrowing money from Indian bankers and instead sought loans mainly from EIC officers and private British merchants in Madras. The Nawab was also willing to pay the Britons' extraordinary interest rates and frequently acknowledged debts without receiving any real money. In so doing, he sought to bind these influential Britons to his financial and social networks. Although Gurney and Phillips also referred to this, Ramaswami was the first to clearly stress the fact that the Nawab deliberately utilized debt as one of his main weapons.<sup>36</sup> In sum, while many Eurocentric views have been put forward, Ramaswami (like his contemporary Phillips) attempted to underline the Nawab's agency in his efforts to resist the expansion of British power.

Gurney, Phillips, and Ramaswami's efforts to incorporate the Nawab's agency into their works seem to have led to changes in the modern understandings of his state and its ruler within the broader historiography of British colonial expansion. One example of this change is Peter Marshall's article in 2000 on the creation of the British Empire, in which the author shows that, in states such as Karnatak and Awadh, Indian rulers were able to manipulate British power. As Marshall writes, Muhammad Ali Khan, usually assumed to have been an unfortunate puppet at the mercy of the EIC in Madras, was in fact able to use the British alliance to expand his territory and develop an authentically Islamic court.<sup>37</sup> Another illustration is David Washbrook's article in 2004 which suggests that nearly all the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century South Indian states were not powerless but attempted to combat British expansion through military, diplomatic, or cultural means, and that the extensive technological and cultural borrowings from the Europeans by these polities were

---

<sup>36</sup> Nallathagudi S. Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic under the Nawabs* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984), 237, 327-329.

<sup>37</sup> Peter J. Marshall, "Presidential Address: Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century: III, Britain and India," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 10 (2000): 2-3, 8.

carried out to serve local rather than European-related purposes. Washbrook has included Arcot (Karnatak) as one of his examples, along with Mysore, Hyderabad, Baroda, Travancore, and Tanjore.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, Marshall's and Washbrook's standpoints are more the exceptions than the rule in the recent trend of revisiting the history of eighteenth-century polities and rulers. In other revisionist works, although the history of Karnatak and the Nawab have sometimes been drawn into discussions as examples and comparative cases as they relate to other post-Mughal states, such references are usually brief and the related viewpoints derived from the old, conventional colonial paradigm. For instance, in Barua's aforementioned work on military evolution, while the author argues that local powers—the Marathas, the Mysoreans, and the Sikhs—played a greater role in determining the nature of the conflict with the British than previously believed, he simply assumes that the Karnatak Nawab “after the Carnatic Wars [1740s-1760s] had become a virtual puppet of the British.”<sup>39</sup> John Keay, in *India: A History*, similarly refers to the Nawab of Arcot as a British “puppet.”<sup>40</sup> Another illustration of this aberrant characterization is to be found in the work of Mandar Oak and Anand Swamy, who have investigated why, on various occasions in the late eighteenth century, many southern Indian regimes chose to help the EIC in Madras against their Indian neighbors. They concluded that many local players were “self-interested,” “strategic,” and “rational” within the complex political context of the period. As such, the authors have rescued the Indian states that were Karnatak's neighbors—Mysore, the Maratha state, and Hyderabad—from previously-held assumptions of myopia. However, by no means do they consider Karnatak as an active player. They write: “in the 1740s rivals contending to be the Nawab of the Carnatic sought the support of the French and the British. The [EIC] Company's candidate [Muhammad Ali] eventually became the Nawab and, in a pattern that was to be repeated time and again, ceded territory to the Company in exchange for military support.”<sup>41</sup> Evidently, the two authors view the Nawab as having been completely under the control of the EIC in Madras from the very beginning of his rule, and Karnatak features only as the strategic starting point for British colonial expansion.<sup>42</sup> Such recent writings reflect clearly that attempts to restore the Nawab's voice and agency in the Karnatak-British

---

<sup>38</sup> David Washbrook, “South India 1770-1840: The Colonial Transition,” *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 3 (2004): 491-495.

<sup>39</sup> Barua, “Military Developments in India,” 600, 613.

<sup>40</sup> John Keay, *India: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 396.

<sup>41</sup> Mandar Oak and Anand V. Swamy, “Myopia or Strategic Behavior? Indian Regimes and the East India Company in Late Eighteenth Century India,” *Explorations in Economic History* 49, 3 (2012): 355.

<sup>42</sup> See also: Patrick Turnbull, *Warren Hastings* (London: New English Library, 1975), 52; Michael H. Fisher, *The Politics of the British Annexation of India, 1757-1857* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94, 100; Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 146-157; Arvind Sinha, *The Politics of Trade: Anglo-French Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1763-1793* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 28, 30. There are a number of other recent works that discuss and compare developments in various eighteenth-century South Asian states but almost or completely omit Karnatak. See, for example: Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kulke Hermann and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (London-New York: Routledge, 2016).

relationship, initiated by earlier scholars, need to be continued in order to fully bring Karnataka's history out of its conventional framework. It is not only necessary to re-investigate some old issues, such as the Nawab's financial and military dependence on the British, but also to examine new facets of their relationship, such as diplomatic exchanges and cultural encounters.

c. The Local Development in South India

In the above, I mentioned various studies that have been written about South India and the states therein (such as Mysore, Travancore, and the Coromandel Coast). But, compared to North India and the Deccan, the quantity and variety of historical scholarship on the South is more limited, not only for the eighteenth century but the entire early modern period. No different from the North, the South in the eighteenth century has been seen as being in a Dark Age between two imperial eras, but in this case these were the Vijayanagara period and that of British rule.<sup>43</sup> Yet the 1970s-1980s revisionist movement in North Indian and Deccan historiography has brought increased attention to the South.

Scholars who have worked on filling gaps in South Indian historiography include: Sinnappah Arasaratnam and the aforementioned Prasannan Parthasarathi, who focus on the mercantile world of the Coromandel Coast; Nicholas Dirks, who proposes using the concept of "ethnohistory" as a model with which to study the political culture of the small kingdoms of South India; Susan Bayly, whose studies of Muslim and Christian communities provide in-depth analysis of South Indian society from the early modern to the early colonial periods; Markus Vink and Lennart Bes, who have attempted to reconstruct the histories of important Nayaka and Poligar (Palaiyakkarar) kingdoms; and the aforementioned Burton Stein and Kate Brittlebank, who study state-formation and the political ideology of the Mysore sultans. Three other influential scholars are Velcheru Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, who, since the early 1990s, have produced collaborative works that shed light on various aspects of pre-colonial South Indian history by exploiting vernacular South Indian sources—written in Telugu, Tamil, and Marathi, among others—that used to be seen as literary texts rather than historical narratives.<sup>44</sup> The picture that emerges from these

---

<sup>43</sup> Good introductions to developments in South Indian historiography include: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions: Making Politics in Early Modern South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-21; Velcheru Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600-1800* (New York: Other Press, 2003), 1-23; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 354-355; Brittlebank, "Introduction," 1-6.

<sup>44</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India, 1750-1790: Changing British-Indian Relationships," *Modern Asian Studies* 13, 1 (1979): 19-40; Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy*; Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Susan Bayly,

revisionist histories is that some areas of South India, at least, also experienced imperial decentralization and South Indian state-formation as a result of economic and cultural prosperity.

Despite this recent historiographical trend, which has intentionally brought to light the previously-neglected southern regions, Karnatak has not received the attention it deserves, especially for the second half of the eighteenth century. For example, Pamela Price has written about the two southern Tamil Maravar kingdoms of Ramnad and Sivaganga from the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire to the rise of the British colonial one. But she makes no mention whatsoever of the Muslim Nawabs who, for more than half a century, claimed that they were the overlords of these two regions. The works of Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, as well as those of Alam—in which many South Indian courts and polities are investigated—often refer to Nawabi Karnatak of the early eighteenth-century (from its time as a Mughal province to its rule by the Nawayat dynasty) when discussing economics and cultural resilience. Nevertheless, these finish in the mid-1740s and hence do not engage with Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, who ruled from 1749-1795. Similarly, the works of Arasaratnam and Parthasarathi on the mercantile world of the eighteenth-century Coromandel Coast significantly underestimate the role of this local Nawab.<sup>45</sup>

However, Susan Bayly's study of the development of Islam and Christianity as a source of change in southern India is an exception here, as it has contributed greatly to our understanding of Karnatak. Although Karnatak is not its central focus, the kingdom is extensively explored in several chapters in its role as the first permanent Muslim-ruled polity in the southern Indian heartland. With regard to the Walajah dynasty, she discusses how, in order to establish their rule, these recent Muslim migrants from North India proceeded to strategically integrate themselves into local society by developing links with various ideological resources of power, both within and without their own religious community. During this process, the Walajah rulers contributed greatly to shaping local society, while

---

*Saints, Goddesses and King: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Markus P. M. Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast: Cross-Cultural Contacts between the Dutch East India Company and the Nayaka State of Madurai" (Doctoral Dissertation; University of Minnesota, The United States, 1998); Lennart Bes, "The Heirs of Vijayanagara: Court Politics in Early-Modern South India" (Doctoral Dissertation; Radboud University, The Netherlands, 2018); Stein, "State Formation and Economy Reconsidered"; Kate Brittlebank, "Piety and Power: A Preliminary Analysis of Tipu Sultan's Dreams," in *Tall Tales and True: India, Historiography and British Imperial Imaginings*, ed. Kate Brittlebank (Clayton: Monash University Press, 2008), 31-41; Kate Brittlebank, "Assertion," in *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, ed. Peter J. Marshall (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 268-292; Velcheru Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi-New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*.

<sup>45</sup> Pamela G. Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 94-102; Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, 140-183; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 339-395. The works and ideas of Arasaratnam and Parthasarathi will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

their own characters were simultaneously molded by various internal and external forces.<sup>46</sup> Bayly's work highlights that the perspective of local South Indian society is just as crucial for comprehending the Karnatak state and the Nawab's actions as those of the Perso-Islamic Mughal and European worlds. Her work is also ground-breaking in terms of methodology, as it was the first serious attempt to set Nawabi Karnatak in its local context—outside the Eurocentric framework—and to focus on local actors. Bayly claims that her work is part of a wider “revisionist” movement fighting the assumption that local people were passive entities of the colonial experience. Scholars belonging to this school have discussed how groups of non-European subjects—often elites—in various regions that experienced European expansion were able to create “strategies of resistance” that allowed them to transcend or incorporate for their own purposes the intrusive impact of the Europeans. European and Western knowledge and technology were frequently used to enhance native forms of social organization and royal power. From the local perspective, Europeans were the junior or subordinate partners in these encounters or relationships.<sup>47</sup> Despite focusing on the agency of “elites” rather than people “from below,” the works of Bayly and her colleagues share a similar outlook to those of subaltern scholars, which have tried to understand responses to colonialism from the perspective of the colonized people. It is through taking a similar approach to that of Susan Bayly that I will investigate Karnatak's history.

Another methodological aspect that is particularly important in Susan Bayly's work, as well as in other studies in this area, is that it is not as focused on politico-economic studies, fiscal-centered questions, or the material basis of state-building as some studies of former Mughal domains in North India and the Deccan. They have reminded us that the cultural and ideological spheres are also important facets of a state and studying these can contribute greatly to our comprehension of a region or regions.

### **Approaches, Perspectives, and Questions**

The literature review has demonstrated that modern studies of late-eighteenth-century Karnatak and the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, though having made some good progress, are far from comprehensive. The themes of historical research are still very limited, mainly to those which most concerned Europeans. Other local-elements—such as court life and society, the Nawab's religious activities, and cultural aspects—are sometimes included but only marginally. In my opinion, this is mainly because previous scholars (except Susan

---

<sup>46</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*; see especially Chapters Four to Six.

<sup>47</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 3-4, 9.

Bayly) are plagued by the problems of perspective; they have been “trapped” by the knowledge that, almost immediately after the Nawab’s death, the region was annexed by the British, something that has prevented them from seeing Karnatak during the Nawab’s rule from a perspective other than that of British colonial expansion. It has also prevented fresh empirical analysis and downplayed the efforts and achievements of local agents that may have delayed but could not prevent the inevitable.

As discussed, with its aim to fill gaps in previous research, this study seeks to explore the Karnatak state’s formation by combining and balancing the three perspectives of the Perso-Islamic Mughal, European, and South Indian worlds. Inspired by the revisionist and subaltern trends of historiography, the restoration of local voices and agency is also a main goal. However, a significant difference between this study and previous revisionist works—which have long been dominated by institutions or classes of people—is its attempt to combine the history of state formation with a biographical approach. I focus on the voice and perspectives of an individual—Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan—as the main point of departure in approaching Karnatak’s history. One of the main questions, explored throughout this investigation, is how the Nawab wanted himself and his state to be seen. As such, I have been inspired by a recently-developed biographical trend that falls under the rubric of “new” microhistory.<sup>48</sup>

Biography, in its simplest sense, refers to writing that places the life and the perspectives of an individual at the center. For centuries, biography had faced skepticism from professional historians, and the status of the subject as a historical methodology reached its nadir during “the age of modernity,” because, from the nineteenth century, historians were led by the belief that they could create objectivity in history by means of science-based, empirical, and rational methodologies. Under this modernity paradigm, biography, which was considered subjective, moral, and related more to literature, was rejected. The history of the masses or the classes generally replaced that of individuals.<sup>49</sup> Historians were also occupied by a desire to write macro-histories (e.g. of continents, empires, oceans, or even the world), using various structural, functional, quantitative, and statistical models to explain people and

---

<sup>48</sup> It was Matti Peltonen who termed this trend “new” microhistory in order to distinguish between manifestations of microhistory from the 1970s and some older ideas of, for instance, local history as microhistory. However, most scholars just call this trend “microhistory,” without the adjective “new.” See Matti Peltonen, “What Is Micro in Microhistory?,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne De Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 105.

<sup>49</sup> For a good theoretical and methodological discussion of how the border between biography and history has been contested in the past, see: Sabina Loriga, “The Role of the Individual in History: Biographical and Historical Writing in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Century,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne De Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 75-76, 80-88.

societies on a large scale. Politico-economic studies dominated historiography while examinations of culture and beliefs were excluded; many of the eighteenth-century South Asian regional studies mentioned in the preceding sections are good examples of the latter approach. However, from the late 1970s, a group of historians began to view the focus on functional and structural methodologies as representing a “crisis” and proposed an alternative paradigm and practice, one known as microhistory.<sup>50</sup> Collectively, the advocates of this new trend choose to focus on smaller-scale research and the restoration of people, events, and phenomena that had been neglected in the previously dominant macro-historical approach. They were also determined to bring the human dimension back into history in order to create a greater balance between individual destinies and social structures. The object of such an inquiry may be a small village or town, or groups of marginalized people. However, the most popular subjects are individuals, and this has led to the intersection of and close association between microhistory and biography in recent decades. Biographical approaches have returned to the academic fore as a historical tool, one that is part and parcel of microhistory; they have frequently been discussed together and have become what Hans Render terms two fraternal methods in historical study.<sup>51</sup>

On the theoretical level, advocates of “new” microhistory and biography have made great efforts to distinguish their approaches from earlier local histories, communal histories, and traditional biographies, which they consider as rarely posing new questions or bringing original interpretations to bear on historiography more widely.<sup>52</sup> Limitations of space do not allow me to go into such theoretical discussions in any great detail, yet I would like to highlight some of the strengths and advantages of the new microhistorical and biographical approaches that have been highlighted by their practitioners, and which I view as promising tools to help guide my study. Sabina Loriga, a scholar who tries to link microhistory and biography to macro-history, argues that an individual cannot explain a group, a community, or an institution and, vice-versa. Instead, macrohistory and microhistory complement each other; to understand the whole (macro-history), one has to understand the parts (micro-/individual history), but to understand these, one has to understand the whole. Loriga also

---

<sup>50</sup> The pioneers of this trend were Italian scholars such as Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi. On microhistory as a response to the crisis of the Marxism and functionalist-structuralist methodologies see: Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 93-113.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Renders, “The Limits of Representativeness: Biography, Life Writing, and Microhistory,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne De Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 128.

<sup>52</sup> For further discussions and examples, see: Giovanni Levi, “The Uses of Biography,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne De Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 69, 72-73; Loriga, “The Role of the Individual in History,” 89-90; Peltonen, “What Is Micro in Microhistory?,” 105-107, 110; and Richards Brown, “Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne De Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 126-127.

suggests viewing each and every individual as a hybrid or a piece where webs of relationships intersect, as well as emphasizing the multiple and overlapping roles one individual may hold simultaneously.<sup>53</sup> John P. Ghobrial is another scholar who suggests how the studies of an individual's life (especially his/her self-representations), local history, and global history should be interconnected and support the understanding of one another.<sup>54</sup> Loriga and Ghobrial's ideas are adapted in my research. I investigate the Nawab's thoughts, actions, and representations, with the aim of shedding new light on and complementing the wider picture of the Karnatak state, while at the same time learning the history of Karnatak in order to understand the life of one eighteenth-century South Asian. I also view the Nawab, the head of the state, as a central point through whom webs of people and institutions involved in the development of Karnatak at that time met and were connected. Going through him in this way will allow me to trace these central elements.

I am also interested in microhistory's promise of "corrective tools," as outlined by a number of its advocates. Hans Renders and Binne de Haan suggest that biographical research, combined with detailed historical contextualization, can be a powerful interpretative tool to correct or alter dominant grand narratives, frameworks, or (too-rigid) pillarization.<sup>55</sup> Richard Brown suggests that micro-studies allow researchers to explore a finite subject more exhaustively and to have better command of the evidence; as such, they can even be more authoritative and trustworthy than macro-scale studies for producing broader interpretive statements and revealing wider phenomena. This may also help solve problems of oversimplification that often occur in macro-research and structural methodologies.<sup>56</sup> Francesca Trivellato has also highlighted how a single case, analyzed in depth, can foster fresh and illuminating bases for extensive comparative work.<sup>57</sup> Thus, I expect that by employing a biographical approach, I will be able to reveal new aspects of the Karnatak state and its ruler and use them to make fresh comparisons with their contemporaries in various ways. These will not only open up a new place for the region in existing discussions of the early modern period but they may also help shape or alter previous grand narratives related to eighteenth-century South Asian states and of British colonial expansion.

---

<sup>53</sup> Loriga, "The Role of the Individual in History," 91-93;

<sup>54</sup> John P. Ghobrial, "The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory," *Past & Present* 222, 1 (2014): 57-59.

<sup>55</sup> Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, "Introduction," in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne De Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 7; Renders, "The Limits of Representativeness," 129-138.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, "Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge," 125-128.

<sup>57</sup> Francesca Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?," *California Italian Studies* 2, 1 (2011): 1-2, 4, 17.

In addition, as is widely claimed by its supporters, the biographical approach is a promising method to help return cultural dimensions to historiography, thereby lessening the dominance of political and economic institutions. A number of microhistorical studies written by Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, and Natalie Zemon Davis are good illustrations of how an examination of various worldviews, beliefs, and mentalities from an individual's life may benefit wider historical discussions.<sup>58</sup> Trivellato points out that individuals whose lives traversed multiple linguistic, political, and religious boundaries are among the most popular subjects of microhistory, and this demonstrates that the biographical approach can best highlight the contacts and clashes between people from different societies.<sup>59</sup> The Nawab did not literally travel through multiple boundaries, but he was at the point where at least three different politico-cultural worlds intersected. The theme of cross-cultural encounters will not be neglected in this study, and the biographical approach—to explore these scenes through the Nawab's own experiences—is an essential part of that.

My Masters' thesis, completed in 2012, was an initial experiment that explored Karnatak's history by applying such a biographical approach. Using the Nawab's voice, actions, and worldview as the main window through which to examine Karnatak's history allowed me to move the Europeans to one side, downplay their agency, and bring elements and perspectives from the Mughal and local South Indian worlds to the fore. In so doing, various aspects and themes of Karnatak's history that had previously been ignored were explored. I showed that the world of the Nawab was much greater than just the struggles between the Nawab's court and Fort St George in Madras and far wider than simply being part of the duel for empire between the British and the French. Although his kingdom was in the far south of the subcontinent, the borders of his world extended far beyond imperial Mughal India, reaching Persia, the Ottoman Empire, Arabia, and Britain.<sup>60</sup> This Ph.D. dissertation continues my Masters' project in order to produce a more systematic and comprehensive history of the Karnatak state under the Nawab by combining the various facets of state-formation research with a biographical approach.

This dissertation is divided into three main sections. Part I, "Aurangzeb's Legacy" (Chapters One and Two), provides the historical background and context for the study. I explore how the Walajah family went from being Mughal servants to setting up a ruling

---

<sup>58</sup> Peltonen, "What Is Micro in Microhistory?," 113, 115; Brown, "Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge," 126.

<sup>59</sup> Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?," 1, 14-16; see also Ghobrial, "The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory," 51-93.

<sup>60</sup> Pimmanus Wibulsilp, "I Am Nawab of Arcot: Reconsidering the Political History of the Late Eighteenth Century Kingdom of Arcot through the Eye of Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah, 1749-1795" (M.A. Dissertation; Leiden University, The Netherlands, 2012).

dynasty and what condition Karnatak was in when Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan ascended the throne. I also investigate how the relationship between the Nawab and the British began. The concepts of “zamindarization” and “fitna” will be brought into the discussion here. Part II, “The Making of the Karnatak State” (Chapters Three to Six), discusses the Nawab’s efforts to consolidate and maintain independent power through four pillars of pre-colonial state-formation—dynasty, sword, pen, and religion. Various debates surrounding pre-colonial South Asia—such as Turko-Mughal legacies, the influence of the Perso-Islamic and Indic worlds, military revolution(s), religious tolerance, the rise of various intermediary groups, and so on—will be explored. In Part III, “Embracing the Europeans” (Chapters Seven to Nine), the relationship between the Nawab and the British (which is also partly discussed in Parts I and II) will be further elaborated through three main aspects of their encounters: the economy, culture, and the military. It cannot be denied that the British were one of the main actors in the development of Karnatak during this period, a group without reference to whom any history of the region would not be comprehensive. But, as I suggest, we need a new version of this relationship, one based on both collaboration and competition, in which the voices and active roles of the local rulers are heard and observed, in order to balance the previous Eurocentric narratives. My main aim in this part will be to trace the functions of the various European elements (e.g. institutions, personnel, material culture, artistic styles, technology, customs, etc.) that were attached to or embraced by the Karnatak court, from the Nawab’s point of view. In other words, what were the Nawab’s motivations or strategies in embracing them? Wider early modern debates on rulers and the mercantile world, portfolio capitalists, cross-cultural encounters, and military revolutions will be related to the answers. In each of these three parts, a detailed introduction and conclusion will be provided. In the overall conclusion to the study, I will also show the contribution my approach and discussion make to our comprehension of the Nawab’s Karnatak.

### **Historical Sources**

The sources that can be used to explore Karnatak’s history during the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan are written in a wide variety of languages—primarily Persian, English, Dutch, French, Danish, Tamil, and Marathi—and kept in various archives and libraries, mainly in Britain, India, and the Netherlands. The most important sources—in terms of volume, detail, and proximity to Nawabi Karnatak and its ruler—are the Persian and English sources, while the others are more marginal. Therefore, these are the two I have used most, with a few Dutch and English-translated Tamil texts also incorporated. However, due to the

scope of my research questions, limited time, and my limited language skills (knowing only English and with limited ability in Persian and Dutch), even within the two main groups of Persian and English sources I have chosen to consult some collections and ignore many others. In the following sections, I will give a brief overview of the available sources—particularly the English and Persian—and explain my approach to and the limitations in choosing and utilizing them. Two important factors that have shaped my choice of sources are worth stating preliminarily here. First, as I would like to focus on restoring the Nawab’s agency and perspective, the documents that were produced during his lifetime and sought to reflect his ideas—i.e. those produced under the supervision of the ruler or produced by people in close contact with him—are central. Secondly, due to my language limitation, in cases of non-English sources, those which have English translations are my preferred choice.

## **Persian Sources**

### **a. Dynastic Histories/Chronicles**

This type of source covers those pieces of court literature that were compiled under the direct oversight or patronage of one of the Karnatak Nawabs as an official history of their own reign or the reigns of their forefathers. Three Persian texts fall into this category and are related to Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, namely the *Anwarnama* (compiled 1766-1771), the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* (1781-1786), and the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* (the mid-1830s). The first two books were compiled by two Walajah court scholars—Mir Ismail Khan Abjadi and Munshi Burhan Khan ibn Hasan—under the patronage of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan himself. The *Anwarnama*, written in a poetic form, is a history of his father, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, while the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* is a prose version and extension of the *Anwarnama* that reports the events of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s own reign. The *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* was written by one of Nawab Muhammad Ali’s grandsons, named Muhammad Ghulam Karim, on the orders of Nawab Azim Jah Bahadur, a Walajah prince and the regent of the fifth Walajah Nawab. It is an account of the life of Nawab Umdat al-Umara Bahadur Walajah II (r. 1795-1801), the eldest son and immediate successor of Muhammad Ali Khan. All three have been published, although only the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* and the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* have been translated into English; as such, they will be the two main court chronicles used in this study. My non-use of the *Anwarnama* is based on two factors. One is my limited ability in Persian, the other is the seemingly extensive overlap of information between this source and the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*. This is because the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* is a prose version and extension of

the *Anwarnama* and so, in the words of Muhammad Husain Nainar—the translator of the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*—the latter work “covers pretty nearly the same ground as the famous *Anwarnama*.”<sup>61</sup> The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* begins with the genealogy of the Walajah family from the beginnings of Islam up to the eighteenth century. It then recounts the history of Karnatak from the late seventeenth century to the rise of the Walajahs as its rulers. It has stories dating to the early years of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s life and ends with his success in taking Pondicherry from the French in 1761. Unfortunately for us, for reasons unknown the author did not continue his account up to the 1780s as he had initially planned. However, valuable information on the Nawab’s ancestors, family, court, and relations with various groups of people can be gleaned from it.<sup>62</sup> Although the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* was produced in the decades following the Nawab’s reign, it provides detailed information on the Walajah family during the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. It also reports some interesting events and ceremonies that took place at the court in the final years of the Nawab’s reign in which the author, as the Nawab’s grandson, was a participant and eyewitness.<sup>63</sup>

The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* and, to a lesser extent, the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* are the standard sources that scholars use to study Karnatak under the Walajahs. However, how they use these texts has been limited, employing them simply as a means of writing about the family’s background, how its members entered Mughal service, and how they became the Karnatak Nawabs. Many other aspects have been ignored or criticized, such as the genealogy linking them to Arabia, Central Asia, and Persia; the military role of the Nawab in fighting alongside his British ally during the early years of his reign; and the Nawab’s portrayal of his relationship with the Europeans. This is mainly because such accounts have been considered by modern historians as the mythical or boastful claims of a petty ruler rather than the articulation of facts. For example, Ramaswami has written, “Persian sources like *Tuzak-i Walajahi* are valuable to some extent, but they defeat their purpose as works of history by their obsequiousness.”<sup>64</sup> This reflects a long-held, conventional perspective held by many historians towards indigenous sources, one that has recently been systematically contested by three of the aforementioned South Indian historians—Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam. As they argue, indigenous texts that are usually seen as myths, legends, or literary works can be very useful historical sources once scholars move beyond the conventional perspective of

---

<sup>61</sup> Muhammad H. Nainar, trans., *Tuzak-i Walajahi of Burhan Ibn Hasan, Part I: From the Early Days to the Battle of Ambur (1162 A.H.)* (Madras: University of Madras, 1934), ix.

<sup>62</sup> See further details in: Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, ix-xiii.

<sup>63</sup> See further details in: Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, xiii-xvii; Muhammad H. Nainar, trans., *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz of Muhammad Karim, Part I* (Madras: University of Madras, 1940), v-xiii.

<sup>64</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 329.

European historicism that strictly distinguishes fact from fiction. They emphasize that a piece of writing is intentionally created by its author to represent, fashion, or refashion something—himself, others, ideologies, and so on—that they want their audience to recognize or memorize. Scholars need to approach these texts with this attitude and a greater degree of sensitivity, reading them more *with the grain*, listening closely to their conversations, carefully observing all kinds of subtle shifts in idiom, and understanding the text in its own context through the standpoint of its authors and potential contemporaneous audiences. In this way, multiple historical messages can be observed and, in the words of the three scholars, “neither the notion of factuality, nor that of fiction, needs to be dissolved.”<sup>65</sup> While I still think that the fictional and the factual parts need to be clearly indicated, I agree with the three historians that the conventional approach of diligently distinguishing fact from fiction in the narratives has caused us to unnecessarily lose sight of many remarkable concepts of the past that genealogies,<sup>66</sup> for example, present. Instead, as I will show in this study, all written sources can be seen as representations or conceptions of the self by their producers. By asking relevant questions and carefully contextualizing our findings, all narratives can be used to uncover how authors and patrons imagined themselves and thereby provide us with fresh perspectives on the past. In the case of the two chronicles in question, they are among the most crucial resources through which the standpoint of the Nawab and the perspective of the Perso-Islamic world can be seen. In my opinion, the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* is the best resource for tracing the Nawab’s own voice. This is because, as well as funding its production, there is a strong hint that the Nawab himself probably closely supervised and may even have selected its contents. As recorded by its author, Burhan Khan, “During the progress of the compilation of this book, when the narrative had proceeded thus far, *the author according to custom read it out to Ḥazrat-i A’la* [i.e. the Nawab], [the stories] recalled to his mind the anxiety, and [the Nawab] shed tears” (my italics).<sup>67</sup>

In using the two Persian chronicles through their English versions, I admit there is the risk of something being lost in translation. However, this can be partly relieved by the fact that the translation and publication of these two sources was done by professional scholars with the clear academic purpose of making the sources more accessible for historical

---

<sup>65</sup> Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, 1-4, 13; Another prominent scholar who promotes and discusses the methodology of reading the archival sources *with the grain* is Ann Stoler, although she mainly applies it to the use of colonial archives for studying local history. See, Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 50-53.

<sup>66</sup> See an example of how genealogies can be used in the study of history in: Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), xxiii-xxv, 97-191.

<sup>67</sup> Muhammad H. Nainar, trans., *Tuzak-i Walajahi of Burhan Ibn Hasan, Part II: From the Battle of Ambur 1162 A.H. to the Capture of Pondicherry, 1174 A.H.* (Madras: University of Madras, 1939), 50-51.

research. The translator of both chronicles, Muhammad Husain Nainar, was the head of the Department of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu at the University of Madras.<sup>68</sup> He cooperated with C.S. Srinivarachari, a professor of history at Annamalai University, who provided very detailed historical notes to the English versions of the two sources. Explanations for numerous technical terms, place-names, prominent protagonists, and important ceremonies or events are given. There is also much cross-checking with and many references to various other primary sources and historical works from later periods, both in Persian and English. The notes provided clearly reflect that both scholars involved in the translation not only had good command of both languages but also exhaustive historical knowledge of Karnatak, the Mughal, Persian and Islamic worlds, and British colonial expansion. However, for this study, when it is necessary to get the exact meaning or sense from the original words or phrases, I checked the Persian versions and sometimes provide the Persian terms.

#### b. Collections of Court Letters and Records

This second group covers the records, administrative documents, and correspondence produced or collected by the Walajah court. Large numbers of these can be found in the collection of Persian manuscripts kept in the Tamilnadu Archives (TA) in Chennai. They are bound together, largely un-chronologically, into more than a hundred bundles. An unpublished English catalogue, giving a brief introduction to each of them, has been produced.<sup>69</sup> Their types and themes are diverse. For example, there is correspondence between the Nawab and various individuals and institutions (local, West Asian, and European); receipts; lists and service records of his servants with their salaries; court financial accounts; and evidence of business transactions between the Nawab and other individuals.<sup>70</sup> Among these, bundles 65 to 68 are particularly important and have been consulted for this thesis. They constitute a set of daily court records, around 700 letters (thus covering around 700 days) in total, bound together chronologically, and they have been labelled by some previous historians the *Ruznama*. The author of these letters was a Hindu scribe named Munshi Kishna Chand, and he received direct orders from Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan to write down “all the important events of the court.”<sup>71</sup> These records were

---

<sup>68</sup> After working on these two chronicles, Nainar translated the *Bahar-i Azam Jahi*, another historical source for Karnatak that relates the life of Nawwab Azamjah Bahadu Walajah IV.

<sup>69</sup> In this English-language inventory, the date of each letter, the writer and recipient, the topics, and sometimes a brief summary of the most important aspects are given.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example: TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 4, 5, 90-95A, 102-104, 109-111.

<sup>71</sup> The main contents of these letters include the Nawab’s granting of audiences to various courtiers and guests (local, West Asian, and European), details of their conversations, the Nawab’s orders on various matters, and special events or ceremonies that took place at the court.

produced regularly from April 1773 to early 1775. It is not known if the Nawab halted the practice after that or if the records thereafter are no longer extant. They have never been translated or published, so they have been under-utilized by scholars. One exception is Gurney, who, in his short article, used some of the information therein to examine the Nawab's personality and reconstruct his court's milieu.<sup>72</sup> The *Ruznama* is just as valuable as are the chronicles for reflecting the Nawab's voice and worldview, and what is recorded—the Nawab's actions, orders, names of people, and ceremonial events—was noted because the munshi thought that it was significant in his master's eyes; this was anything that the Nawab wanted potential readers to know about him or his court. While I was not able to make full use of this source in Persian, the English summary of each record in the catalogue has been extremely useful.<sup>73</sup>

### c. Other Persian Writings Produced during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

The studies of Gurney and various modern bibliographers—including Charles Ambrose Storey, Dara Marshall, Nabi Hadi, and Shaikh Allauddin—have highlighted that there is a large number of unpublished and untranslated Persian “historical” texts that were written about or contain information relating to the Walajah dynasty and the reign of the Nawab. Some of these were produced by the Nawab's second son or a few other Walajah princes or courtiers during or just after the Nawab's reign. They are very important, eye-witness accounts of the Nawab's life and his court. Various others were “histories” produced in the latter part of the nineteenth century by local scholars or courtiers. These are all contained in rare manuscripts that remain unpublished and are kept in public and private libraries in Chennai and Hyderabad.<sup>74</sup> There are no English translations yet and very few English introductions or overviews are available. As such, I must leave these texts for future research. However, there is a list of these in the Appendix.

This study also owes a great deal to the *Maathir al-Umara*, an eighteenth-century (Persian) biographical survey of Mughal notables from the period 1556-1780 that was written by Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, and a modern (English) bibliographical survey of

---

<sup>72</sup> Gurney, “Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot,” 222.

<sup>73</sup> The *Ruqaat-i Walajahi*, published in 1958, is another such Persian source. I must omit this collection now because there is no English translation, but it seems to be one of most interesting sources for Karnatak's internal affairs. Further details are provided in the Appendix.

<sup>74</sup> See the lists of these Persian manuscripts in the Appendix. For bibliographical surveys of Persian sources on Karnatak, see: Charles Ambrose Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, vol. I (London: Luzac and Co., 1927), 777-780; Dara N. Marshall, *Mughals in India: A Bibliographical Survey*, vol. I (London: Asia Publishing House, 1967), 360; Nabi Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995), 214, 333; 589; Shaikh Allauddin, “Libraries and Librarianship during Muslim Rule in India: An Analytical Study” (Doctoral Dissertation; Sambalpur, Sambalpur University, India, 1992), 348-354; H. Munavarjan and T. Shafeeqe Ahmed, “Sources For the Study of Nawab Muhammad Ali Walajahi,” *International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences* 4, 7 (2016): 27-30.

Arabic and Persian literature from Karnatak by Muhammad Yousuf Kokan, who also provides biographical information for many eighteenth-century scholars. Both works provide introductions to various prominent South Asian figures who were related to the Nawab and/or his court during his lifetime. The latter scholar also provided much interesting information related to the Nawab from Persian and Arabic sources produced during the Nawabi period, which due to my limited language ability, I could not access directly. They have allowed me to reconstruct the Nawab's social and cultural networks to a greater extent than was possible from his court production alone.<sup>75</sup>

## British Sources

### a. The British East India Company's Records

The EIC records consist of the documents produced and collected by the Company's servants as part of their duties. These take various forms, such as reports, minutes of consultations, correspondence between different company offices, and "country correspondence" (the letters exchanged between the EIC and local rulers). Due to the intense and almost daily contacts between the Nawab and the EIC across his entire reign, the EIC archives are undeniably the most voluminous, detailed, and long-running resource. The collections in which the majority of the information on Karnatak can be found are those produced by, sent out from, or received in the Madras Presidency (Fort St George), the EIC's headquarters in Karnatak next to which the Nawab's palace was built around 1767. These documents are kept in two main places: 1) the Indian Office Record (IOR), British Library, London; and 2) the Madras Office Record, Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai. In IOR, there are at least four main collections containing documents related to the Madras Presidency: (1) the Madras Public Proceedings (MPP); (2) the Madras Military and Secret Consultations (MMSC); (3) the Despatches to Madras (DM); and (4) the Home Miscellaneous Series of Indian Records (HOME). These four collections (from between the late 1740s and 1795) constitute the main EIC records that were consulted and used for this study.<sup>76</sup> Previous historians of Karnatak, especially Gurney

---

<sup>75</sup> Sam Sam al-Daulah Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, *The Maathir al-Umara, Being Biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu Officers of the Timurid Sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D.*, ed. Bains Prashad, trans. H. Beveridge, 2 vols. (Patna: Janaki Prakash, 1979); Muhammad Y. Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic, 1710-1960* (Madras: Muhammad Yusuf Kokan, 1974).

<sup>76</sup> The MPP and MMSC mainly contain minutes of consultations, copies of letters and orders received and sent out, and country correspondence both produced and collected by the Madras Council. The DM carries correspondence between Madras and the Court of Directors in London. The HOME comprises a variety of documents, largely grouped thematically, and some of its volumes relate to Karnatak. Among the EIC records in IOR, there are also a few original Persian letters from the Karnatak Nawabs, sent to the Company, that were kept separately in the catalogue "IO Islamic." While only two of them were produced by Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, their significance is worth noting. The first letter is his original will, written with his own hand in 1777 and sent to the EIC's Court of Directors. The second is a letter of 1795, written to cancel that will. The cause of the production and cancellation of the will of the Nawab shall be discussed elsewhere in this study. See further: M.Z.A. Shakeb, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Letters from Arcot and Baroda* (London: India Office Library and Records, 1982), 1-2. The references for the two Persian letters are IO Islamic 4364 and 4248.

and Phillips, also relied heavily on them for their research, but they limited their questions mainly to the Nawab's debts and British agency; other aspects—described in detail in the sources—were barely touched upon.

As for the Madras Record Office in Chennai, the English records that cover the reign of the Nawab are in four catalogues, namely: (the records of the) Public Department; Military Department; Revenue Department (from 1774); and Mayor's Court (1689-1798).<sup>77</sup> Due to time restrictions and my assumption that there is probably significant overlap in the information between the collections in Chennai and London, I have chosen to leave those in Chennai for future investigation. Although not regularly, the Nawab also had contacts with the Presidency of Bengal, especially in the 1770s and the early 1780s, when Warren Hastings was Governor-General of India. The collection of the Bengal Presidency is, therefore, another source for Karnatak's history. At this stage, I have started to research its contents via various publications. The 11-volume *Calendar of Persian Correspondence* (CPC), which has a detailed summary of each of the Persian "letters" that passed between some of the EIC's servants and South Asian notables, and which were kept by the Bengal Presidency, is extremely useful. The letters exchanged between the Nawab and Warren Hastings are the particular focus of my attention.<sup>78</sup>

In using the EIC's records, it is important to underline that, within that institution, a united point of view should not be presumed. For example, the Directors in London, the Governor-General in Bengal, and the Madras Presidency frequently had differing opinions on events in Karnatak. For example, while the Directors issued orders based on the Company's laws, their agents in Madras frequently chose to act more pragmatically in order to solve immediate problems. Moreover, different interest groups had different views regarding the Karnatak court. Even within each of these EIC "sub-divisions," the backgrounds of individual British officers and their relationships with the Nawab differed. Some were the Nawab's friends, some his business partners, many others his bitter enemies, and these relationships changed constantly. Such should be taken into consideration when interpreting the records, and this approach also needs to be applied to sources related to all other British protagonists, such as the king's servants or private traders. Without very careful contextualization of each

---

<sup>77</sup> In these catalogues are documents, in various forms, comparable to those kept in IOR, such as consultations, despatches to and from Britain, letters from and to factories, and country correspondence. For a preliminary survey of EIC documents in the Madras Office Record (Tamilnadu Archives), see: Sailen Ghose, *Archives in India: History and Assets* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963), 167-173, 311-314.

<sup>78</sup> *Calendar of Persian Correspondence: Being Letters, Referring mainly to Affairs in Bengal, which Passed Between Some of the Company's Servants and Indian Rulers and Notables, 1759-1795*, 11 vols. (Calcutta/New Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing/The National Archives of India, 1911-1969). Abbreviation *CPC* will be used henceforth.

piece of evidence, the use of British sources could easily lead to misinterpretation. I expect two main things from my use of the EIC's records and other British sources. The first is to gain perspectives from the European world that will help interpret the Karnatak state and its ruler. The second is to employ these sources in order to help trace the Nawab's voice and agency as, within these texts, there are a number of letters and messages—written either by the Nawab himself or under his orders—to various British institutions and individuals. Also, there are conversations and discussions between the Nawab and British people that appear to have been recorded verbatim. Moreover, I argue that the Nawab's actions and views, as reported by the British eyewitnesses, and the responses, opinions, critiques, compliments, and complaints of those Europeans towards the Nawab, can all be read *against the grain* to reveal the Nawab's desires, thoughts, and strategies. This approach of reading European sources “from the bottom up” or “upside down” to restore the agency of South Asians is based on Ranajit Guha's subaltern study.<sup>79</sup>

#### b. Private Manuscripts of British Individuals

This type refers to private (non-institutional) records produced by many of the British individuals who had contacts or business dealings with or related to the Nawab, and who referred to him or his state in their writings. These documents exist in various forms, such as private correspondence with friends and acquaintances, personal diaries, memoirs, and collections of historical documents (e.g Robert Orme's manuscripts). Many of these are kept in IOR, while others are scattered across various libraries in Britain and India.<sup>80</sup> Despite using both types of British records (EIC records and private manuscripts), scholars like Gurney, Phillips, and Ramaswami have tended to rely more on the private manuscripts of British protagonists for their studies than on the Company's records. They seem to believe that, as Gurney suggests, private letters and accounts reveal details of the debt transactions and court politics better than do Company records. Because many Company servants had large sums tied up in the Nawab's own debts, they were naturally cautious about mentioning their financial concerns too freely.<sup>81</sup> But my opinion vis-à-vis the two types of documents is different. In private documents, the authors report events from their own limited viewpoints and often with strong prejudices. On the other hand, the EIC's records carry “factual”

---

<sup>79</sup> Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” in *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 2-4. See also, Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 47, 50.

<sup>80</sup> The authors of these sources included numerous Company servants and ex-servants (who produced the writings in a private capacity and for personal reasons), military officers and civil servants of the British government sent to South Asia, private merchants, political adventurers, travelers, and some politicians in Britain. See the examples of these private European manuscripts in the Appendix.

<sup>81</sup> Gurney, “The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot,” abstract.

commentaries on events and provide various opinions or ideas held by the Company's servants related to these episodes. In the Company's records, one can thus see factual information and various perspectives on a single issue all at once. Also, due to their almost daily contacts with the Nawab throughout his reign, the EIC's sources allow for long-term observations about his state and engage with a greater variety of themes related to local society. As such, in this study, I choose to focus on the EIC's records while using the information in and perspectives of private documents almost exclusively via secondary literature. To this, the diary of George Paterson and the report of James Buchanan are notable exceptions.<sup>82</sup> Because of the extensive use of the former source in this study, its background must be detailed.

Paterson's diary is extensive: nine volumes, each comprising 250-300 pages. He first arrived in India in late 1770 as the secretary of Sir John Lindsay, who was the first British "king's minister" sent to the Karnatak court, whose mission will be described in Part III. In only a short time, Paterson won the Nawab's favor. A year later, when Sir John departed, Paterson was asked by the Nawab to stay, nominally as the secretary of the second representative of the British king in Arcot, Sir Robert Hartland, but really as secretary to the Nawab. During his four-year stay in Karnatak (1770-1774), Paterson saw the Nawab almost daily and was consulted on practically all important matters. Hence, he was in a very privileged position to observe the court from close quarters. Crucially for us, Paterson enthusiastically set himself the task of recording what he saw and experienced in vivid detail. His account reveals a great deal about the Nawab, his courtiers, court ceremonial, court politics, and the relationships between the Nawab and those people with whom he interacted. Frequently, the conversations between the Nawab and Paterson or others are recorded in a verbatim style. Two historians who have used Paterson's records substantially are Gurney (on the Nawab's debt and personality) and Pamela Nightingale (on the moral attitudes of British individuals in eighteenth-century India). Both of them regard this source highly for its factual accuracy and absence of prejudice on the part of the writer.<sup>83</sup> All of these factors make Paterson's diary a very valuable source for this study, for tracing both the Europeans' perspectives and the Nawab's voice. However, Paterson also had his own biases and judged

---

<sup>82</sup> Another private European manuscript used in this study is the report of James Buchanan, a trading agent for the Nawab whose account reveals crucial aspects of the Nawab's mercantile activities; see: Chapter Seven.

<sup>83</sup> Gurney notes that, unlike many of the British, Paterson "came to India with an open mind, prepared to judge Indians dispassionately but with sympathy" and was genuinely working for the Nawab's best interests. Nightingale notes that Paterson's records "all show the degree of detachment of the trained observer and analyst who feels compelled to record accurately even his own faults and failures." See Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 222, and Pamela Nightingale, *Fortune and Integrity: A Study of Moral Attitudes in the Indian Diary of George Paterson, 1769-1774* (Delhi-New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), viii.

individuals and events based on his own experience. His opinions regarding the Nawab and his court should not, therefore, be taken literally, or at least not without careful analysis.

### **Dutch Sources**

The archive of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), kept in the Dutch National Archives (NA) in The Hague and in the Tamilnadu Archives, is another source-collection containing information related to Karnatak and the Nawab. While researching for this study I explored part of it, beginning with the collection of “Letters and Papers Received from Asia by the ‘Seventeen Gentlemen’” (*overgekomen brieven en papieren*—OBP), kept in the NA. The OBP from the Dutch factories in Coromandel (aka Negapatnam) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) between the 1750s and the 1790s—including the final reports of their chiefs (*memories van overgave*), proceedings, correspondence with local rulers, and reports of missions to the court of Karnatak—have been skimmed through. The main topic, which frequently appears, relates to a long-running conflict between the Nawab and the VOC over pearl-fishing at the southern tip of the Coromandel Coast (details of which will be discussed in Chapter Seven). There is also scattered information related to various other disputes between the two parties (such as over territory or trade), some diplomatic exchanges (in Madras and Ramnad), and Dutch perspectives on the Nawab-British relationship. For this study, due to limits of space and research scope, only a small amount of information from the VOC can be incorporated. The rest must wait for future research, which will allow more space to explore various aspects of the Dutch-Karnatak relationship. However, for the benefit of other researchers, a list of prominent VOC collections that relate to Karnatak and the Nawab are provided in the Appendix.

The Dutch sources in the Tamilnadu Archives are not explored in this thesis, nor are various manuscripts in Danish, French, Portuguese, and vernacular languages like Tamil and Marathi.<sup>84</sup> The vernacular sources, in particular, would no doubt be useful for understanding the view of Karnatak from South India, which is one of the three main perspectives of my study. For this current stage, the reconstruction of South Indian perspectives and their role in shaping Karnatak’s history has been based on various pieces of secondary literature related to

---

<sup>84</sup> Ghose, *Archives in India*, 168, 312-313.

pre-colonial South India and some relevant primary sources that have been translated into English, such as the well-known Tamil diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai.<sup>85</sup>

As well as the sources—published and unpublished—outlined above, this thesis is also greatly indebted to previous works on Karnatak, the Mughal Empire, other regions of South Asia in the eighteenth century, pre-modern Islamic and Indic political ideologies, early British colonial expansion in South Asia, and eighteenth-century British politics, all of which cannot be listed here.

---

<sup>85</sup> Ananda Ranga Pillai was a *dubash* (secretary-*cum*-interpreter) for the French in Pondicherry. He kept a private diary from 1736 to 1761, providing a day-to-day account of the events and social life of the period. He also provided details of wars in Karnatak from the mid-1740s to the 1760s, in which the role of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan may be observed. See: Ananda Ranga Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai (1736-1761)*, ed. Frederick J. Price, K. Rangachari, and Henry Dodwell, 12 vols. (Madras: Superintendent, Government Press, 1904-1928).



## PART I: Aurangzeb's Legacy: War and Migration

A small number of modern studies trace the development of the Nawabi state of Karnatak before the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. These works usually start with the annexation of the region by the Mughals at the end of the seventeenth century and its transformation into an autonomous state in the 1710s by an enterprising ex-Mughal officer named Nawab Sa'adat Allah Khan. Sa'adat Allah Khan was a Deccani Muslim and the dynasty that he founded is known as the Nawayats, after the tribe to which he belonged. In the early 1740s, internal struggles among the Nawayats presented various external powers—such as the Marathas and the Nizams of the Deccan—with the opportunity to interfere in the Nawayat state, eventually liquidating it. Karnatak then fell into the hands of another Mughal warrior, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, the founder of the Walajah dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Here, one significant problem with previous scholarly literature must be highlighted: that the Walajah family usually enters the historical scene without any attempt by modern scholars to describe or explain the background of the people who founded this new dynasty. These modern studies then go on to relate how the Walajahs almost lost power as a result of their struggles with the Nawayats, struggles in which many neighboring power-holders—such as the Deccan Nizams, the British, and the French—were also involved, and which were followed by a series of internal conflicts involving many petty local rulers and the Walajahs themselves.<sup>2</sup> In most accounts, from the 1750s onwards, the focus is almost exclusively on the history of the Anglo-French wars in Karnatak and European expansion in South Asia. The usual implication is that Muhammad Ali Khan was able to survive and rule only because he was fortunate enough to have been picked by the British as a native ally-*cum*-puppet in their fight against those native leaders who had been chosen by the French.<sup>3</sup>

Although there is much detail within such previous studies, there is still a severe lack of contextualization of the Karnatak state's position and that of its rulers in these works. I argue that the state's existence and evolution was the result of a long-term process that began in South Asia in the second half of the seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth:

---

<sup>1</sup> The term "Walajah" was a Mughal honorific that was only given to Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan by the Mughal emperor in 1765. Using the title for members of the family prior to this year is an anachronistic but convenient means of reference for historians.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 1-16.

<sup>3</sup> For accounts of the rise of the Walajah family from a predominantly Eurocentric point of view, see: Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 5-6, 25; Henry D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800: Traced from the East India Company's Records Preserved at Fort St. George and the India Office and from Other Sources*, vol. II (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 388-389, 427-433; Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 146-169. For the most detailed study of the political events of the early Karnatak state, see: Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*.

the zamindarization of the Mughal warriors.<sup>4</sup> The Karnatak state has often been labelled an eighteenth-century Mughal successor state, and not enough work has been done to link it to this process of zamindarization. By adopting this idea as its theoretical framework, Chapter One will discuss the emergence of Karnatak as a Mughal province and its subsequent transformation into the independent Nawabi state, while Chapter Two will detail the rise of the Walajahs to become the second Karnatak dynasty, with particular focus being placed on the main subject of this study, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. It will also discuss how he managed to become its ruler despite the fierce power-struggles that both led to and resulted from his claims to the throne.

---

<sup>4</sup> “Zamindarization” means becoming a zamindar, i.e. a potentate whose family held land or a region on a hereditary basis. The concept will be discussed further in Chapter 1.2.

## Chapter 1: Military Service, Migration, and Settlement

### 1.1 Mughal Expansion into South India

Mughal expansion into South India began during the reign of Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), but the most significant results were not seen until the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658), whose army was led into the region by his son, Prince Aurangzeb. In the mid-1630s, this prince expanded the empire's southern frontier at the expense of the three existing Deccan sultanates: Ahmadnagar was liquidated, while Golconda and Bijapur, which were yet to be fully assimilated into the Mughal Empire, were forced to pay tribute to the Mughals.<sup>1</sup>

The Mughal campaigns of the 1630s and subsequent invasions of the Deccan had a significant impact on the geopolitics of South India. Two repercussions of the Mughal incursions are worth discussing here, for they concern the eastern part of Tamilnadu, along the Coromandel Coast, which would later be known as Karnatak. First, faced with Mughal aggression, the ambitions of Golconda and Bijapur to expand north were thwarted. Instead, these states directed their energies south, to eastern Tamilnadu, with the twin aims of destroying Aravidu rule in what were the last vestiges of the Vijayanagara Empire—the Aravidus had taken refuge in Chandagiri after the fall of their empire's capital in 1565—and eliminating the empire's other successor states in the region. In 1650, Golconda successfully annexed the northern part of eastern Tamilnadu—around Nellore and Chingleput—while Bijapur occupied areas further south, from the region around Vellore and Senji down to the northern frontier of the Tanjore Nayaka state.<sup>2</sup> This was the first time that the region experienced long-term Indo-Muslim rule, although it was much later here than in other parts of the subcontinent.<sup>3</sup> According to Ramaswami, around this time the term “Karnataka”—meaning the lands of the Kannadigas (the Kanadian speakers)—started to be used by the two Deccan sultanates to refer to the two parts of Tamilnadu under their control: “Golconda Karnataka” and “Bijapuri Karnataka.”<sup>4</sup> These two Karnataka regions were also sub-divided into “Balaghat” (“the western up-country”) and “Payenghat” (“the eastern low-country”). The word “Karnatak,” which was applied to the territory of the Mughal Nawabs in the eighteenth century, is a corruption of this term Karnataka, and the Karnatak territory was comprised of

---

<sup>1</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 35-38; Jos J. L. Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire, 1500-1700* (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 32-33.

<sup>2</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, 41.

<sup>3</sup> In the early fourteenth century, an ex-official of the Delhi sultan founded an independent Muslim state in south-eastern Tamilnadu that was known as the Madurai sultanate. It was, in fact, the first Muslim polity in this region, though a relatively short-lived (1335-1378) and insignificant one. After it was eliminated, the area came under the rule of Hindu Nayaka warriors of the Vijayanagara Empire.

<sup>4</sup> This should not be confused with the modern Indian state of Karnataka in the western Deccan. In the early modern period, the word “Karnataka” was used to refer to those parts of Tamilnadu that belonged to Golconda and Bijapur.

all the former “Bijapuri Karnataka Payenghat” and parts of “Golconda Kanataka Payenghat.” However, Rajayyan has proposed, slightly differently, that the term was first used, a little later, by the Mughals, who used the term Karnataka or Karnatak to refer vaguely to the land of the Dravidians.<sup>5</sup>

The second significant ramification of the Mughal invasions of the 1630s is that they paved the way for the rise of the Marathas as a new regional power; these incursions caused the power of the Bijapur sultans to weaken, and this led to opportunities for various powerful local Maratha chiefs—who had provided military service to the Bijapur sultanate in the western Deccan—to attempt to gain independence. The most successful of these was Shivaji Bhonsla of Poona (1627-1680), who was able to attract various other Maratha chiefs into his service. By the late 1650s, Shivaji had become *de facto* independent leader of the Maratha Confederacy, and in 1674 he was crowned ruler of the independent Hindu Maratha state. Under his rule, the Marathas expanded their military power in the Deccan (late 1650s-1670s) into southern regions of the Mughal Empire, without having any reason to fear a confrontation with the latter. The Maratha expansion coincided with the accession to the throne of the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, in 1658, and it was not long after, in 1660, that the emperor launched a war against the Marathas by ordering his governors in the Deccan to punish them. That task, though, was unexpectedly difficult.<sup>6</sup>

Despite two decades of war waged by Aurangzeb’s generals in the south, from the 1660s-1670s, the Mughals had failed to make any significant headway. The Maratha state, on the other hand, had grown rapidly. In 1683, Aurangzeb deemed the conquest of the Deccan to be the most important means of securing the position of the empire and, as such, made the critical decision to lead the conquest of South India himself. By 1687, his army had successfully defeated the two sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda, the former tributary states of the Mughals who had been supplying military aid to the Marathas against their former overlords.<sup>7</sup> The then Maratha ruler Shambaji (son of Shivaji) was eventually defeated and executed in 1688, by which time most of the Deccan plateau had fallen to the Mughals, although the insurgent Maratha state had by no means been destroyed. Shambhaji’s younger brother, Rajaram Bhonsla, who was hastily crowned the new ruler in 1689, successfully

---

<sup>5</sup> For further discussions regarding the terms of references for these early modern provinces, see: Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 7; Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 1; Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, ed. William Crooke (London: John Murray, 1903), 164-165.

<sup>6</sup> John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 207-218; Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, 36-37.

<sup>7</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 52-74.

escaped the Mughal aggression. As the rulers of Vijayanagara had done, the new Maratha ruler moved south-east, and chose the fort-town of Senji, in the center of Karnatak, as his place of refuge.

In order to understand why he chose there, we must briefly recount earlier developments in the area. As previously mentioned, from 1655 Senji had been ruled by Bijapur and, at that time, the states to the south of Senji were still ruled by various Hindu Nayakas and Poligars who had been there since Vijayanagara times. In the early 1670s, however, Vyankoji, a Maratha general and a half-brother of Shivaji, ended Nayaka rule in Tanjore and founded a Maratha dynasty there in its place. His success in Tamilnadu drew the attention of Shivaji and, in 1677, the latter sent his army to conquer Bijapur Karnataka (from the Bijapur sultanate) and install Maratha governors in Senji and Vellore. This was how, from the late 1670s up to the arrival of Rajaram Bhonsla, much of eastern Tamilnadu came under Maratha control, ruled by two lines of the Bhonsla family.

From Senji, Rajaram relentlessly urged the remaining Maratha commanders in the western Deccan to fight the Mughals. This attitude, unsurprisingly, enraged Emperor Aurangzeb and eventually drew the Mughal forces into eastern Tamilnadu. The northern part of eastern Tamilnadu was the principal arena of Mughal-Maratha conflict in the period up to 1698, when the Mughal armies gained the final victory. In the preceding years, the Mughals had annexed most of eastern Tamilnadu, which used to be under Golconda, Bijapur, and Maratha (under Shivaji) rule, into its realm as a new suba.<sup>8</sup> The name given to this province was Karnatak, or Arcot after the name of its new capital, and a Mughal subadar, with the title of Nawab, was appointed to administer the region. Karnatak was one of the six southern Mughal subas—Berar, Bidar, Golconda, Bijapur, Sira, and Arcot or Karnatak—that were administered directly by the Mughal deputy in the Deccan; this deputy was, in turn, directly answerable to the emperor in Delhi.

From the events described, it could be inferred that the Mughal conquest of Karnatak was simply a spontaneous act resulting from the choice of the Maratha ruler to settle in Senji. However, it is also important to note the nature of this region, which made it very attractive to settlers from the dry Deccan plateau. Jos Gommans, for instance, has sought to explain why the Mughal conquest of Arcot was virtually inevitable. His view is that, when the Mughals sought new territory to conquer, there were three principal prerequisites. First, it had

---

<sup>8</sup> Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 214, 220-223, 232.

to be a rich agrarian and populous center situated in a river valley or coastal region. Secondly, it could not be far from extensive grazing lands, because the vast Mughal armies required space and their military animals needed pasturage. Thirdly, as the Mughals were concerned with securing financial resources, they had to control highways or trade routes, either land-based or maritime, in order to control the collection of revenue, regulate supplies to the military, and tax commerce in the region. These three main conditions were entirely or partially met in a few places in South Asia along the so-called “Arid Zone,” which Gommans has termed “the nuclear zones” of Mughal power. These regions were annexed one after another.<sup>9</sup> The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* supports the idea that Arcot was one such “nuclear zone” (as proposed by Gommans), i.e. at the frontier of two or more different ecological spheres. It notes that, when the Mughal armies came to seize Karnatak in the 1680s, they chose “the bank of a river and the skirt of a forest as the camping ground for the army of Islam.”<sup>10</sup> This military camp gradually evolved into the city of Arcot, the new capital of the province.

Contributing to the wealth of Karnatak were two important hinterland routes—one to Golconda in the north, the other to Bijapur in the northwest—and the prosperous seaports on the Coromandel Coast. Some of these ports were dominated by the local Hindu and Muslim merchants, as well as traders from other Eurasian lands (e.g. Arabs, Persians, Armenians, South East Asians, etc.), while others became the trading enclaves or headquarters of various European companies and private entrepreneurs from the early seventeenth century. The most prominent of these were the British EIC in Madras, the French CIO in Pondicherry, the Dutch VOC in Pulicat and, later, Negapatnam (Nagapattinam), and the Danish in Tranquebar (Tharangambadi).<sup>11</sup> These merchants, both local and foreign, linked Coromandel trade to overseas markets as far away as South East Asia in the east and Western Europe in the west. Many areas of Karnatak were thriving centers of textile production and pearl diving (in the far south), and textiles were the region’s principal export.<sup>12</sup> With regard to agriculture, many areas of Karnatak generated a surplus. In the north, the coastal area of Nellore and the basin of River Pennar were noted for their rice cultivation. In the center, the terrain from Arcot to Vellore was barren, while Chingleput was largely a desert. The valley of River Pelar, however, was rich with vegetation, while the region’s good irrigation system—which included canals and large reservoirs—made rice cultivation a viable option for many villages.

---

<sup>9</sup> Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 22-37

<sup>10</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 59.

<sup>11</sup> EIC stands for (the British) East India Company; VOC stands for (the Dutch) Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; and CIO stands for (the French) La Compagnie des Indes Orientales.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the textile and pearl trade on the Coromandel Coast, see Chapter Seven (7.2).

Its dry fields also yielded cotton, indigo, and sugar. To the south of Arcot, Tanjore was the wettest area in Tamilnadu. Situated in the Kaveri Delta, it was rich in alluvial soil and yielded two to three crops annually. Further south, the region around Madurai, Ramnad, and Tirunelveli was mostly covered with forests of valuable wood and sustained large herds of cattle and sheep. In some areas, streams permitted the cultivation of rice, while the dry fields yielded cotton and palm products. These agriculturally less-developed hinterlands supplied large numbers of men for the military because they were home to communities of people who had highly-developed military skills.<sup>13</sup>

By establishing the Karnatak province, the Mughals completed their ambitious conquests along the South Asian Arid Zone and expanded their influence throughout more or less the entire subcontinent. Ironically, this coincided with the beginning of the empire's disintegration, a topic to which we will now turn.

## 1.2 Migration and “Zamindarization”

In the first two decades of the campaign that began in the 1660s, a number of Mughal servants—and particularly the Rajput warriors in their service—were sent to South India. After 1683, when the emperor decided to lead the campaigns himself, his sons and the majority of the Mughal generals, along with tens of thousands of soldiers, followed. In addition, always escorting the royal army were the imperial harem, households, administrators, religious scholars, artists, traders, bankers, and everyone else required to keep Mughal imperial court life and the central bureaucracy running. Each of the imperial officers was also accompanied by their own family and servants. Although the exact number of people who moved to the South is not known, a contemporaneous source indicates that Aurangzeb's royal camp may have consisted of 300,000 to 400,000 people, or even more; as historians of the Mughals often suggest, the royal encampment was a mobile imperial capital.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in the 24 years that the emperor stayed in the South, he supplied his camps with fresh troops and money from the northern and eastern provinces of his empire. Many of the Mughal warriors with their military households, both old and new, were recruited from all over the imperial domain to govern the newly-annexed regions.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the half-century long campaign of Aurangzeb, from 1660 until his death in 1707,

---

<sup>13</sup> Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 98-99; Kanakalatha Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel* (Chennai: Orient Longman, 1999), 43; Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 343.

<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Mughal camps, see: Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 100-111.

<sup>15</sup> Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 227, 235.

stimulated a remarkable degree of human migration from northern India into the Deccan, and thence into Karnatak.

After spending decades in the South, many of these northern immigrants had interacted with the local communities and developed their own interests in the region to such an extent that many of them did not want the war to end or to return whence they came. As John F. Richards rightly puts it, for many Mughal warriors, the South became the center of their universe.<sup>16</sup> Instead of fighting against their enemies, many of the Mughal governors who were assigned to the newly-annexed southern districts preferred to keep their troops in their forts and concentrate on forging ties with the local chiefs in order to set up effective systems of revenue collection. The revenue surplus that, previously, had been dispatched to the imperial treasury was retained in the region and redistributed among the governors and landed gentry. A clear illustration of this tendency among the Mughal nobles can be seen in the case of Zulfiqar Khan, who, in the years 1689-1698, was entrusted with the task of overthrowing King Rajaram in Karnatak. There was a consensus among his contemporaries that he was colluding with the Maratha ruler to intentionally prolong the war and spending much of his time securing tribute from local rulers in Karnatak. It was the general opinion that Zulfiqar Khan was hoping to seize control of Karnatak upon the emperor's death, and he was thus preserving his resources for the impending war of succession. Yet the unexpected longevity of the emperor's life foiled his plans and, after ten years, the Mughal general could find no more excuses to prolong the siege, especially as some of his rivals were writing to the emperor describing his treachery. Emperor Aurangzeb finally threatened Zulfiqar Khan that he would force the army to camp in the open air until they took Senji. Only then did the war come to a close, with one contemporary opining that the place was only conquered because Zulfiqar Khan bribed Rajaram to retreat.<sup>17</sup> Zulfiqar Khan is just one example of the many Mughal warriors who, in this period, attempted to establish themselves in territories under their control and carve out their own independent domains. This phenomenon not only occurred in the South but throughout the Mughal Empire, and it has been termed by various scholars a process of "gentrification" or "zamindarization."<sup>18</sup> Before going on to discuss the links between this process and the emergence of Nawabi Karnatak, we should first explore

---

<sup>16</sup> Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 246.

<sup>17</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 8-10.

<sup>18</sup> The term "gentrification" in the context of the eighteenth-century Muslim Empire was first coined by André Wink, while the term "zamindarization" is used by other scholars, such as Gommans, to explain the same process; see: Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, 8; Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 69.

the meanings of zamindar and the process of zamindarization by studying the institutional background of the Mughal elite warriors.

According to Gommans, who approaches Mughal history from a military standpoint, South Asia—both prior to and during the Mughal period—can be viewed as one large military labor market, full of warrior-bands seeking employment from the highest bidder. It was always one of the main challenges for the Mughals to direct the energies of as many of these war-bands as possible into the imperial cause, as opposed to having them resist the empire. The principal means that the Mughals used to achieve this were the mansabdari and jagirdari systems, which were mentioned in the introduction.<sup>19</sup> The Mughal mansabdars can be divided into two broad categories on the basis of the nature of their title-holders. The first category was comprised of the mercenary-like *jamadar* and their military households, who did not have strong roots in South Asia. Many of them, like the Timurid-Mughal rulers, were recent immigrants from Turan (Central Asia), Persia, or Roh (Afghanistan), and were often happy to preserve their nomadic and tribal lifestyles by being very willing to relocate when required. The second category was comprised of the South Asian gentry, holding either large or small parcels of land and being either Hindu or Muslim, who were usually referred to by the Mughals as zamindars—land-holders. Some of them were indigenous people, but others originated from tribal communities of migrants—as did the first group—and had, at one point or another, managed to gain wide-ranging land rights, become landlords, and embed themselves within local society. To elevate their status, they abandoned their semi-nomadic culture and adapted to the norms and traditions of Indic or Islamic settled society. Many of them considered themselves to be a prince of their home region. Their primary aim in entering Mughal service was to raise their position from petty local chiefs to imperial or trans-regional elites, as well as to ensure they had firm control of their existing lands by having their rights officially acknowledged and guaranteed as hereditary holdings (*watan-jagirs*) by the Mughal emperors. Furthermore, the zamindars looked for opportunities to receive more jagirs from the emperor in order to increase their lands and power.

Zamindars played a crucial role in the Mughal Empire as the principal mediators between the imperial court and various parts of society at the local level. They were the caretakers of long-term agrarian development and could also mobilize huge numbers of armed peasants, who could either strengthen or undermine imperial rule. Although the zamindars

---

<sup>19</sup> See Introduction, footnote 5.

were indispensable to them, it was the more mobile jamadars that the Mughal rulers preferred to appoint to the high ranks of the mansabdari elite. This was because these warriors were more willing to be sent to expand the imperial boundaries instead of pursuing the standard zamindari ambitions of consolidating and expanding their own regional domains. The principles of the mansabdari system were, therefore, to keep the mansabdars moving and fully employed in the imperial service and to avoid assigning them long-term responsibilities, thereby reducing their chances of becoming integrated into the regions that they were administering. To the traditional zamindars, the mansabdari system was meant to widen their interests outside the local sphere and bind their loyalties to the imperial center.<sup>20</sup>

Through the mansabdari system, the Mughal rulers were able to maintain the prosperity of their empire for almost two centuries. However, from the second half of the seventeenth century, this approach was no longer effective. Emperor Aurangzeb and his immediate successors were faced with increasing resistance from many of their mansabdars, from both jamadari and zamindari backgrounds, resistance that was expressed in various forms. For instance, there were frequent revolts led by petty local zamindars against non-local mansabdars who had been sent from the imperial center to govern the region and collect revenue, while the more powerful of the zamindars started to resist being appointed to any part of the empire outside their homelands. At the same time, an increasing number of the mansabdars, who had previously been sent all over the empire, showed an unwillingness to be transferred to other regions, as they were no longer willing to risk their lands for an insecure future in other parts of the empire. They traded their nomadic-*cum*-mercenary lives for settled agrarian lordships, thus becoming new zamindars.<sup>21</sup> Such processes of zamindarization were endemic throughout the empire, and accelerated during the reigns of Emperor Aurangzeb's immediate successors. Many historians have discussed the causes of zamindarization during this period. Some blame the inherent flaws in the mansabdari system, while others believe that various external factors—ranging from political and economic to cultural ones—were responsible.<sup>22</sup> However, most historians accept that the policies of and changes at the imperial center—such as: the protracted southern campaigns of Emperor Aurangzeb; his long absence from the northern imperial heartland; and the subsequent wars of successions that impacted the Mughal court—greatly weakened the central power of the Mughals and the efficiency of the mansabdari system.

---

<sup>20</sup> See, especially: Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 31, 34, 42-43; Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 37-97.

<sup>21</sup> Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 79-88, 89, 92.

<sup>22</sup> For examples of the flaws in mansabdari system, see the main introduction. For a further discussion on the causes of Mughal zamindarization, see: Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India*, 1-55.

To return to the most important events at the imperial court during this period, after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb the Mughal Empire experienced a series of wars of succession that lasted for more than a decade and resulted in the enthronement of six emperors between 1707 and 1719. The four most prominent were: Bahadur Shah (r. 1707-1712), Jahandar Shah (r. 1712-1713), Farukhsiyar (r. 1713-1719) and Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-1748). Each change of ruler led to the rise or fall of various prominent warriors, and doubtless the Mughal nobles felt somewhat insecure about their fate at court. Furthermore, while the Mughal nobility had long been divided into conflicting factions based on ethnicity, such as Turanis, Iranis, and Hindustanis (the “local-born” nobles), the wars of succession caused their competition to assume an alarmingly destructive character. For example, during the reigns of Farukhsiyar and Muhammad Shah, the imperial court was dominated by the “Saiyid brothers,” Saiyid Husain Ali and Saiyid Abd Allah Khan, of the Hindustani faction, resulting in the downfall of both the Turani and Irani elites. The dominance of the Saiyids at court grew to such an extent that Emperor Farukhsiyar sensed danger and plotted to eliminate them. Yet his plans were foiled, for he was dethroned by the Saiyids, blinded, imprisoned, and later murdered by unknown hands. The Saiyid brothers, who now became king-makers, enthroned several young Timurid princes, one after the other, all of whom died shortly after due to illness. Finally, the Mughal crown was placed on the head of Muhammad Shah.<sup>23</sup>

Love (*mahabbat*) for and proximity (*taqarrab*) to the ruler were generally deemed to be the highest dignities that any noble could have, and these were always matters of competition between nobles in pre-modern courts.<sup>24</sup> This was certainly true for the Mughal Empire for most of its history, at least up until the first decade of the eighteenth century. From that point on, however, instead of aspiring for high office at the center and the glory of serving near the emperor, many prominent and ambitious Mughal nobles preferred to escape the struggles at court, leave the capital, and find ways to consolidate their power within their own lands. One good example of this trend is the aforementioned Zulfiqar Khan, who conquered Karnatak for the Mughal Empire in 1698. During the reign of Emperor Bahadur Shah, he rose to become the most powerful imperial noble and was given the option of either staying in Delhi as the imperial *wazir* (“prime minister”) or being appointed as viceroy of the Deccan. Zulfiqar Khan chose the latter option. After reaching the Deccan, he wasted no time in strengthening his links with the Marathas and other local chieftains in order to lay the political foundations necessary for his domain. His dream of an independent state, however,

---

<sup>23</sup> Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 264-273.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of this, see, for example: Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 57-58.

did not materialize, as he was soon engulfed by the struggles at the Mughal court and met a tragic end, being executed by Emperor Farukhsiyar. The case of Zulfiqar Khan was merely one more lesson to his contemporaries of how precarious their situation could be if they took part in the conflicts at court during this period. Thus, when Emperor Farukhsiyar appealed to some of the most important Mughal nobles to assist him in ridding the court of the Saiyid brothers, none could be persuaded to risk their own lives to do so, despite being enticed with lavish rewards of high posts and wealth.<sup>25</sup>

A position that often paved the way for a noble to create an independent state was that of regional governor within the Mughal Empire. Until late in Aurangzeb's reign, the Mughal mode of provincial administration had been based on dual rule: a military governor (a subadar for a large province and a *fawjdar* to a small district) and a revenue and civil administrator (or *diwan*) were appointed temporarily to every province. These two were counterpoints, checking and balancing each other's power. As some scholars have noted, during the long decades of Emperor Aurangzeb's campaigns in the South, changes of Mughal governors and lesser officials in the provinces became less frequent. This was because the emperor desperately needed enormous sums of money for his wars, and therefore the officials who proved to be reliable in dispatching provincial revenue to the court—or at least maintained law and order in the provinces under their control—tended to remain in their positions for longer periods of time. Furthermore, in order to ensure an effective system of revenue collection, many of them were given absolute power to perform their duties, and some provincial administrators went on to hold both offices—the subadar and diwan—at the same time. The governors who were in the emperor's good graces could also be granted the right to appoint their own diwans and other assistants. The emperors after Aurangzeb were weak, which led to further loss of imperial control over the provincial rulers. Consequently, opportunities arose for ambitious members of the nobility who wished to gain power at a regional level in order to carve out their own states. Illustrative of the successes that some of them achieved in their efforts are the cases of Murshid Quli Khan in Bengal and Orissa, Barhan al-Mulk in Awadh, and Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah in the Deccan.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 11-14; Yusuf Husain, *The First Nizam: The Life and Times of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah I* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 43-45, 74-75; Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 261, 266, 268, 274-275. For further details of Zulfiqar Khan's life and career, see: *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 270-279.

<sup>26</sup> Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 247-250; Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 41-42.

### 1.3 The Emergence of the Southern Mughal Successor States: The Deccan and Karnatak

Nawabi Karnatak emerged from this wider process of zamindarization, and its early development was closely related to the rise of another southern Mughal successor state, the Deccan Nizamate; consequently, the development of these two polities will be discussed together. The emergence of both states centered around three military war-bands in Mughal service who attempted to use their imperial positions to put down roots in South India: 1) the Iranis and Afghans under Zulfiqar Khan; 2) the Turanis under Nizam al-Mulk; and 3) the Nawayats.<sup>27</sup>

The first group, the Iranis and Afghans, was led by Zulfiqar Khan—the aforementioned Mughal warrior of Irani origin—and his deputy and political successor, the Afghan Da'ud Khan Panni. In 1698, Zulfiqar Khan was appointed the first Karnatak Nawab, and later, in 1702, he was promoted to the post of viceroy of the Deccan where he was in charge of the six Mughal subas of southern India. When he was made governor of the Deccan, Zulfiqar Khan left Da'ud Khan Panni in Karnatak as the new Nawab in order to have influence in both regions. At the same time, Da'ud Khan Panni, following his master's example, attempted to establish his own powerbase in Karnatak by elevating many of his family members and followers—Indo-Afghan descendants in Bijapur—to positions of authority in the area. Karnatak thus became a haven for many Afghan fighters and traders during the decade of Da'ud Khan's governorship.<sup>28</sup> In 1712, when Zulfiqar Khan was recalled to the imperial court (where he soon met his end), Da'ud Khan was appointed to govern the six provinces of the Deccan in his absence. Da'ud Khan continued to expand his influence locally, although his ambitions in the Deccan and Karnatak were temporarily thwarted when Emperor Farukhsiyar transferred him to Gujarat in 1713. Having dominated the South for more than a decade, the Indo-Afghan war-bands enjoyed great success in establishing themselves in various areas between the Deccan and northern Karnatak. Even after the death of Da'ud Khan in the late 1710s, his brother Ibrahim Khan and various other

---

<sup>27</sup> These categorizations on the basis of ethnicity do not mean that all the members of a group belonged to the specified ethnic group. Usually, it was simply the leader or strongest members of the group who determined that group's ethnic identity. For example, when the group's leaders were Turanis, other members, of different backgrounds, could often label themselves or be called Turanis. Here, therefore, the words "warband" or military household differ from "tribe"; a warband or a military household was a group of highly disciplined warriors of mixed ethnic origin that remained open to talented outsiders from outside the leader's caste/kinship relations. A warband could also be comprised of different sub-groups who were ready to be re-allocated or re-grouped under new leaders or "ethnic" labels when circumstances changed. For more information on warbands and ethnicity, see: Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire*, 160-175.

<sup>28</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 100, 108; Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 229-230.

relatives remained in the Deccan and founded semi-independent Afghan Nawabi domains in Kurnool and Cuddapah, thereby transforming themselves into local zamindars.<sup>29</sup>

The second group, formed of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah (aka Chin Kulich Khan) and his Turani followers, began to establish their power in the South after Emperor Farukhsiyar moved Da'ud Khan to Gujarat and appointed the Nizam in his place. Nizam al-Mulk had been one of the most prominent generals of Emperor Aurangzeb and his family were considered the leaders of the Turani faction at the imperial court. Both he and his father, Ghazi al-Din Khan Firuz Jang, played an active role in consolidating Mughal rule in the southern territories. However, after the death of Aurangzeb, a rival faction, the Iranis (led by Zulfiqar Khan), dominated the Mughal court. As a result, Nizam al-Mulk and the Turanis were driven from the imperial stage during the reigns of the two subsequent emperors. It was only in 1713 that Emperor Farukhsiyar invited them back to Delhi and then appointed Nizam al-Mulk as viceroy of the Deccan. As soon as he had returned to the South, the Nizam busied himself re-establishing Mughal imperial authority, which had been in decline ever since the death of Emperor Aurangzeb. He attempted to complete the annexation of the South as well as advance his own ambitions, although his efforts stalled for a decade after he was recalled to Delhi in 1715. One of the Saiyid brothers, Husain Ali Khan, was appointed the new viceroy of the Deccan in his place. The Nizam was offered different provinces as compensation, although, wary of intrigues at court, he chose the comparatively lowly position of fawjdar of Moradabad, a region in which he possessed a large jagir.<sup>30</sup>

It was only in 1719, following the death of Emperor Farukhsiyar, that Nizam al-Mulk was able to re-assert his influence. The Saiyid brothers made conciliatory overtures to the Nizam by offering him the governorship of Malwa, which he accepted, and, when he left Delhi in March 1719, over 1,000 high-ranking Mughal warriors and administrators, most of whom were Turanis who did not wish to live under the Saiyids, decided to accompany him. Evidently, his influence over the Mughal Turani warriors was considerable, and the Saiyid brothers regarded the Nizam as a threat for as long as he was active. Thus, in 1720 they sent troops to Malwa to kill him, but, having been forewarned, the Nizam left the region for the Deccan. Having spent his youth consolidating this region into the Mughal Empire, he knew its resources well and so chose it as a new center from which to build up an independent powerbase, and, shortly after, the Nizam destroyed the Saiyids' forces.

---

<sup>29</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 100; Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 347. For further details on Da'ud Khan Panni's life and career, see: Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 350-361; *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 458-462.

<sup>30</sup> Husain, *The First Nizam*, 41, 53-65; Richards, *Mughal Administrations in Golconda*, 275-276.

Around the same time, his uncle, Muhammad Amin Khan, murdered the Saiyid brothers. After this, and following the sudden death of his influential uncle, the Nizam was appointed to the position of imperial prime minister (wazir). The Nizam decided to return to Delhi again in the hope of revitalizing the imperial center. However, despite initiating many innovative reforms, his programs generated significant opposition and, after being wazir for just two years, he decided to leave the imperial court once and for all and make his way back south.<sup>31</sup> The arrival of the Nizam in the Deccan in 1724 is considered the beginning of the independent Mughal successor state of the Deccan under the Asafjahi dynasty. Thereafter, although the Nizam never openly declared his independence from the imperial government or showed signs of disloyalty to the emperor, he did, in practice, exercise all the powers of a sovereign ruler—such as conducting war, concluding treaties, and conferring titles on officials—without consulting with or securing permission from Delhi.<sup>32</sup>

The third group, the Nawayats, rose to prominence in Karnatak from the 1710s, after Da'ud Khan Panni had been transferred from there to the Deccan. Upon his departure, his position as the Karnatak Nawab was taken by his diwan, Nawab Sa'adat Allah Khan, who was from an Indo-Arab Muslim tribe or community known as the Nawayat (or Nait). The Nawayats are said to have migrated from West Asia and settled mainly in the Konkan—a coastal region in the western Deccan—during the ninth century. The Nawayats were, essentially, an elite Muslim caste, and among their number were religious scholars, ministers at court, warriors, enterprising traders, and large landowners. Some of their members rose to prominence during the rule of the Deccan sultans and, in the late seventeenth century, when the Mughals established their power in the Deccan, able Nawayat leaders, such as Sa'adat Allah Khan, sought opportunities to enter the imperial service.<sup>33</sup> Because of the power struggles in both Delhi and the Deccan, the distant Mughal province of Karnatak was left undisturbed up to the 1710s, which allowed Nawab Sa'adat Allah Khan to establish his power in this region. Similar to the earlier Nawabs, he invited his family and friends from the Nawayat community in the western Deccan to fill the administrative and military positions. They were followed by merchants, artisans, and religious scholars who were related to the community.

---

<sup>31</sup> Husain, *The First Nizam*, 89-95, 113-118, 121-128. For further details on the family's history and the careers of Firuz Jang and Nizam al-Mulk see also: *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 587-592; II: 409-459.

<sup>32</sup> Husain, *The First Nizam*, 128-129, 132, 147; Munis D. Faruqi, "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 1 (2009): 16-17, 22.

<sup>33</sup> For more details on the Nawayat people, see: *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 164-167; Alex Pais, "The Navayats: An Account of Their History and Their Customs," *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* 10, 1 (1919): 41-43; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 97.

It was not until 1724, when Nizam al-Mulk founded the independent Deccan state by bringing the six Mughal provinces under his own direct control, that the repercussions of events in the north were again felt in Karnatak. Desiring to dominate the entire Deccan, the Nizam was confronted by “rebel” forces under the leadership of Mubariz Khan, the Turani governor of Hyderabad who had ruled that city as a quasi-autonomous state for over a decade (1713-1724). Mubariz Khan was supported by various regional governors in the South who nursed grievances against Nizam al-Mulk and feared that their interests in the region would suffer if the Nizam became ruler of the Deccan. Sa’adat Allah Khan, the Nawab of Karnatak, was one of them. However, their resistance was soon quashed.<sup>34</sup> As was usual in the Mughal period, after the rebel leader, Mubariz Khan, was killed, those of his followers who sought pardon and showed deference to the new regime were allowed to retain their positions. Nawab Sa’adat Allah Khan was, therefore, able to continue ruling the Karnatak region and gradually break away from the Nizam’s overlordship of the Deccan. Insofar as Mughal symbols and ceremonies affirming his subordination to the emperor were necessary, the Nawab maintained them. However, he dealt directly with the imperial court and thereby circumvented the authority of the Nizam, who was his immediate superior in the imperial hierarchy. For instance, with no son of his own, Nawab Sa’adat Allah Khan adopted one of his nephews, Dost Ali Khan, and appointed him as heir to the Nawabship of Karnatak. He also made arrangements to receive direct and “private consent” from Emperor Muhammad Shah. After Sa’adat Allah Khan’s death in 1732, Dost Ali became the new Nawab of Karnatak, and his son Safdar Ali Khan would later succeed him without securing the approval of the Nizam. The Nawabship of Karnatak thus became hereditary, based upon the principle of dynastic succession.<sup>35</sup>

The Nizam resented his authority being ignored, but presumably his own circumstances in the Deccan prevented him from taking action against the Nawayats in Karnatak. In the early period of Nawayat rule, power was concentrated in the capital city of Arcot and its vicinity, building new fortresses, mosques, and markets. Various warriors from the Nawayat tribe were sent out to administer the forts and regions. In the 1730s, the Nawayats began to extend their authority down to the southern tip of the peninsula via the military prowess of Nawab Dost Ali’s son, Safdar Ali, and his son-in-law Chanda Sahib. Many of the chief Nayaka and Poligar dynastic states in Trichinopoly, Madurai, and

---

<sup>34</sup> For more information about the career of Mubariz Khan in the Deccan, see: Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 264-305; *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 90-102.

<sup>35</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 39-40.

Tirunelveli were liquidated and those regions incorporated into the Nawabi state.<sup>36</sup> Only the Maratha state in Tanjore was permitted to preserve its semi-autonomous status, albeit with the obligation to pay tribute to the Karnatak Nawab. However, in the late 1730s, at the height of their expansion, internal dissent started to emerge among the Nawayat elites, all of whom had ambitions of becoming independent rulers of autonomous domains. This again points to how deeply entrenched the idea of zamindarization was in the early eighteenth century. Illustrative of this process in Karnatak was Chanda Sahib, the Nawayat prince who had led the conquest of the southern Karnatak regions. Soon after he was appointed governor of Trichinopoly, he used this ancient Tamil city as his stronghold, proclaiming himself the *de facto* ruler of southern Karnatak, independent from the government of his cousin in Arcot. However, his aggression ultimately brought ruin not only upon himself but all of the Nawayat house. His attempt to integrate the Tanjore Maratha state into his territory was used as a pretext by the Marathas of Maharashtra to invade Karnatak and help their “cousins.” The Maratha invasion was also supported by many local Hindu rajas who wished to free themselves from the control of the Muslim Nawabs, while jealousy between the Nawayats prevented them from working together to resist the invaders. Eventually, in 1740, Nawab Dost Ali Khan was killed by the Marathas and Chanda Sahib imprisoned in the western Deccan. Internecine conflict then broke out among the remaining Nawayat princes, who competed for the Karnatak throne for several years, culminating in the assassination of the last two Nawayat Nawabs of Karnatak, in 1742 and 1744.<sup>37</sup> This paved the way for the rise of the Walajah family to become the second dynasty of Karnatak Nawabs, details of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

---

<sup>36</sup> Husain, *The First Nizam*, 131, 147, 207-208; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 152-154.

<sup>37</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 50-52; Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 148-149. For further details on the lives and careers of the Nawayat Nawabs in Karnatak, see: Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 363-395; *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 654-655.



## Chapter 2: The Walajahs

But the King of kings, the Glorious and the Most High Lord had granted me this kingdom as a hereditary right; the Pādshāh of Hind was pleased to select me for the administration of the important affairs of this kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 The Walajahs and the Mughals

The Walajahs were a northern Indo-Muslim family from the *qasaba* town of Gopamau, in the region of Awadh, which they claimed had been their homeland since the thirteenth or fourteenth century. As Juan Cole states, *qasaba* were typical small northern Indian towns with rural or semi-urban environments, containing local trade depots with small permanent bazaars, small forts, mosques, and irrigation facilities. Despite their peripheral nature, such towns fostered a literate culture amongst their Muslim noble families that helped enable them to send their sons to the imperial court as civil officers and religious scholars and thereby to maintain links with the imperial center.<sup>2</sup> The Walajahs were one such family.

According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* and the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, during their early period in Hindustan the family's patriarchs were mostly religious scholars. Many of them were appointed to the position of Muslim judge (*qadi*) in various towns during the period of the Delhi sultanate. However, their involvement in state affairs stopped there. The family's first significant connection with the Mughal Empire was forged in the mid-seventeenth century, during the lifetime of Muhammad Anwar, the grandfather of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. Muhammad Anwar made his way to the imperial court and offered his services to Emperor Shah Jahan, who appointed him manager of the chamber for praying (*tasbihkhana*). Leaving the court during the succession struggle, he returned there sometime during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, who granted him his previous post. When Aurangzeb led the Mughal forces to South India in 1683, Muhammad Anwar was one of the servants who accompanied the emperor. However, shortly after his arrival in the Deccan, Muhammad Anwar fell ill and passed away, his body being interred in his hometown.<sup>3</sup> A few years later, his son Anwar al-Din (1674-1749)—who would be the father of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan—left his hometown in Gopamau to join the emperor's "victorious army," which at that time must have

---

<sup>1</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 75-76.

<sup>2</sup> Juan R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 75.

<sup>3</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 14-15; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 58.

been a royal encampment somewhere on a Deccan battlefield. Anwar al-Din was first appointed to serve in the *diwankhana*—the imperial male guest room. Following Aurangzeb's death, Anwar al-Din Khan went on to serve Emperor Bahadur Shah (r. 1707-1712). After this, references to Anwar al-Din Khan resurface during the reign of Emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-1748), who granted him the post of *naib-wazir* (deputy to the wazir); at that time, the wazir was Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah, the leader of the Turani group discussed in the previous chapter. When Nizam al-Mulk moved south to establish the Deccan state in 1724, Anwar al-Din Khan was one of his followers.<sup>4</sup>

The eighteenth-century biographical survey *Maathir al-Umara* gives more details regarding Anwar al-Din Khan's career. According to its authors, when he first met Emperor Aurangzeb, he was given the mansabdari rank of 400 and position of *amin* (commissioner) for the *jizya* (poll-tax), first in the district of Gulbarga, and later also in Sangmanir. At that time, he became a close friend of Khwaja Muhammad Amanat Khan, a prominent official under Emperor Aurangzeb.<sup>5</sup> This Mughal notable helped develop Anwar al-Din Khan's career in the imperial service: when the former became *mutasaddi* (superintendent or manager) of the port of Surat, Anwar al-Din Khan was appointed as its *jizya* commissioner; when Amanat Khan went to fight in Malwa, Anwar al-Din Khan, who had performed his duties well, was appointed as his *mukhtar* (manager); when Amanat Khan was promoted to governor of Hyderabad, Anwar al-Din Khan was appointed his diwan for that province. At some point after the death of Amanat Khan in 1700, Anwar al-Din Khan became an associate of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah. The Nizam also helped him to gain promotion within the empire, becoming *fawjdar* of Kora Jahanabad, in Allahabad. Afterwards, due to a problem, he was removed from this position and went again to Nizam Asaf Jah, who at that time was beginning to establish an autonomous state in the Deccan.<sup>6</sup>

Between the 1720s and the 1740s, Anwar al-Din Khan was appointed by the Nizam as governor of several districts in coastal Andhra Pradesh. According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, these were Chicacole (aka Srikakulum), Rajbhandar, and Masulipatnam, while the modern historian Yusuf Husain adds Ellore and Rajahmundry to this list.<sup>7</sup> Although these districts were by no means vast nor important political centers in the same way that Aurangabad and Hyderabad were, they were fertile coastal regions and thriving commercial centers with trade

---

<sup>4</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 32-39.

<sup>5</sup> Further details regarding Amanat Khan can be found in *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 230-231.

<sup>6</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 1065-1066.

<sup>7</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 38-42; Husain, *The First Nizam*, 225.

routes to other ports in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>8</sup> They were thus coveted by powerful rulers in the region. The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* depicts Anwar al-Din Khan and his family as having played a vital role in subjugating petty local Muslim and Hindu chiefs and in quelling the aggression of the Marathas in these regions. Prior to becoming the Nawab of Karnatak, Anwar al-Din Khan was promoted to the position of governor of Hyderabad, the most important province in the Deccan.<sup>9</sup> Such appointments help highlight the high status that Anwar al-Din Khan enjoyed among the followers of the Nizam. They also reflect the significant career transformation of members of the Walajah family. While their ancestors in the pre-Mughal era had mostly been religious scholars, both Muhammad Anwar and Anwar al-Din Khan served in the imperial court in civil positions, but, after only a few decades, the latter became a Mughal warrior-*cum*-administrator, leading his own warband under the banner of Nizam al-Mulk.

Shortly before Anwar al-Din Khan followed the Nizam south, his third son, Muhammad Ali Khan, was born to his second wife, Bibi Fakhr al-Nisa Begam, in Delhi in 1723. The boy spent his early years in North India with his mother, first in Delhi and then in his family's ancestral hometown of Gopamau. When he turned six, his father ordered the family to move to the South to join him. This turned out to be a permanent departure from North India for Muhammad Ali Khan, who would spend the rest of his life in the Deccan and Karnatak.<sup>10</sup> He was one of five sons of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan. His eldest brother, Badr al-Islam Khan Bahadur, lived and died in the North, while Muhammad Ali Khan himself, together with three of his siblings—Muhammad Mahfuz Khan Bahadur, Abd al-Wahhab Khan Bahadur, and Muhammad Najib Allah Khan Bahadur—stayed with their father in the Deccan, and from a young age assisted him and Nizam al-Mulk in stabilizing that area.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 Walajahi Karnatak

According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah always wanted to bring Karnatak under his control. However, the opportunity to do so did not arise until civil war broke out among the Nawayat princes in the early 1740s, leading to the Maratha intervention and the assassination of Nawab Safdar Ali Khan in 1742. Proclaiming that he was acting on Mughal orders to oust the Marathas and restore peace to the country, Nizam al-Mulk marched into Karnatak with an army of 280,000 men, and Anwar al-Din Khan was summoned to join

---

<sup>8</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 136, 159.

<sup>9</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 40-51.

<sup>10</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 5-6; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 90.

<sup>11</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 30-31; *Maathir al-Umara*, II:1066-1067.

the Nizam's army. In early 1744, after incarcerating many members of the Nawayat elite, Nizam al-Mulk chose to enthrone the underage Nawayat heir, Sa'adat Allah Khan II, the son of the late Nawab, Safdar Ali Khan, as ruler of Karnatak. The fact that the Nizam did not dare put an end to the dynasty suggests that the Nawayats were still very powerful in the region. However, he took the opportunity to establish his rule there and appointed his own officials as regents to the underage Nawayat Nawab. Initially, the Nizam made Khwaja Abd Allah Khan, one of his Turani officials, regent, but the latter's sudden death led to the appointment of Anwar al-Din Khan.<sup>12</sup> Just four months later, in July 1744, the last Nawayat Nawab was murdered by an Afghan soldier backed by an unidentified faction. Various rumors of plots circulated in the capital. Some believed that the murderer was the Nawayat prince Murtaza Ali Khan, the half-uncle of the deceased, who had killed the previous Nawab and was thus afraid that the latter's son, Sa'adat Allah Khan II, might exact revenge when he grew up. Others believed it was the regent, Anwar al-Din Khan, and possibly also the Nizam himself, who had plotted the murder, as it was they who benefitted most from the assassination, although it was said that the Nizam reproached Anwar al-Din Khan for failing to protect the young boy.<sup>13</sup> Yet, immediately, the Nizam used the opportunity to put an end to Nawayat rule and reintegrate Karnatak into his Nizamate by appointing Anwar al-Din Khan as the new Nawab of the area.

### **2.3 The Nawayat-Walajah Wars**

Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan enjoyed a spell of relative peace from 1744-1748. Yet, after this time, stability both there and in the Deccan was compromised by a series of wars that lasted for decades. These wars were the result of two main events. The first was the death of Nizam al-Mulk in June 1748 in the Deccan and the succession of his second son, Nasir Jang (r. 1748-1750), as the new Nizam, whose accession was immediately challenged by his nephew, Prince Muzaffar Jang. The second was the release of the Nawayat, Chanda Sahib, who had been a Maratha hostage since 1741. Chanda Sahib returned to Karnatak with the goal of restoring his family's dynastic rule, hence directly challenging the Walajahs.

The resulting conflicts within the two states were intensified as result of the formation of two trans-regional alliances. In one, the new Nizam of the Deccan, Nasir Jang, and Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan of Karnatak decided to support each other in order to maintain their positions. In the other, Muzaffar Jang made an alliance with Chanda Sahib to seize the two

---

<sup>12</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 82-83; *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 84-85.

<sup>13</sup> *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, I: 256-258; Husain, *The First Nizam*, 226-227.

thrones for themselves. The situation was further complicated when new but powerful groups of jamadars within the South Asian military labor market—the forces of the European Companies—joined the struggle.<sup>14</sup> The French Company (CIO), under Governor Dupleix, decided to ally its powerful army with Muzaffar Jang and Chanda Sahib because it felt that its power in coastal Karnatak had been diminishing under the rule of Anwar al-Din Khan’s family, to the advantage of the EIC.<sup>15</sup> Hostilities started when the combined forces of Muzaffar Jang, Chanda Sahib, and the French invaded Karnatak. As described in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Anwar al-Din Khan, who was already 77 years of age, foresaw his own death and so chose his third son, Muhammad Ali Khan, who was then governing Trichinopoly, to stay behind and defend Karnatak, and advised his son to form an alliance with the British if required.<sup>16</sup>

	The Walajah Alliance	The Nawayat Alliance
Karnatak	Anwar al-Din Khan (the father) Muhammad Ali Khan (the son)	Chanda Sahib
The Deccan	Nasir Jang (the second son of Nizam al-Mulk)	Muzaffar Jang (a grandson of Nizam al-Mulk)
European	The British (EIC)	The French (CIO)

*Diagram showing the two camps of the trans-regional alliances during the Nawayat-Walajah wars*

This suggestion by the elderly Nawab, as well as the efforts of all factions to form alliances in the face of this power vacuum in the Deccan and Karnatak, is reminiscent of Wink’s analysis of fitna, a political mechanism or process of state (or power) expansion. Fitna essentially

<sup>14</sup> I will discuss the entry of European warbands into the South Asian military labor market further in Chapter Four.

<sup>15</sup> The conflict between the Walajahs and the French CIO in Pondicherry began in the year 1746, because the French attacked the British EIC in Madras against the order of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan who had requested both Europeans to stay in good terms in his territory. Thereafter, the feeling of mutual hostility between the Walajah dynasty and the French gradually developed and minor quarrels frequently occurred during 1746-1749. Eventually the French decided to join Muzaffar and Chanda Sahib to eliminate the Walajahs. For the details of their conflicts and how the British EIC had been involved in these events, see: *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, I: 336; II: 178, 201, 291-293; 304, 311; III: 125-127, 136-137, 174, 217, 303, 310-314; 358-360, 367-383; Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 388-389, 427.

<sup>16</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 139.

means the abandonment of one allegiance for another, and thus always generates shifting sovereign rights. From a Western perspective, such an action has often been viewed as an act of “rebellion” or “treason.” But in the pre-modern Islamic world, Wink suggests, such acts were viewed as “no more than the forging of alliances” and were a practical and legitimate exercise of state power.<sup>17</sup> Unlike pre-modern Europe, political expansion in many parts of the Islamic world rested not so much the use of pure military power but on the manipulation on networks of alliances and rivals, i.e. the acts of *fitna*. Wink uses this concept to explain the rise of the eighteenth-century Maratha state and suggests that it is applicable to many other South Asian polities of the period. In eighteenth-century South Asia, the scramble for power after the decline of Mughal authority meant that virtually anyone with sufficient military backing could exercise *fitna*. They could strike up alternative alliances and “entice away” their enemy’s supporters to build their own power. *Fitna*, in fact, significantly reduced the chances of actual physical battle; as eighteenth-century South Asia has shown, due to the widespread of such practice, big battles involving entire armies and seeing significant violence—not including minor skirmishing—were the exception rather than the rule.<sup>18</sup>

Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan’s army in 1749 was quickly defeated by their opponents. The elderly Nawab was killed, and many of his family members and servants taken prisoner. The death of the Nawab is described differently in the various accounts, which I will not describe in detail here. However, one point is worth noting. The official Walajah chronicle, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, blames their defeat on the treachery of certain individuals in the dead Nawab’s army, which led to him being attacked by three enemy soldiers. The one treacherous figure named in the chronicle is Muhammad Husain Khan Tahir, a Nawayat noble who had been integrated into Walajah service, while the three killers were supposedly Yusuf Khan, Abd al-Qadir, and Munawwar Khan. Munawwar Khan was the *sipahdar* (military commander) of Kurnool, an Afghan, and a descendant of Da’ud Khan Panni.<sup>19</sup> The Nawayats and the Afghans both played important roles in the Walajah court and they will be discussed later. This battle is also a good example of the concept of *fitna* at work, since, although it involved tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides, it was primarily won by bribery, treachery, and the murder of a ruler.

After his father’s death, Muhammad Ali Khan became the family’s new leader and immediately initiated a process of *fitna*. He gathered his remaining forces and paid a ransom

---

<sup>17</sup> Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, 6, 21-35, 54-55.

<sup>19</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 75, 110-111, 138-147; Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 114-115.

to his enemies to secure the release of all his captive family members and warriors. He wrote letters and sent presents to Nizam Nasir Jang in Aurangabad and the emperor in Delhi, requesting formal recognition of him (and not his Nawayat rival) as the new Nawab of Karnatak and asking for their immediate military assistance to suppress “the rebels.”<sup>20</sup> At the same time, Muhammad Ali Khan also approached another potential ally, the EIC, offering them the valuable Karnatak district of Poonamallee as a jagir in exchange for British military assistance.<sup>21</sup> The British were evidently concerned by the French alliance with two potential candidates for the Deccan and Karnatak thrones, and they also enjoyed cordial relations with the Walajah family, who in previous years had assisted them in securing their Coromandel settlements that had been besieged by the French. Hence, they agreed to send military aid to Muhammad Ali Khan, despite the fact that it was, in this early period, relatively limited, as British involvement in local politics was still half-hearted. This was in stark contrast to the French, who strongly supported the Nawab’s enemy.<sup>22</sup>

In 1750, Nizam Nasir Jang marched down from the Deccan with a large army. He successfully regained northern Karnatak, imprisoned his rebellious nephew Muzaffar Jang, and officially confirmed Muhammad Ali Khan as the rightful Nawab. However, this situation was short-lived. In December 1750, Nizam Nasir Jang was murdered by some of his allies, in the form of the three Afghan Nawabs of Kurnool (Himmat Bahadur), Cuddapah (Abd al-Nabi Khan), and Savanur, as part of a conspiracy with the French. Muzaffar Jang was released, and he immediately proclaimed himself the new Nizam of the Deccan, while the Nawayat prince Chanda Sahib was then appointed the new Nawab of Karnatak. Lacking recognition by his Mughal masters, Muhammad Ali Khan was now reduced to merely being a pretender. However, less than three months later, Muzaffar Jang was also murdered. Fearing a consequent vacuum of power, the French promptly threw their support behind another potential candidate for the Deccan throne, Salabat Jang, the third son of Nizam al-Mulk.<sup>23</sup> In Karnatak, Chanda Sahib gradually seized more land and made himself master of the northern regions. Various local officials and zamindars, who were either relatives of the Nawayat dynasty or old servants who were still loyal to them, gave him their full support. Many others, willing to back any winner, saw that the Nawayat prince was supported by the new Nizam and the French and so also pledged their loyalty to him. Many of Muhammad Ali

---

<sup>20</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 24-27.

<sup>21</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Fort St David Consultation, 17 Dec. 1750, no page.

<sup>22</sup> For details of the assistance rendered by the Walajah family to the EIC during the First Carnatic War (1745-1748) between the British and the French, see: *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, III: 360, 367-383; Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 340-343, 372-375.

<sup>23</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 398-408; Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 136-139, 145-146.

Khan's family members and servants, led by his older brother Muhammad Mahfuz Khan and younger brother Muhammad Najib Allah Khan, sensed the change in the Walajah family's fortunes and decided to return north to Hyderabad, their former stronghold in the Deccan. Muhammad Ali Khan himself, however, did not want to give up. He took a different route, south to Trichinopoly, accompanied only by a small group of loyal companions.<sup>24</sup>

Both claimants to the throne of Karnatak, Muhammad Ali Khan and Chanda Sahib, sought to gain it using both military and diplomatic means. In early 1751, Chanda Sahib was in a far more advantageous position than was Muhammad Ali Khan. As the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* notes, possibly with some degree of exaggeration, Chanda Sahib's force was 60,000-strong and included horses, infantry, 2,000 Europeans, 10,000 "Negroes," and 100 French cannons. He is said to have rapidly subjugated various southern Karnatak districts, before marching to besiege Trichinopoly and force Muhammad Ali Khan to submit. Meanwhile, the latter, cornered in his fort, became seriously ill and was on the verge of death. Seeing their leader in dire health, all the neighboring Poligars changed side and two-thirds of his own army deserted him. In despair, all of his companions decided to sue for peace. However, the tables were soon turned as Muhammad Ali Khan recovered from his illness and resumed the fight.<sup>25</sup>

His efforts to secure Karnatak during this period had two main thrusts. First, he was working on the Mughal imperial stage. As such, he sent letters with valuable presents to Delhi: one to the Mughal emperor, Ahmad Shah (r. 1748-1754), requesting the latter's recognition and confirmation of his rule, and another to Ghazi al-Din Khan, the eldest son of Nizam al-Mulk, who held a high position at the imperial court. According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, after news of Nasir Jang's death reached Delhi, the emperor nominated Ghazi al-Din Khan to be the new ruler of the Deccan (rather than Salabat Jang, the third son of Nizam al-Mulk, as Muhammad Ali Khan's enemies then claimed). Muhammad Ali Khan expressed his allegiance to Ghazi al-Din Khan—as his father had done to Nizam al-Mulk—and convinced him to come to the South in order to right the wrongs committed by Chanda Sahib's forces.<sup>26</sup> However, as it was uncertain when or whether assistance from the North and/or the Deccan would come, Muhammad Ali Khan poured the rest of his energy into forming regional alliances. He sent representatives to negotiate with all the powers who were stakeholders in Karnatak—the rulers of Mysore, the Marathas, the numerous Karnatak

---

<sup>24</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 58-59.

<sup>25</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 69-70, 76.

<sup>26</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 79-82.

zamindars (namely Tanjore and various Poligars), and the EIC—and in the process offered rich rewards in return for their military and financial assistance.

One point is particularly worth noting here. During this chaotic period, although every claimant to any regional throne sought official acknowledgement from the Mughal emperor, this legitimation was less important for local actors than the results of the military operations and diplomatic negotiations that took place around the subcontinent. Any local party in the Deccan or Karnatak could seize power and, without any hesitation, claim that they were the rightful Nizam or Nawab before receiving official Mughal recognition. Furthermore, having no fear of Mughal retribution, all of them falsely claimed that they had received letters of support and official acknowledgment from the Mughal emperor for their claims. Such fabrications were frequently used in their diplomatic maneuvers with other power holders in order to secure allegiances and/or attempt to bluff their enemies. However, these attempts were usually of no consequence because Mughal endorsement of a local ruler was hardly regarded as decisive in the middle of a war.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, however, during this period the EIC continued to hold Mughal legitimation in high regard. For one thing, the EIC was afraid of incurring the wrath of both the Mughals and the rightful Nizams, as it feared such could greatly damage their interests. More importantly, EIC servants needed legitimate reasons to defend their actions to the Court of Directors in London. As observed by Michael Fisher, unlike some other European companies who, in the same period, virtually denied the authority of local polities, the EIC repeatedly emphasized that it supported the rights of the legitimate rulers, not only in Karnatak, but also elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> And because it regarded the signing of treaties as crucial for the establishment of diplomatic relations, the possession of an imperial *farman* (royal edict) confirming the legitimate status of the power-holders was indispensable. In its correspondence throughout this period, it is clear that the EIC often pressed Muhammad Ali Khan to push his interests at the Mughal court in order to get official sanction for his—and consequently their—activities. Understanding the high British regard for proof of legitimacy, Muhammad Ali Khan consistently emphasized his status as the Mughal-backed governor in his correspondence with the EIC and sought its cooperation in the name of his Mughal masters, either the emperor or the Deccan Nizam.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, in his letters to the EIC, the Nawab wrote that he had obtained farmans from the Great Mughal and the rightful Nizams of the Deccan (first Nasir Jang and later Ghazi al-Din Khan),

---

<sup>27</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 2 Oct. 1752, no page.

<sup>28</sup> Fisher, *The Politics of the British Annexation of India*, 97.

<sup>29</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Fort St David Consultation, 18 Oct. 1750, no page.

in which they ordered the British to support their representative.<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Ali Khan's enemies also used similar tactics, sending the EIC letters claiming that the Mughal court had ordered the British to withdraw their support from Muhammad Ali Khan. The EIC, however, could prove that some of these "imperial letters," presented by both sides, were forgeries.<sup>31</sup> As such, I would argue that the principal reason why the Nawab went to great lengths to establish contact with and request recognition from the Mughal court during this early period was not in the hope of acquiring political legitimacy or immediate military assistance from them but to gain credibility in his dealings with the EIC.

When Muhammad Ali Khan sought to begin the process of fitna, it was the British who were the first to respond positively to his request, although they were almost blackmailed into assisting the Nawab as the latter threatened that he would enter into an agreement with the French if the British were unwilling to offer him assistance. The British, moreover, showed a strong commitment to help the Nawab regain control of the region because the Nawab agreed to cover the full cost of the wars.<sup>32</sup> However, it was only after the middle of 1751 that the situation took a positive turn, when the EIC decided to send reinforcements to Karnatak under the command of its able commander Stringer Lawrence, while also promoting Robert Clive from Madras civil servant to military commander. In August 1751, having agreed to follow the challenging plan proposed by Muhammad Ali Khan, Clive and Muhammad Madina Ali Khan, one of the Nawab's generals, regained control of the capital city of Arcot and its surroundings. The success of Clive in using only 200 men to defend the place against enemy forces numbering some 15,000, who tried in vain to retake it, significantly turned the tide of the war. By thus opening up another front, this time in the north, they managed to distract their enemies and reduce the pressure on Trichinopoly.<sup>33</sup> To unexpectedly lose Arcot was, in turn, a massive blow to the prestige of Chanda Sahib and the French among their South Indian supporters. Simultaneously, it was the first time the EIC's military talent—which, up until the Siege of Arcot, had appeared to be much poorer than that of the French—was clearly evident.<sup>34</sup> This—the first time that the South Asian princes may have thought that the British might, after all, be a match for the French—greatly helped Muhammad Ali Khan to gain the fruits of the diplomatic labors that

---

<sup>30</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Fort St David Consultation, 18 Feb. 1751, no page; 1 Apr. 1751, no page; Madras Consultation, 8 Jun. 1752, no page; 10 Aug. 1752, no page.

<sup>31</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Fort St David Consultation, 29 Aug. 1751, no page; 17 Oct. 1751, no page; Madras Consultation, 2 Oct. 1752, no page; 24 Sep. 1753, 218.

<sup>32</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Fort St David Consultation, 17 Jan. 1751, no page.

<sup>33</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Fort St David Consultation, 16 Mar. 1752, no page; Love, *Vestiges of the Old Madras*, II: 428.

<sup>34</sup> For details of Clive's siege of Arcot, see: Robert Harvey, *Clive: The Life and Death of a British Emperor* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), 65-80.

he had invested in other directions. He successfully convinced one ambitious Mysore prince, Karachuri Nand Raj, the younger brother of the-then Mysore raja, to enter into an alliance with him instead of going over to his rivals. The prince not only loaned Muhammad Ali Khan an enormous sum of money, but also, and at his own expense, marched to Trichinopoly more than 5,000 Maratha mercenary horsemen and 10,000 infantrymen, led by the Maratha general Murari Rao. Soon afterwards, the Maratha raja of Tanjore and the Tondaiman raja of Pudukkottai also sent military contingents to Muhammad Ali Khan.<sup>35</sup>

In mid-1752, the combined forces of Muhammad Ali Khan's allies (primarily consisting of the EIC, Mysore, Tanjore, and Tondaiman) fought his enemies, and Chanda Sahib was finally defeated and killed. Many French soldiers were taken prisoner, which forced Governor Dupleix to negotiate a temporary peace with Muhammad Ali Khan and the British.<sup>36</sup> The situation in the Deccan also helped the Nawab. In November 1752, Muhammad Ali Khan received news that his ally and the claimant to the Deccan throne, Ghazi al-Din Khan, had died. As a consequence, Salabat Jang (r. 1751-1762), the French candidate to the Deccan throne became its ruler. This coincided with a Maratha invasion of the Deccan, which forced the new Nizam to rethink his political strategy; not wanting to wage wars on multiple fronts, Salabat Jang (temporarily) became less antagonistic toward Muhammad Ali Khan and instead requested that the latter and his allies, the British, make peace with the French.<sup>37</sup>

#### **2.4 Muhammad Ali Khan: Sole Ruler of Karnatak**

The death of Chanda Sahib and the retreat of Nizam Salabat Jang from Karnatak were crucial turning points for Muhammad Ali Khan's ambitions to rule the region. However, this by no means signified the end of his struggles. The wars between Muhammad Ali Khan and the French, who had given their support to Raza Sahib, Chanda Sahib's son, as a new candidate, continued, while most local governors and Poligars in Karnatak were still in a state of rebellion and refused to acknowledge his sovereignty. Furthermore, by this time, Muhammad Ali Khan had exhausted the treasury and many of his mercenaries mutinied over unpaid salaries.

The Nawab's alliance with Mysore also crumbled. Some time before, in order to secure its assistance, Muhammad Ali Khan had promised to grant its prince, Karachuri Nand

---

<sup>35</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 168; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 89-94, 100-101.

<sup>36</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 8 Jun. 1752, no page; 15 Jun. 1752, no page.

<sup>37</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 14 Dec. 1752, no page.

Raj, the district of Trichinopoly. Yet Muhammad Ali Khan had only made that agreement in a desperate bid to buy time. He had never had any real intention of giving up such a strategically important area, one which was also regarded as the southern capital of Karnatak, and, after the conflict had ended, he attempted to offer other areas to the prince instead. In retaliation, the latter stopped paying the Maratha mercenaries who had participated in the war, causing them to start plundering Karnatak. The loss of these old allies risked leaving Muhammad Ali Khan vulnerable to a French attack. With mounting debts and many enemies, the Nawab's situation was in a precarious state in late 1752. Ironically, however, this difficult situation for the Nawab was also a central factor in allowing him to retain the throne, for although the Mysore prince's alliance with Muhammad Ali Khan was greatly strained, the former hesitated from severing relations with the Nawab completely because he feared that, if he did so, the money he was owed would never be repaid.<sup>38</sup> For the same reason, Muhammad Ali Khan's debts to the EIC also ensured that the Company became his staunch ally. By late 1752, the EIC had decided, in contrast to its prior position, that it needed to support him irrespective of whether the Nawab had acted ethically in the conflict (since he had gone back on promises made to the prince of Mysore) or whether he had received Mughal legitimation to rule Karnatak. It would appear that it saw its fate as being deeply intertwined with that of Muhammad Ali Khan:

In regard to the King of Mysore as he has certainly advanced large sums of money on the Nabob's account, [...] we think he ought in justice to assign some rents for the payment, [but] if the King should not be satisfied with this but declare openly he will be the aggressor and we must assist the Nabob against him as an enemy.<sup>39</sup>

[...] it will still be the Company's interest to support him [the Nawab] to the utmost extremity not only in prospect of being reimbursed what [money] the Company are in advance of his account but because the withdrawing our assistance would inevitably bring on his ruin. The consequence of which would be that the Arcot would become a prey to the French and the [British] Company be excluded from any investment there.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 29 Jun. 1752, no page; 8 Jul. 1752, no page; 13 Jul. 1752, no page; 28 Aug. 1752, no page; 13 Nov. 1752, no page; 3 Jan. 1753, no page; 15 Jan. 1753, no page; 17 Mar. 1753, no page; see also Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 177-180.

<sup>39</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 16 Sep. 1752, no page.

<sup>40</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 4 Sep. 1753, 191.

With the EIC as his ally, Muhammad Ali Khan was able to continue the wars against his many rivals for several years when, in 1753, Mysore and the Maratha forces under Murari Rao joined the French and together attacked the Nawab. The strong British support also raised the Nawab's credibility in the eyes of the Karnatak zamindars, and many of them decided to send him further military support.<sup>41</sup> The situation became even more favorable for Muhammad Ali Khan in 1754, when the French government in Paris sensed that Governor Dupleix's ventures into Indian politics had gone too far and decided to recall him. In October of that year, the new French governor of Pondicherry agreed a truce with the EIC not to interfere in the disputes of the Indian princes in the region. Mysore was then left to fight for Trichinopoly without an ally. Around the same time, news broke that the Marathas and the Deccan Nizam were planning to invade Mysore together. These circumstances compelled Karachuri Nand Raj to withdraw from Karnatak in April 1755 without having been able to extract payment for the assistance that he had rendered to the Nawab.<sup>42</sup> By this time, Muhammad Ali Khan had more or less secured the position of Nawab of Karnatak from the perspective of other Indian rulers, although various internal problems in the war-torn state of Karnatak still awaited his attention. After the death of his father, his family and court were in disarray; his brothers eagerly searched for opportunities to establish independent domains, and most of his vassals had failed or were refusing to pay tribute.<sup>43</sup> Adding to the internal chaos, hostilities broke out between the Nawab-British alliance and the French (who supported the Nawayat prince Raza Sahib) once more, in the Third Carnatic War (1756-1763), a conflict that was part of the Seven Years War fought between the two European nations. Hence, for another decade, Muhammad Ali Khan was both facing external wars and attempting to reform the Karnatak state.<sup>44</sup>

It was only after the mid-1760s that the Nawab experienced a period of relative stability, because by that time many of his internal rivals had been subjugated. On the wider South Asian stage, he also made diplomatic progress, receiving official recognition from all power holders of any significance. These diplomatic overtures can be divided into three main phases: 1) the Treaty of Paris (1763); 2) the Mughal farman (1765); and 3) the treaty with the Deccan (1768).

---

<sup>41</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 27 Aug. 1753, 174.

<sup>42</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 182-183.

<sup>43</sup> These internal issues will be discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>44</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 189-197.

First, in 1763, after the Nawab-British alliance had won the Third Carnatic War, Muhammad Ali Khan was acknowledged as the lawful Nawab of Karnatak by both the British and the French in the eleventh article of the Treaty of Paris.<sup>45</sup> The negotiations surrounding this were mainly carried out by the British, and the Nawab played no role in the discussions leading up to the signing of the treaty. However, the significance of the treaty for local politics lay in the fact that the Nawayats could no longer rally the support of the French in their bid for the Karnatak throne. It also guaranteed Muhammad Ali Khan a long period of undisturbed peace, as war between the Nawab and the French did not resume until the 1780s, when he supported the British in their bid to take Pondicherry.

However, what was far more significant for Muhammad Ali Khan was the farman he received from the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II (r. 1759-1806) in 1765. This farman officially confirmed his position as ruler of Karnatak. On this occasion, the Nawab was also given the title of “Walajah” and the right to pass on the throne of Karnatak hereditarily to his successors. Furthermore, Karnatak was declared independent from the Deccan suba, which meant that, in the nominal Mughal hierarchy, Nawabi Karnatak was elevated to equal status with the Deccan Nizamate.<sup>46</sup> From then on, the farman was seen and often used by the Nawab as the main source of his political legitimacy. The means by which he acquired this farman is also worth noting. According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, the Nawab initiated these efforts in the early 1760s, when he learned of the coronation of the new emperor. He sent his *wakil* (envoy) Khwaja Shamsu al-Din Khan to offer *arddasht* (a type of ceremonial letter) and *nadhr* (a symbolic monetary gift to show respect) to the emperor and report to him the conquest of French Pondicherry. The *wakil* did not go directly to Delhi, but instead first went to meet General Robert Clive in Bengal. Clive, as previously mentioned, was an old friend of the Nawab in the EIC, and had helped him take back Arcot from Chanda Sahib and the French in 1751, the step which helped turn around the Nawab’s fortunes. Now, Clive was the EIC’s governor in Bengal (1765-1767) and also Commander-in-Chief of the EIC forces in India. As the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* narrates, the two men—Clive and Shamsu al-Din—then went to the imperial court together. The process of requesting the farman went smoothly; the emperor praised the Nawab for the capture of Pondicherry, accepted his *nadhr*, and granted him presents and titles, as well as giving other titles and mansabs to his five sons.<sup>47</sup> Yet why did the Nawab not send his *wakil* directly to the imperial court? And why was the *wakil* first

---

<sup>45</sup> IOR, H/286, HOME, Papers Relative to the Succession to the Nawabship of the Carnatic 1763 to 1784, 5-8; Lucy S. Sutherland, “The East India Company and the Peace of Paris,” *The English Historical Review* 62, 243 (1947): 180.

<sup>46</sup> IOR, H/286, HOME, Papers Relative to the Succession to the Nawabship of the Carnatic 1763 to 1784, 6-7, 12-14.

<sup>47</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 272-273.

sent to Bengal to meet Clive? These are questions that the Walajah chronicle does not answer. In reality, the granting of this farman was primarily the consequence of Robert Clive's negotiations with Emperor Shah Alam II in the aftermath of the Battle of Buxar (1764). This historic battle was fought between the EIC forces, led by Clive, on one side, and the combined armies of the Mughal emperor, the Nawab of Bengal, and the Nawab of Awadh on the other, which ended in a decisive victory for the British.<sup>48</sup> As the vanquished, the three northern Indian powers were obliged to sign various treaties and agreements that granted the EIC significant wealth and political power. As a further repercussion, the Nizam of the Deccan lost part of his territory (see below). As an ally of the victor, the Nawab of Karnatak, on the other hand, had the opportunity to significantly advance his interests. The farman was thus primarily the result of political maneuvers conducted by the British to please their local ally, and they probably viewed this approach as a long-term diplomatic investment in the Karnatak Nawab. However, from another perspective, the acquisition of this farman may also be seen as the fruit of the Nawab's long financial and diplomatic investment in the EIC, of both the corporation as a whole and individual servants.<sup>49</sup>

The farman officially granted the Nawab independence from the Deccan, but this was by no means something that its ruler, the Nizam, could accept. This led to the third phase of diplomacy on the part of the Nawab, which was designed to gain the recognition of the Deccan Nizam. An opportunity to do so arose not long after, when war broke out between the Nawab-EIC alliance, on the one side, and the joint forces of Hyder Ali (the sultan of Mysore, r. 1761-1782) and Nizam Ali Khan of the Deccan (r. 1762-1803) on the other. This conflict is known as the First Anglo-Mysore War. For a brief background to the war, after Hyder Ali had occupied the Mysore throne, tensions between Mysore and Karnatak—two ambitious powers who shared a common border—reached boiling point.<sup>50</sup> In 1766, Hyder Ali Sultan complained that the Karnatak Nawab had committed atrocities against his people, while the Nawab argued that his enemies—Raza Sahib, who was the fugitive son of Chanda Sahib, and Muhammad Mahfuz Khan, the Nawab's rebellious brother—were being protected by the sultan.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the Nizam of the Deccan sought to counter Karnatak's push for

---

<sup>48</sup> Peter J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740-1828* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 87-94.

<sup>49</sup> From the late 1740s to the mid-1760s, the Nawab granted many tracts of land and villages to the EIC as thanks for their assistance. These grants will be discussed further in Chapter Seven (7.3). As Ramaswami argues, from the late 1750s, the Nawab no longer borrowed money from Indians and only did so from EIC servants, with very high interest rates. In so doing, he wished "to create an interest for himself among the Company's people," and then "the British creditors would not allow him to go under because they would go under with him." The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* also mentions the Nawab's generous acts to the EIC's elite servants who were serving him, saying that English sardars "gained in a single *majlis* (council or meeting) lacs [lakhs] of rupees as presents." See: Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 238-239; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 253; IOR, P/251/49, MP, MMSC, 25 Jul. 1763, 91.

<sup>51</sup> IOR, P/251/55, MP, MMSC, 7 Jan. 1766, 10-11. The Nawab's brother will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

autonomy. He was also antagonized by the EIC, since it had not only helped Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan become ruler of Karnatak but had also annexed the Northern Circars (from the Nizam's territory) by the imperial farman of 1765. The rise of the EIC and its occupation of the Northern Circars was also a cause for alarm for Mysore, since her borders were threatened by British politicking.<sup>52</sup> These shared political insecurities resulted in an alliance between Mysore and Deccan Hyderabad in 1767 against the Nawab of Karnatak and the EIC in Madras. The alliance was short-lived, though, as the Nizam of Hyderabad, beset by financial difficulties, sued for peace, and the treaty that was subsequently signed was of great importance for the status of Karnatak. The seventh article of the treaty declared that the Nizam had released the Nawab and his successors "forever from all dependence on the Deccan," and from all demands made by the Deccan in the past, present, and future.<sup>53</sup> The final obstacle on the path to Karnatak's independence had thus been cleared.

## 2.5 Relations with the Mughal Emperors

Although he was an independent sovereign, the Nawab never lost sight of his status as a servant of the Mughals and so continued to maintain links with and show deference to the Mughal emperor throughout his reign. He assumed the title of "Walajah Amir al-Hind (...)" and had other honorifics granted to him by the imperial court.<sup>54</sup> Coins were struck and Friday prayers read out in the Mughal emperors' names.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, he continued to send arddashts, nadhrs, and presents to Delhi to celebrate important events. In turn, imperial letters and presents were sent to his court. It is, nevertheless, important to note that all these exchanges were mediated by the EIC via the Governor of Bengal.<sup>56</sup> One may interpret this as an indication that the Nawab was already under the full control of the EIC, and that the EIC did not allow the Nawab to have direct contact with his imperial master. But this is not my opinion, and I have not been able to find any evidence of any such restriction being placed on the Nawab by the EIC before the signing of the 1787 treaty between those two parties.<sup>57</sup> Using the EIC as a vehicle to mediate with the imperial court before 1787 instead of sending his own wakil there was, it seems, the Nawab's own decision. I suggest that the Nawab may have preferred to use the growing influence of the EIC in Delhi to facilitate his diplomatic

---

<sup>52</sup> The conflict over the Northern Circars will be discussed in Chapter Seven (7.3).

<sup>53</sup> IOR, E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Nawab, 12 Jan. 1768, 42-43; IOR, H/286, HOME, Papers Relative to the Succession to the Nawabship of the Carnatic 1763 to 1784, 12-14; Charles U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. IX (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1973), 27-33.

<sup>54</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Mar. 1771, 231.

<sup>56</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 194; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 20 Sep. 1773; bundle 67, 5 Apr. 1774; *CPC*, IV, Nawab to Governor-General, 11 Oct. 1773, 101; Mughal Emperor to Nawab, 23 Feb. 1774, 150.

<sup>57</sup> I will discuss this treaty further in Chapter Nine.

missions. In so doing, he could display to the imperial court and other local rulers that he had the powerful EIC behind him should any of them wish to harm his state (certainly at the cost of being viewed as the EIC's dependent). There is another illuminating example of how the Nawab of Karnatak deliberately used the influence of the EIC in Bengal to further his interests, this time with the Nawabs of Awadh. From the mid-1760s, the Karnatak ruler had repeatedly requested that the Governor of Bengal (who, after 1773, was to be the Governor-General of India) help him negotiate with the Awadh rulers to grant Gopamau—the hometown of the Walajah family—to the Nawab of Karnatak as a gift, or at least to rent it out to him for a long period. The rental plan was eventually accepted in 1780, after two decades of negotiation. On other occasions, the Nawab requested that the Governor of Bengal use his influence in the region to rescue the Nawab's Walajah relatives, who were at odds with the Awadh rulers, and to facilitate the transfer of his money to businesses and charities in the town.<sup>58</sup> From its perspective, the EIC seems to have been pleased with such an arrangement, as it could ensure that its ally was not secretly plotting with other local powers behind its back.

The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* and the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* go into elaborate detail about the links that the Walajahs built and maintained with the imperial center. Notably, their connections with the last Great Mughal, Emperor Aurangzeb, receive special mention. According to these chronicles, the Nawab's grandfather, Muhammad Anwar, became one of the emperor's favorites and received coveted mansabs and honorable titles, such as *Bahadur* and *Haji Muqaddas*,<sup>59</sup> and the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* depicts the recruitment of Anwar al-Din Khan, his father, as having been predestined. On the death of Muhammad Anwar, the family's service at the court was interrupted. In his youth, Anwar al-Din had wanted to follow in his father's footsteps into imperial service, but he worried about not possessing the contacts at court required to support his cause. Yet, by "divine intervention," a royal farman from Emperor Aurangzeb arrived in Gopamau with an invitation to the son of the deceased Muhammad Anwar to join the Mughal's service. Anwar al-Din was first enrolled in the army, but, as a result of the emperor's special kindness to this young man, he was moved up the ranks to be the *peshkar* of the diwankhana. The chronicle thereby emphasizes the enviable position that the Nawab's father held, as he had both love from and proximity to the emperor, the highest dignities to which nobles in pre-modern courts could aspire. The chronicle then

---

<sup>58</sup> *CPC*, II, Governor of Bengal to Nawab, 22 Mar. 1767, 53; Nawab to Governor of Bengal, 16 Oct. 1767, 163-164; *CPC*, IV, Nawab to Governor-General, 5 Sep. 1773, 92 and 19 Oct. 1775, 348; *CPC*, V, Governor-General to Nawab, 11 Apr. 1776, 12 and 6 Apr. 1780, 429.

<sup>59</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 14-16; Muhammad H. Nainar, trans., *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz of Muhammad Karim, Part II* (Madras: University of Madras, 1944), 58.

goes on to record Anwar al-Din's rapid rise at the Mughal court. Like his father, he was entrusted with the imperial mansab of 2,000 with 2,000 horses and received the titles of *Khan-i Jahan Khan* and *Bahadur*. The subsequent emperors, Bahadur Shah and Muhammad Shah, were also pleased with his service, promoting him to higher ranks and endowing him with more, and more illustrious, titles.<sup>60</sup>

The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* presents Anwar al-Din Khan's decision to follow Nizam al-Mulk to the South in 1724 as one that was uncontroversial. In fact, this perspective seems to have been in sharp contrast to reality. The text states that the group had Emperor Muhammad Shah's permission to move south to restore order in the Deccan.<sup>61</sup> Although it is not stated in such a way, the departure of the Nizam and his party to the South could be interpreted—and has, in fact, been widely perceived in this way by audiences both past and present—as severing relations with the imperial court, and thus as an act of rebellion.<sup>62</sup> By mentioning this event in the chronicle, did Muhammad Ali Khan wish to emphasize his family's disloyalty to the Mughal emperors? Or can it be interpreted differently? Munis Faruqui's study of Nizam al-Mulk's career is worth considering here, as it helps us understand the intentions of the Nawab. As Faruqui suggests, in addition to their personal loyalty to Nizam al-Mulk, Mughal officials in his service in the early eighteenth century believed that the Nizam was Emperor Aurangzeb's living political legatee. The Nizam himself intentionally enhanced this notion by suggesting that his military conquests in South India were intended to fulfil his late imperial master's ambition of annexing the Deccan to the empire.<sup>63</sup> By adopting Faruqui's viewpoint, one can see Anwar al-Din Khan's attempt to shift the orientation away from Delhi in a new light. Instead of raising the standard of rebellion, both he and his new master Nizam al-Mulk are shown to have executed their duties as loyal Mughal servants. Despite being disloyal to the weak and immoral emperor, Muhammad Shah, they pursued and achieved an objective that the beloved deceased emperor had desired. By presenting Anwar al-Din as Aurangzeb's trusted servant, this narrative provided Muhammad Ali Khan's family with the greatest political legitimation that a ruler in South Asia could have. This was because Emperor Aurangzeb was, in the eighteenth century, regarded as the last Great Mughal ruler and the statesman who integrated Karnatak into the empire.

---

<sup>60</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 31-39.

<sup>61</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 39; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 158.

<sup>63</sup> Faruqui, "At Empire's End," 22-23.

In reality, however, relations between the Deccan and the imperial center were strained after the Nizam had established his new state. In contrast, the Karnatak chronicle suggests that Anwar al-Din Khan's family maintained good relations with both the imperial center and the Nizam. For example, the text speaks of the gifts and farmans that the emperor bestowed on Anwar al-Din Khan for his military successes, all of which were dispatched via the Nizam's court.<sup>64</sup> By emphasizing the healthy nature of these relations, the chronicle sought to convince its readers that the Nizam and the Walajahs received continuous validation from the Mughal court as their rightful representatives in the South. These firm links are said to have continued after the death of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's father, and he had supposedly received recognition and support from the later Mughal emperors and the rightful Nizams of the Deccan (before Karnatak became independent in 1765). To support these assertions, the chronicle cites verbatim many passages from these letters sent between the courts.<sup>65</sup>

Why did Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan need to maintain good relations with the Mughal Empire? In other words, why were connections with the imperial court still meaningful to Karnatak in the late eighteenth century? Were they intended to save the state from any form of imperial aggression? This assumption is probably true in relation to the northern Indian regions but may not apply to Karnatak since it was situated a long way from the imperial center, with the Maratha and Deccan states acting as barriers to any potential assault from Delhi. I support the views of Alam, who suggests that Mughal connections were still a very useful resource for rulers in their negotiations, with both other eighteenth-century states and their local subjects.<sup>66</sup> It cannot be denied that, even at their twilight, the Mughals were still a reference point for political power for almost all polities in the subcontinent. As such, in successor states such as the Deccan, Bengal, and Awadh, the rulers did not abandon the Mughal titles of Nizam and Nawab, and even constructed fictional allegiances to the imperial court in their self-image. The Mughals' opponents, such as the Marathas, gained prestige and increased reputation by publicly challenging the weakened Mughal power and invading imperial territory. The EIC, another enemy, cemented its power locally by integrating itself into the Mughal hierarchy.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the centrality of Delhi in the political

---

<sup>64</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 42, 51.

<sup>65</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 27, 29, 34, 61-62, 79, 80-81.

<sup>66</sup> Alam, *The Crisis of Empire*, 15-17.

<sup>67</sup> In 1765, after the EIC won the Battle of Buxar, it forced the Mughal emperor to appoint it as the imperial diwan of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa province. See Charles U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. II (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1973), 241-242; Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 53.

consciousness of South Asia can be seen in the Nawab of Karnatak's dispute with the VOC over the pearl trade. In a 1770 meeting with the Dutch envoy, the Nawab supposedly said that the business had to be carefully investigated because "the whole country up to Delhi" knew that the envoy had arrived to negotiate business with him.<sup>68</sup> In short, every party in late-eighteenth-century South Asia still considered themselves to be subjects of the Mughal Empire and their status within the Mughal hierarchy was still highly relevant to interstate competition. Some fascinating examples of how the Nawab of Karnatak and the EIC used their status vis-à-vis the Mughals to attempt to bluff each other while vying for political status will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

The work of Faruqi on Nizam al-Mulk highlights another interesting aspect of how Mughal validation had the potential to offer advantages to its successor states. He argues that Mughal links helped bring about the southerly migration of service people from the Mughal heartlands. Talented individuals from the old imperial centers—administrators, soldiers, and cultural agents—were indispensable to the formation of any newly-emerging polity. All the eighteenth-century Mughal successor states were in intense competition with one another to acquire manpower from the increasingly fragile Mughal Empire. Yet, a far-flung southern state like the Deccan also had to contend with the widespread perception that the South, despite offering lucrative opportunities, was an alien political and cultural environment and that the journey there was fraught with hardships. The recruitment of experts thus became a very difficult task, one that the Nizam of the Deccan desperately sought to achieve. It was by emphasizing his lineage and his continuing links with the Mughal Empire that the Nizam managed to negate such poor perceptions of the South and his dynasty. Largely as a result of this policy, the Deccan was ultimately successful in drawing large numbers of north Indians, Iranians, and Central Asians into the state's service.<sup>69</sup> In my opinion, this argument can also be applied to Karnatak. As shall be seen in Chapters Four and Five, a lack of soldiers and administrators was a significant problem, one that plagued the Walajah dynasty in its early years.

---

<sup>68</sup> NA, VOC 3292, Mission to Arcot by Pieter Sluijsken, Sep.-Dec. 1770, 721r-721v. In Dutch: "Door het geheele land ja zelfs tot dielie toe, is bekend, dat zulk een groot heer om eenige saake aftehandelen is hier gekomen (...)"

<sup>69</sup> Faruqi, "At Empire's End," 35-36.

## Conclusion to Part I

Placing developments within Nawabi Karnatak into their earlier contexts of Mughal imperial expansion and the zamindarization of its potentates has allowed us to shed new light on several fundamental characteristics of the region and of the Walajah house. These frameworks allow us to make sense of “the Karnatak pull” and appreciate the potential of the region as a highly strategic arena, both militarily and politically, and one of the most profitable economic areas of South Asia. As such, the region was very attractive and had always invited incursions by outsiders who had ambitions and the resources to try to improve their fortunes, one of which was the Walajah family.

Viewing the region from these contexts has also allowed us to see the astonishing demographic diversity of the eighteenth-century Karnatak region, both before and after the arrival of the Walajah family. The area had been the land of a southern Indian, Tamil-speaking population and Telegu migrants from ancient times up to the early modern period, but from the mid-seventeenth century onwards it became home to various groups of more recent emigrants, such as Marathas, Afghans, and Nawayats from the Deccan plateau, Rajputs, Turanis, and Iranis from North India, and many European traders and soldiers who arrived by sea. Not included in this list are the northern Hindu Khattris and Kayasthas and the Muslim Arabs, whose history of migration into the region will be discussed in Part II. It was over these various groups of people—in elite society, in the military and labor markets, and in the economic sector—that the Walajah Nawabs were able to form their power. Each of them brought the Nawabs different benefits and challenges, and they shaped developments in Karnatak history; the roles of these people within the context of the Walajah state’s formation will be the focus of the next two parts of this study. However, I would like to stress here that this demographic diversity reinforces one of my preliminary arguments: Karnatak was a frontier zone between at least three different overlapping worlds— Mughal, European, and South Indian—and it should be viewed and studied using this framework, i.e. through a combination of these three perspectives.

The rise of the Walajah family itself is an excellent way to illustrate how events such as the Mughal campaign of Aurangzeb to the South in the late eighteenth century and the decline of the Mughal Empire after his death could generate a great demographic movement in South Asia, and how a significant number of opportunists in the period benefited from the rapidly-changing circumstances. The Walajahs originated from a small town in Awadh,

advanced their career in Delhi and the eastern Deccan, and ended up in Karnatak. Starting as a petty civil servant, within two generations the family's leaders had become the jamadars of a war-band, governors of towns, and eventually powerful zamindars ruling over a large independent state.

The ways in which Muhammad Ali Khan—who inherited his father's dominion in a most precarious state—survived and thrived as the ruler of an independent state are particularly illuminating. Like his father before him, he used a period of intensive service to the Mughal Empire in order to advance his family's interests by gaining territory and building legitimacy. As such, he conformed to many of his contemporaries who also built Mughal successor states—Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, and so on—except that the Walajah family had come from a relatively lowly position in the imperial hierarchy compared to the others.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, their case is one of a steep upward trajectory, something which could only happen at such a period of transition. However, what made the Walajah's case almost unique is that Muhammad Ali Khan intensively involved the Europeans in this process of zamindarization (as did his local enemy, Chanda Sahib). He initially used both his position as the officially-designated Mughal governor and imperial orders to entice the East India Company to support him and, later, used the EIC's increasing military and political power in South Asia, and particularly at the Mughal court, to liberate himself from imperial control and be acknowledged as the rightful Nawab of Karnatak.

The local contexts also allow us to see more clearly how the relationship between the Nawab and the British began to work. There was no “colonial mindset” within the EIC and no rash dependence on the Nawab's side to let the Europeans ruthlessly exploit his situation under the pretense of protecting his interests. Both of them were forced by difficult circumstances to form an alliance to ensure their immediate survival, something which happened primarily at the initiation of the Nawab and with great reluctance by the EIC. Aspects of the Nawab's and the EIC's military will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. For now, I would like to make some brief observations. During his times of struggle, the Nawab had tried to buy the services of many of the mercenary-like jamadars who were available in the local market, such as the Mysoreans, the Marathas, the Tanjoreans, as well as the EIC. However, alliances involving the South Asian jamadars often proved failures. The EIC, on the other hand, proved to be a much more stable ally than other

---

<sup>1</sup> The issue of the Walajahs' relatively humble origins will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

South Asian collaborators. This was mainly because the goals of the British and the local warrior groups were quite different. Whereas the latter fought for the Nawab with the desire to take away parts of his territory or to increase their political bargaining power against him, the EIC not only operated to ensure its own position but also that of the Nawab. As the bearer of the war's cost, the Nawab soon became the largest debtor of the EIC. For this very reason, the survival of the Nawab soon became tied to the survival of the Madras Presidency both financially and politically and vice versa. The threats from the Franco-Nawayat alliance and the Nawab's other local enemies lingered on into the early 1760s and increased the Nawab's debt to the EIC. Hence, the fate of the two parties were firmly intertwined during the first fifteen years of the Nawab's reign.



## PART II: The Making of the Karnatak State

The previous chapters focused on trans-regional matters, and particularly how Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan managed to defeat his external enemies and be acknowledged as ruler on an interstate level. In this second part, the internal challenges that the Nawab faced will be explored. After the Nawab-British alliance had eliminated Chanda Sahib and driven the prince of Mysore, Karachuri Nand Raj, out of his domains, in August 1755 the Nawab organized an extravagant ceremony to mark his re-entry into his capital city of Arcot, signaling the beginning of his rule. All of his family, subjects, and tributaries were summoned to demonstrate their allegiance to him.<sup>1</sup> This ceremony, full of pomp and circumstance, belied the true state of Karnatak in this period, as it was in an extremely fragile position. The Nawab was virtually penniless and most of his family and subjects had taken up arms against him, while his ally, the EIC, did not truly believe that he would be able to maintain his grip on power. Consequently, it tried every means possible to persuade the Nawab to step down, accept a handsome annual allowance for the upkeep of himself and his family, and hand over the management of his lands to the Company. This proposal was put forth at least twice, in 1757 and 1760, yet both times the Nawab, determined to set up his own independent state, obstinately refused.<sup>2</sup> The principal aim of the second part of this study is to explore the main consequence of the Nawab's tenacity: state-formation under his rule. It will investigate how the Nawab managed to rebuild his state during the second half of the eighteenth century.

I will explore the Nawab's efforts at state-formation through reference to four main pillars: 1) Nawabi dynasty; 2) Nawabi "sword"; 3) Nawabi "pen"; and 4) Nawabi religion. My choice of these four is principally inspired by the political theories and models of the renowned North African historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) on the development of early Islamic polities, in which these elements are deeply rooted. As is seen in his *Muqaddimah* and other writings, Ibn Khaldun's view was that a state or empire usually starts off with a strong military household. Yet their success in battle and in conquest rests not only on their martial talent but also on their loyalty to the group leader and a strong feeling of group cohesion, which he termed *asabiyya*. Two essential things that could help the group leader in strengthening *asabiyya* in his warband are "the intensity of their (common feeling of tribal) descent/pedigree (*li-tazahum al-ansab*)" and "the freshness of their religion (*ghadadat al-*

---

<sup>1</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 475.

<sup>2</sup> IOR, P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, 310-313.

*din*).<sup>3</sup> Group feeling leads to royal authority and a dynasty,<sup>4</sup> something which is established “once leadership is firmly vested in the members of the family qualified to exercise royal authority in the dynasty” and “once (royal authority) has been passed on by inheritance over many generations, (then) the beginnings are forgotten, and the members of that family are clearly marked as leaders.”<sup>5</sup> Ibn Khaldun repeatedly stressed the link between group cohesion, dynasty, and religion: “Dynasties of wide power and large royal authority have their origin in religion based either on prophecy or on truthful propaganda” and “religious propaganda gives a dynasty at its beginning another power in addition to that of the group feeling it possessed.”<sup>6</sup> As is described in the *Muqaddimah*, to maintain his hold over the government and their own dynasty, he must seek assistance from others, who can help him “with the sword or with the pen,” hence “both ‘the sword’ and ‘the pen’ are instruments for the ruler to use in his affairs.”<sup>7</sup> During the establishment of power at the beginning of a dynasty, as well as at its end, need for the sword is usually greater than need for the pen. However, when its power is firmly established, the ruler’s main objective is to maintain law and order, to collect taxes, to prolong the dynasty, and to compete the authority and fame of other dynasties. The pen is useful in all these matters, and the need for it increases during the middle period. In this period, therefore, the men of the pen have more, and more intimate, contact with the ruler and enjoy greater benefits.<sup>8</sup>

In my opinion, the four interlinked components of early Islamic states—dynasty, sword, pen, and religion—described by Ibn Khaldun are suitable as a set of analytical tools or a framework to capture the various political ideas and activities of the late-eighteenth-century Karnatak Nawab. They are probably even more apt than are other models or concepts that have been introduced by modern social scientists to study the early modern state, for several crucial reasons. First of all, Ibn Khaldun’s models focus on “personnel” elements—the groups of people surrounding the ruler—while many modern scholars, whose works I have discussed in the Introduction, focus mainly on institutions or administrative systems. There are several reasons to choose to focus on personal agency rather than institutions when studying Nawabi Karnatak. First, the sources used in this study do not permit the significant

---

<sup>3</sup> David Ayalon, “Mamlūkiyyāt,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 342, 345, 347-348. These are passages written by Ibn Khaldun not in his *Maqaddimah* but in his *Kitab al-ibar*, and quoted by Ayalon. The term Ansab or *Nasab* has been translated by Ayalon and other scholars as either as descent, pedigree, lineage, or family.

<sup>4</sup> Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. I (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 284-285.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, I: 314.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, I: 319-320.

<sup>7</sup> Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. II (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 4, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, II: 46-47.

institutional changes that Karnatak underwent in the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan to be traced. Rajayyan, who has studied the Karnatak administrative system in detail, argues thus. According to him, throughout the course of the eighteenth century, the Karnatak Nawabs introduced no fundamental innovation to the administrative system that they inherited. Instead, they generally retained that system but replaced all the Mughal imperial officials with their own appointees, added ministerial offices at court, and forced them all to swear allegiance to the Nawab.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the historical sources highlight many interesting changes in the groups of people who had the Nawab's favor, which are worthy of discussion.

Furthermore, while Ibn Khaldun categorized officials into those of the pen and those of the sword, he always emphasized the fluidity and possible overlap between these two groups much more than are allowed by more modern ideas of clear-cut civil (or bureaucratic) and military institutions. As Ibn Khaldun declares, in the pre-modern Islamic state it was always possible that a talented and trustworthy officer could be given many tasks, both military and civil, by his master, regardless of his "official" position (as "sword" or "pen"). For example, a military general could be appointed as a tax collector, the ruler's personal secretary, and an ambassador, either simultaneously or at different times. The ruler could also give the supervision of his whole realm, in both military and civil matters, to one favorite servant. Such a lack of delineation between the functions of sword and pen most often occurred at the early stage of a dynasty; when, later, the state expanded and thus became more complicated, sharp divisions and subdivisions in its administration had to be made. However, overlapping functions of or multiple roles within individual servants were still not uncommon.<sup>10</sup> Ibn Khaldun's model is a useful reminder for modern scholars—myself included—who study pre-modern states and who, in so doing, frequently divide institutions or officials into military and civil (and their subdivisions, such as provincial governors, revenue collectors, or religious scholars) for the convenience of investigation. One needs to keep in mind that overlap, fluidity, and permeability of the boundaries between the functions and roles of officers were typical of the pre-modern state in general.

However, it should be noted that, while I use Ibn Khaldun's political models, I will also provide many of my own adaptations for the sake of convenience. For example, while Ibn Khaldun did not directly link the intensification of *nasab* with the establishment of a

---

<sup>9</sup> Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 21, 115.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, II: 3-18.

dynasty, I see the former as a crucial part of the latter process and will, therefore, discuss them together. Furthermore, unlike Ibn Khaldun, I will apply a “zooming out” approach in presenting the four pillars. In Chapter Three (on Nawabi dynasty), my main focus will be on the Nawab’s inner circle, i.e. his consanguineous and marital family. Then, in Chapter Four (on Nawabi sword) and Chapter Five (on Nawabi pen), I will move outwards to study the composition of his companions, servants, and court officials. Chapter Six (on Nawabi religion) will, to some extent, allow us to go one step further outside his court circle and observe the Nawab’s wider client and patronage networks, on both regional and interstate levels. The main issue that this study examines in each of these chapters is what the main strategies that the Nawab used to control and strengthen the four aforementioned pillars—and thereby to consolidate his own position—were, and attention shall be paid to both ideological and practical facets. The Nawab’s self-representation and his actions will both be discussed. While, in each chapter, I will provide analysis and relevant observations, in order to prevent unnecessary repetition and to allow comparisons and an overview to be made the main conclusions will be detailed at the end of Part II, after discussion of all four pillars.

Chapter Three’s main focus is on how the Nawab constructed his dynasty. Many scholars, including myself in the preceding chapters, take it for granted that the Walajah was the second “dynasty” of Nawabi Karnatak. However, there has never been a serious discussion of whether and, if so, how the Walajah Nawabs attempted to build their own unique dynasty and dynastic identity. According to the historians of dynasties Liesbeth Geevers and Mirella Marini, biological kinship ties of a prominent lineage, usually given by standard dictionaries, by no means fully cover how a dynasty can be defined, and the perception of rule is an important dimension to add.<sup>11</sup> According to another specialist, Jeroen Duindam, dynasty is commonly understood as “a ruling family” or “line of kings (i.e. rulers) or princes.” Dynastic power (rulership) emerged “as an extension of kinship” when a family or lineage imposed its supremacy over others while continuing to hold strong connections to its family and genealogy.<sup>12</sup> Both Duindam’s and Geevers-Marini’s meanings of dynasty correspond to Ibn Khaldun’s notion that “dynasty” vests leadership in the members of a family so that they can exercise royal authority and pass it on by inheritance over the course of many generations. In their discussions of dynasty formation, all four scholars see one specific aspect of this process as being of central importance, something they variously term

---

<sup>11</sup> Liesbeth Geevers and Mirella Marini, “Introduction: Aristocracy, Dynasty and Identity in Early Modern Europe, 1520-1700,” in *Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Geevers and Marini (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 9, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Jeroen Duindam, *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4.

as the intensification of nasab, the glorification of pedigree, or the creation of a dynastic history. According to Geever and Marini, dynastic history functioned to indoctrinate its members about the family's (perceived) rightful position in society and its achievements in the past, which would legitimate their current status and strengthen group cohesion. One crucial aspect they underline is that dynastic history does not necessarily correspond to historical reality; dynasties usually adapted their family history to suit their needs at the time of writing or support their claims. Thus, their family history could be "historicized" by replacing indistinct and/or relatively recent family roots with the "discovery" of a longer line of descent, and certain individuals from the past could be connected to a family to magnify its position.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the creation of a dynastic history is, I suggest, to a large extent a reimagining of the self and a means of self-representation. According to Geever and Marini, one other important aspect in the process of dynastic formation relates to the royal family's choices of whom to accept into their clan and whom to dismiss, or what standards of behavior to expect from all members of the family. A further important point to note is that such decisions did not just involve the male heads of the family; many women—mothers, siblings, spouses, children and other relatives—were also involved. In addition, not only were living members part of the dynasty, but, crucially, it also included both deceased forebears and as-yet unborn descendants.<sup>14</sup> According to Duindam, the construction of a dynasty would also involve "a series of conventions" regarding the offspring who could be regarded as part of the dynasty and who were eligible for the throne; such encompassed effective succession planning and marriage strategies.<sup>15</sup> Borrowing analytical tools from the aforementioned dynastic historians, my chapter will explore Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's exercise of dynastic power (including if he really did exercise it) through an exploration of three main topics: 1) his reimagining of his genealogy (how the Nawab glorified his pedigree and intensified links with his followers); 2) his plans regarding the succession system; and 3) the affiliations of the dynasty (or strategic marriages).

The rise of a new dynasty not only meant changes in the status and composition of the ruling family; it could also result in the replacement of courtiers, administrators, and the whole of the establishment elite. The Walajah Nawabs' accession to the throne naturally caused significant alterations in the Karnatak court and elite society. In Chapters Four and Five, I will discuss who were the individuals or groups that the Nawab recruited to help him

---

<sup>13</sup> Geever and Marini, "Introduction," 2-3, 11-12, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Geever and Marini, "Introduction," 7, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Duindam, *Dynasties*, 88, and chapter two, 87-155.

run the state. The Walajahs' history of migration within the subcontinent meant that they possessed family networks and connections in three areas: the North Indian region of Awadh, the imperial court in Delhi, and the Deccan. How did the new rulers' associations impact the composition of the Karnatak court? As has been seen in Part I, eighteenth-century Karnatak was a region of extraordinary demographic diversity. How did the Nawab interact with each ethnic or interest group that existed within the local society of Karnatak at the time? How far were they part of the Nawab's network(s)? How did the Nawab's policies in dealing with the different interest groups develop or change over time? How did the groups of courtiers who held royal favor and patronage reflect the specific conditions or problems that the Nawab had been facing? These are the questions that I will try to answer in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four—Nawabi sword—mainly discusses the “the people of the sword,” those who led lines or groups of warriors and mercenary soldiers in the Nawab's service. According to Ibn Khaldun, their principal function is to assist the ruler in expanding, defending, and governing the border regions. Additionally, in this study, “the people of the sword” will include those officials who assisted the Nawab on the battlefield as well as the regional governors who were appointed to administer the provinces, although, in reality, the latter group might not carry out military tasks alone but could also perform many of the “civilian” duties required to administer a province as the Nawab's representative. The “people of the pen,” who I will mainly discuss in Chapter Five, were much more diverse in function than those of the sword. In essence, they were individuals or groups of literate men who fulfilled a variety of non-military tasks for the state government. According to Ibn Khaldun, this group of people has many subdivisions, including the pen of letters and of correspondence, of diplomas and of fiefs, and of book-keeping. He wrote that, when the ruler wished to obtain the fruits of royal authority “such as collecting taxes, holding (property), excelling other dynasties and enforcing the law, ‘the pen’ is helpful for (all) that.”<sup>16</sup> One modern historian, Maaïke van Berkel, has pointed out that the people of the pen usually had two main skills, scribal and accounting.<sup>17</sup> From my research into Nawabi Karnatak, these two skills often overlapped in individual civil officers at court, so it is impractical to divide them into the two separate sectors of administration and finance as is often done for modern states.

Chapter Six tries to reconstruct the Nawab's religious networks. Who were the religious individuals, schools, and institutions with whom the Nawab and his court

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 1958, II: 4, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Maaïke van Berkel, “The People of the Pen: Self-Perceptions of Status and Role in the Administration of Empires and Polities,” in *Prince, Pen and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives*, ed. Maaïke van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 428.

associated? These religious literati could either be directly recruited to court positions—such as teachers, court scholars, court judges, and religious advisers—or be associated with the court through various other forms of patron-client relations. In my view, these religious individuals were, in reality, very close to, or even overlapped with, the category of “pen,” as they could use their “pen” to serve the Nawab in various ways. It is not only Ibn Khaldun who has stressed that religion is a crucial tool for building group cohesion and a dynasty; many modern scholars, such as Susan Bayly and Juan Cole, also view religious men and institutions as a key power resource, and the ability to patronize them was a crucial factor in the success of any pre-modern South Asian ruler. Similarly, Liesbeth Gevers and Mirella Marini have also highlighted that ruling families made careful choices as to which churches they chose to sponsor, something which was a crucial part of their efforts to build up their dynasty’s and state’s identity.<sup>18</sup> There are many well-known examples of early modern rulers using religion as the primary vehicle for building political legitimacy and unifying diverse groups of the population. For example, the Safavid shahs’ political legitimacy was predicated on their religious claims to be the legitimate Sufi of the Safaviyya order and the leader of universal Shia Islam.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the wrong religious policy could lead to disaster for a state. One such example is Emperor Aurangzeb, whose orthodox attitudes are often blamed by scholars for causing major conflicts during his reign, conflicts which contributed to the end of Mughal rule.<sup>20</sup>

As the following discussion will involve many individual officers who were part of the Nawab’s court, it seems appropriate here to provide some general background information related to governmental institutions and posts in Karnatak. This polity, like many other Mughal successor states, was mainly based on the Mughal administrative system and the imperial court, with some alterations made to suit specific local circumstances. Usually, each Mughal province had its own set of administrators. The supreme governor, the subadar (with titles such as Nizam or Nawab), carried out military-*cum*-administrative duties and was entrusted with the overall tasks of maintaining overall peace in their region and putting down local rebellions. Additionally, there were the diwan (the chief revenue collector), the *bakhshi* (the chief army paymaster, inspector, and military adviser), and the *diwan-i buyutat* (the supervisor of roads and buildings, imperial stores, and other state workshops). During

---

<sup>18</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 48, and see also 151-186; Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi’ism*, 1, 66; Gevers and Marini, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>19</sup> See also: Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 52-53, 67-70, 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 101, 259-260.

Mughal rule, the provincial diwan, bakhshi, and diwan-i buyutat were the direct representatives of, respectively, the imperial diwan, the chief bakhshi (*mir bakhshi*), and the *khan-i saman* in Delhi. The officials who held these three provincial positions worked independently and did not consider the local governor to be their master. Hence, they were deployed as tools in the provinces by the imperial government, and part of their role was to check and balance the power of the regional governors.<sup>21</sup> In the late eighteenth-century Karnatak state some of these positions were retained, but they were transformed into minister-ships of the Nawab. Under the Nawab, the diwan functioned as the wazir or the state's prime minister, an office that was abolished in the regional court. One of the Nawab's diwans, Saiyid Asim Khan, performed an array of duties relating to administration, revenue collection, and diplomatic missions. It seems that the position of diwan-i bayutat ceased to exist under Muhammad Ali Khan's reign, but the office of khan-i saman was retained, indicating that the offices of the imperial Mughal court were recreated in this post-Mughal state. Another civil office at the Karnatak court, known as *diwan-i khas*, was held by a very prominent courtier who, alongside the diwan, carried out various administrative tasks. The bakhshis or military paymaster was maintained, and, as in Delhi, the highest bakhshi at the Nawab's court was called mir bakhshi.

Many other sub-provincial Mughal offices were also replicated in the Karnatak provincial and district administration, including those of *taludkar*, *faujdar*, *killadar*, and *amildar*. A taludkar was the head or governor of a *taluk* (a province or district that was smaller than the suba); killadars and fawjdars were fort commanders, in charge of the military and defense; while amildars were the chief revenue collectors, representatives of the provincial diwan whose role was to check and balance the work of the governor. Despite the dual structure of the Mughal administrative system continuing well into the eighteenth century, as the Mughal Empire underwent the process of zamindarization these offices were often combined into one person, who essentially became the supreme governor of the district (the ruler's *na'ib*). In the early-eighteenth-century Karnatak, the dual system of governor and diwan was still evident, when the Mughal court appointed the Afghan Da'ud Khan Panni as the Karnatak Nawab and Sa'adat Allah Khan, from the Indo-Arab Nawayat tribe, as its diwan in order to limit the Nawab's power. However, this dual structure seems to have disappeared under the Nawayat and Walajah dynasties, where the fawjdar played a far more active administrative role than merely being a fort commander, while, instead of simply overseeing

---

<sup>21</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 238-242.

the collection of revenue, the amildar carried out all the functions of a governor. However, the eighteenth-century Nawabs could still keep an eye on local governors or army commanders by appointing *sarishtadar* (head clerk) and peshkar, whose main role was to report on those governors. Many other offices from the Mughal period were also preserved in Karnatak: the *qanungo* (chief accountant and revenue record-keeper), *kotwal* (chief police officer), and *qadi* (court judge) were other offices at district level, while *daroghas* (superintendents) and *mutasaddis* (superintendents or managers) also continued to exist.<sup>22</sup> The preservation of most of the Mughal offices seems to confirm that there were no significant institutional changes during Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's reign. However, due to his unusually close relationship with the British and his frequent contacts with other Europeans on the coast, the Nawab established a "European Office" at his court to manage correspondence and communication with these groups.<sup>23</sup> It was filled with local scribes who were proficient in many languages, as well as many European secretaries hired by the Nawab. The people involved in this department will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

As the discussion in Part II (and in Part III) will be heavily focused on the Nawab's court, it will be useful to discuss briefly what the term "court" means. This word has been defined and applied in different ways by various scholars who have used it as an analytical tool to explore aspects of royal life. Here, I will discuss three definitions of the term that will prove useful for this study. First, "court" can refer to the ruler's residence in purely physical terms; it is the place where a ruler lives and carries out his royal duties. The second definition combines the aforementioned spatial framework with specific people; here, the court comes to denote courtiers, those people who are usually found in the ruler's residence or in close proximity to him. Such can include members of the ruler's family who live with him, his domestic servants, bodyguards, confidants, and friends. This definition of a court is close to the meaning conveyed by the term "royal household." However, the term "courtier" is sometimes used to refer to all elite officials who served the ruler but were not necessarily resident in his palace, in part by virtue of having duties in both the center and the provinces.<sup>24</sup> Another set of scholars, among whom one of the most prominent is Antony Spawforth, have

---

<sup>22</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 43-45, 238-239; Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 22-24; Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 94-95, 162, 265, 272, 274; Stein, "State Formation and Economy Reconsidered," 402; Bernard S. Cohn, "The Initial British Impact on India: A Case Study of the Banaras Region," in *The Eighteenth Century in India*, ed. Seema Alavi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 227-228; Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 339-395.

<sup>23</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/1, DGP, Mar. 1771, 192.

<sup>24</sup> Antony Spawforth, "Introduction," in *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3-4; Maria Brosius, "Court and Court Ceremonies in Achaemenid Persia," in *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, ed. Antony Spawforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18; Felix Konrad, "Global and Local Patterns of Communication at the Court of the Egyptian Khedives (1840-1880)," in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (London-New York: Routledge, 2011), 236.

tried to conceptualize the term “court” in a more abstract sense by combining its physicality, personnel, and social functions. The term court in this third conception is thus “a social configuration” characterized by “some distinctive modes of communication.” It is the chief spatial and social setting in which ruler and elites come together to manage their mutual interactions. It is also the site of exchanges between the ruler and all kinds of people who are not necessarily members of the court, such as ordinary people or envoys from foreign powers. The modes of communication that are often thought of as characteristic of courts include diverse ritual and ceremony, protocol, and the carefully meticulous manners of its partakers, involving veneration and flattery.<sup>25</sup>

These three facets of the term “court” will be touched upon in various sections of this study. The “court” as a physical space—with its architectural style, artistic design, size, and splendor—may mirror some aspects of the ruler’s self-representation and worldview. This aspect of the Nawab’s court will be examined in detail in Chapter Eight. In Part II, various groups of people around the ruler—his family, officers, and other people whom the second definition of the “court” encompasses—will be explored and discussed. However, when the Nawab’s court is mentioned in this dissertation in other contexts, it is most often used in relation to the third definition, i.e. as the chief social setting in which the Nawab interacted with various groups of people who either approached him or were approached by him. The details of what happened during these exchanges, in terms of formal and informal audiences, rituals, ceremonies, and so on, can be used to explore the Nawab’s feelings, perspectives, and standpoints on various matters and the people involved in them.

---

<sup>25</sup> Spawforth, “Introduction,” 3-4.

### Chapter 3: Nawabi Dynasty

For a period of three years Ḥazrat-i-A'lā was busy fighting continuously many powerful enemies, patiently suffering all sorts of difficulties, and during this period both the brothers, in the pride of their independence, lost their regard for the labours of Ḥazrat-i-A'lā [...].<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will explore the Nawab's relations with his immediate and extended family, who were related to him by kinship or marriage—his siblings, other blood relatives, spouses, children, and in-laws. As mentioned earlier, it will explore three main themes related to the exercise of dynastic power. The first of these is genealogy (nasab). It will ask how the Nawab reimagined his genealogy and his dynasty's profile when tracing the rise of his family from humble origins as an ordinary Indo-Muslim household to an illustrious royal line. The second is related to the succession system. What was the Nawab's strategy for managing the state he inherited from his father? What kind of dynastic system did he anticipate? How did the Nawab manage to control the rebellious members of his family and share political power with them? And how did he plan for the continuation of the state after his death? Finally, I will discuss the dynasty's networks. How did the Nawab create networks of support and loyalty through the marriages of family members?

#### 3.1 Nasab

According to Susan Bayly, one important way a monarch could attempt to prove that his dynasty did not merely consist of upstarts or ambitious adventurers was by producing royal chronicles or dynastic histories.<sup>2</sup> The first move by Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan in this direction came in 1766/1767, when he commissioned the first court chronicle of the Walajah house, known as the *Anwarnama*, which recounted the reign of his father, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, in poetical form. It is said to have been modeled on the most celebrated classic Persian chronicle, Firdausi's *Shahnama*, and on the equally well-known sixteenth-century Mughal dynastic history, Abu al-Fazal's *Akbarnama*.<sup>3</sup> In 1773, the Nawab went one step further by ordering one of his Hindu secretaries to record his actions and the main events that occurred at his durbar on a daily basis, which resulted in the text known to us as the *Ruznama*. In 1780, the first prose-style dynastic history, the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, based heavily on information from the poetic *Anwarnama*, was ordered to be composed. It is the latter in

---

<sup>1</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 151. Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan is referred to in the chronicle by the honorific “Ḥazrat-i-A'lā.”

<sup>2</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 153-154.

<sup>3</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 153; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 91, 176-178.

particular that provides us with vivid illustrations of how the Nawab reimagined his family's pedigree.

A significant theme in Walajah dynastic history was the patronage that Muhammad Ali Khan's forefathers had received from the Mughal emperors. In reality, however, compared to other contemporaneous Mughal noble families—and especially those who became rulers of the eighteenth-century Mughal successor states—the Walajahs were of humbler origins. One obvious comparative example is the Asafjahi dynasty of the Deccan, a main regional competitor of Karnatak. This family, led by Nizam al-Mulk, headed the Turani faction at the imperial court, and many of its members had held the position of imperial wazir. Furthermore, prior to entering Mughal service, Nizam al-Mulk's grandfather, Sadallah Khan, had been a qadi in Bukhara, a renowned Islamic center in Central Asia.<sup>4</sup> Another example is Zulfiqar Khan, the first Mughal Nawab of Karnatak. He was not only the leader of the Irani faction at the imperial court but his family was also linked to the Mughal emperors by marriage. These nobles also held very high mansabdari positions. During the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, Zulfiqar Khan held the rank of 7,000, while Mir Muhammad Amin Nishapuri (aka Burhan al-Mulk), who founded the Nawabi state of Awadh in 1722, also held that rank.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's father and grandfather had both held the rank of just 2,000.<sup>6</sup> As such, their links to the Mughals may have been a fundamental and convenient source of legitimation for the Nawab, but they were not enough to lift his family to the same level of prestige that other ruling dynasties of the time enjoyed. As will be shown in the following section, the Nawab went to great lengths to find other ideological means (beyond forging the Mughal connection) to elevate his nasab, something that is clearly reflected in the court chronicles.

According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Nawab Muhammad Ali's grandfather—Muhammad Anwar—was once asked by Emperor Aurangzeb: “Have any of your ancestors ever served under a *Padshāh* [emperor] or is it only your good fortune that you have found service under this proud dignity?” To this, the Nawab's ancestor replied: “My ancestors had such a nice sense of honour that they did not have the mean aspiration that I have.”<sup>7</sup> Surprised and very pleased by this forthright answer, the emperor bestowed on him the title of *Shaykh Aqdas*, meaning “holy master.” Through this seemingly fictional conversation between his

---

<sup>4</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 409-410, 417-418; Faruqi, “At Empire's End,” 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 426.

<sup>6</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 34, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 11-12.

grandfather and the emperor, the Nawab justified his family's lack of lengthy service to the Mughals by declaring that, while his forefathers may not have served the Mughals for very long, they had led lives just as honorable as other Muslim elites. Furthermore, the Nawab claimed that his family was not simply an Indo-Muslim one that had but recently experienced the good fortune of entering Mughal service, but was instead an ancient Arab-Muslim family of "blue-blooded" lineage, since he was descended from the Kuraysh, the residents of Mecca prior to the institution of Islam. They also belonged to the same line as the Islamic prophet Hadrat Ibrahim Khalil Allah (i.e. Abraham). Muhammad Ali Khan's ancestor from the time of Prophet Muhammad (the last Prophet), 25 generations before, was the illustrious Umar b. Khattab, the second caliph of Islam (r. 634-644), as the claim goes.<sup>8</sup> According to *the Tuzak-i Walajahi* and the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, after the death of this renowned ancestor, his family stayed in Medina for many generations before political instability forced a move to Bukhara, a famous center of Islamic learning in Turkistan, Central Asia. There, the family lived as virtuous and learned men, teaching Islamic law and tradition. After several generations, a Walajah notable named Shaykh Sulayman became a man of the sword, formed a warband, and marched to Kabul to wage *jihad*—religious war. He successfully established his banner in Kabul in 1009 (AH 400), where he was addressed as Sultan Sulayman. His offspring held the sultanate of Kabul for another two generations before the city was taken by the sultans of Ghazna. As a result, the Nawab's family came to hold less exalted positions. In the thirteenth century, the Mongol invasions forced the family to move out of Central Asia and head to northern India.<sup>9</sup>

By claiming to be part of an illustrious Arab tribe and a descendent of the second caliph and the sultans of Kabul, the Nawab sought to elevate his family to the highest echelons of Islamic society. To understand why the "Central Asian" connection was significant to the Nawab's family, we need to understand its special place in the context of the Mughal court. Central Asia was the ancestral home of the Mughals and the dynasty was Turani by ethnicity, while Bukhara was the city that the Turani Asafjahi family claimed as their ancestral home. In the genealogies of aristocratic Muslim families, claiming to belong to the same tribe or being from the same town as revered holy men, warriors, or, in this case, illustrious rulers was a standard tactic to elevate one's nasab. Using such methods, Mughal courtiers who had migrated from Central Asia had always had a collective sense of

---

<sup>8</sup> For more details about the Kuraysh and the second caliph of Islam, see: Juan Eduardo Campo, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Facts On File, 2009), 685-686; W. Montgomery Watt, "Kuraysh", *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., accessed September 17, 2018: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_4533](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4533).

<sup>9</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 2-7; Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 53-58.

superiority over their rivals and proudly regarded themselves as a distinct social class. The family of Nizam al-Mulk is the best example of self-association with the Turani elite at the Mughal court during the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The Central Asian link was used by practically all members of the Nizam's entourage to claim a special bond with their leader and special status within the group; they claimed that they moved to the Deccan with the Nizam "influenced by the feeling of their common birth-place."<sup>11</sup> The Nawab, too, claimed a Central Asian past, allowing his ancestors to be able to share the same exalted status as the "Turani" group in Mughal society as well as bolstering his connections with his former master, Nizam al-Mulk.

As well as forging genealogical links with Arabia and Central Asia, the dynasty had another claim to aristocratic connections, through the marriage of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan himself. At the age of fourteen, the Nawab had married Khadija Begam, a woman from a prominent Deccan family that, on her mother's side, claimed to be descended from the Safavid dynasty of Iran. The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* states that one of her ancestors, Mir Nizam al-Din Ahmad, was a nephew of Shah Tahmasp Safavi al-Musawi, the Safavid emperor who reigned between 1524 and 1576. One modern Indian scholar, Muhammad Y. Kokan, has a slightly different view of Khadija Begam's Safavid ancestry, suggesting that she was a descendent of the famous Irani scholar Ustad al-Bashar Sayyid Masum Washtagi, who was himself the brother-in-law of Shah Abbas (r. 1588-1629). It is claimed that she was also related to the Qutbshahi sultans of Golconda. As the author of the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* writes: "by his marriage with the princess of Şafawiyya sultans of Irān, a paradise on earth" the Nawab "became the son-in-law of a glorious and noble family [the Safavids]."<sup>12</sup> A poetic phrase that praises the Nawabi-Safavid link is quoted in Kokan's work, one that presumably came from another historical source, and which says: "Persian blood ran in the veins of the five sons [of the Nawab]" and his sons were regarded by the emperor of India as "the pearls of the ocean of Safavid family and the candles of the Musawi Sadats."<sup>13</sup>

As suggested by Duindam, unlike in many other pre-modern polities, such as imperial China or the Ottoman Empire, female lineage played a significant role ideologically in Mughal India. For example, the Mughal emperors made significant use of their claimed

---

<sup>10</sup> Richards, *Mughal Empire*, 273; Faruqi, "At Empire's End," 22.

<sup>11</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 90; "Musawi" is the surname used by members of the Safavid dynasty and people who claimed to be their descendants. They are also usually given the honorific Saiyid before their names.

matrilineal descent from Chinggis Khan to underscore their pedigree.<sup>14</sup> The Walajah family echoed this practice. We should also investigate the role of the Safavid dynasty and its general context in order to comprehend fully the Nawab's efforts. The Safavid house was known in early modern times as one of the three main imperial polities of the Islamic world, along with the Ottomans and the Mughals.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, its name was held in high esteem in early modern Indo-Muslim societies, for several reasons. First, as was widely known, when the second Mughal emperor, Humayun, was expelled from Hindustan in 1540 by the Afghan Suri rulers, it was the Safavid court that provided him with shelter and assisted him in regaining the Mughal throne fifteen years later.<sup>16</sup> The Mughals were thus known to be indebted to the Safavids. The Indo-Muslim scholar, Shah Nawaz Khan, recalled the gratitude and respect that Emperor Akbar had for the Safavid house when he wrote his history, the *Maathir al-Umara*, in the eighteenth century. When Abd Allah Khan Uzbek (1533-1598), the ruler of Turan, invited the emperor to join an expedition against Iran, he replied that the old associations between his family and the Safavids prevented him from such an act.<sup>17</sup> Further south, in the Deccan, due to the intense political and commercial contacts and the shared faith of Shiism that both the Qutbshahi dynasty of Golconda and the Adilshahi of Bijapur had had with Safavid Iran prior to the Mughal conquests of the 1630s, both of them formally recognized the Safavid emperors as their overlords and had the Friday prayer recited in their name.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the Nawab's attempts to highlight his family's links with the Safavids in his chronicle were not only done to strengthen his links with the Indo-Irani noble family of his wife but were also the result of the past glory and high reputation of the Safavid dynasty in the subcontinent. One further thing to note here is that Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan was not the only member of the Indian elites to stress his links with the Safavids. As Shah Nawaz Khan wrote in the eighteenth century, there were many Indo-Muslim nobles who, "by giving them [the former Safavid nobles who had migrated to South Asia] their daughters in marriage[,] established a connection with that august family, and gave themselves out as *Khalīfa Sulṭānīs*" [i.e. successor of sultans].<sup>19</sup>

As well as these Central Asian and Safavid links, the Walajah chronicles also explicitly emphasize the association of the Nawab's family with various noble Indo-Muslim

---

<sup>14</sup> Duindam, *Dynasties*, 137.

<sup>15</sup> For a good comparative study on the three empires, see: Dale, *The Muslim Empires*.

<sup>16</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 565.

<sup>18</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 22-23; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51, 2 (1992): 342-344.

<sup>19</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 139-140.

clans, predominantly Saiyids, in both North India and the Deccan. For instance, the great-grandfather of the Nawab, Muhammad Munawwar, and his son, Muhammad Anwar, were said to have married two women from the family of Muhammad Saiyid, a qadi who was a descendant of “the Sayyids of the pure lineage of Kirmān and the most distinguished residents of Khayrābād [a town in Awadh].”<sup>20</sup> One of the two ladies was the great-grandmother of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan.<sup>21</sup> The mother of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan also belonged to an elite Indo-Irani family, one from Hyderabad, and one of her grandmothers was also a Saiyida. Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, therefore, had “Saiyid blood” on both paternal and maternal sides.<sup>22</sup>

According to nineteenth-century scholars of South Asia, the status of South Asian Muslims was based on various claims of foreign pedigree that determined their rank in the Indo-Islamic hierarchy. While local converts (*ajlafs*) generally occupied the lower rungs of the hierarchical ladder, among the “foreigners” (*ashrafs*) the Saiyids (descendants of the Prophet, who could be of Irani or Arab origin) were the most respected, followed by Shaykhs (religious scholars of Irani or Arab origin), Mughals (Turks/Turanis from Central Asia), and then Afghans (from North India or Afghanistan).<sup>23</sup> This nineteenth-century scholarly perspective is seemingly equally applicable to the case of the eighteenth-century Karnatak ruler. As previously discussed, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan not only highlighted his family’s foreign origins but also claimed to have links to Saiyids of the highest social standing and to a glorious Islamic dynasty of Iran. In so doing, he created a genealogy that decreed that he had the high birth required of Islamic rulers. In so doing, he followed the approach of all other political aspirants of his age. Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah of the Deccan glorified his Central Asian origins. Mir Muhammad Amin Nishapuri (aka Burhan al-Mulk), the founder of the Nishapuri Nawabi state of Awadh, claimed that he was one of a group of migrant Iranian nobles who were the heirs of Safavid glory and tradition because of their patronage of Shia Islam, rather than through the bloodline.<sup>24</sup> The family of Alivardi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal in the period 1740-1757, claimed to have Khurasan as its hometown and Arab and Afshar Turkish ancestors.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 20-21. Kirman can be a town in Iran, a place in Bangash country between Kabul and Bannu, or a region west of Sind.

<sup>21</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 6; Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 60-63.

<sup>23</sup> Janet E. Benson, “Politics and Muslim Ethnicity in South India,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39, 1 (1983): 46; Jean B. P. More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras, 1930-1947* (Orient Blackswan, 1997), 24; Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi’ism*, 72-84.

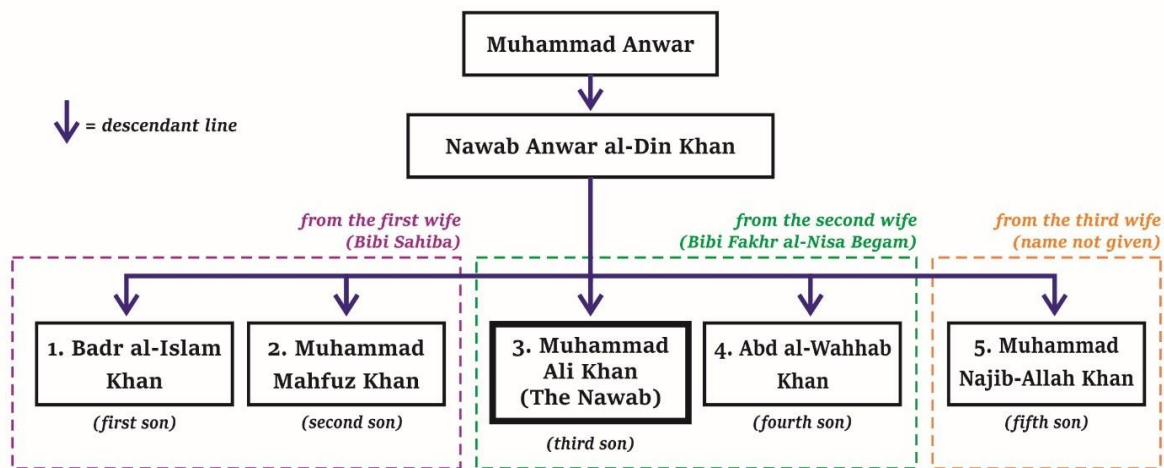
<sup>24</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi’ism*, 175.

<sup>25</sup> Subrahmanyam, “Iranians Abroad,” 348.

### 3.2 Succession

#### The Brotherhood and the Practice of the State's Division

During the early period of the Walajah dynasty, Nawabi Karnatak power was heavily reliant on kinship. One principal indication of this trend was the practice, common during the reign of the old Nawab (Anwar al-Din Khan), of dividing the state up between the most important male royal family members and giving them *de facto* autonomous or semi-autonomous power in their domain, and right to possess their own military household. These provincial heads were, in turn, obliged to contribute part of their revenue as *peshkash*, or tribute, to Arcot, and to send military support when being summoned.<sup>26</sup> It was this custom that caused fundamental problems between Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan (the new Nawab) and his siblings in the period after the old Nawab's death, and we will now discuss this challenge that came from within his own family.



*Diagram displaying Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and his other four male siblings from three different mothers*

According to the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan had three wives. All of them were likely to have been *nikah* or wives by legal marriage (men were allowed four legally-recognized wives and an unrestricted number of concubines in Islamic law).<sup>27</sup> From his three wives were born five sons (and several daughters). Two sons and four daughters were born to his first wife, Bibi Sahiba. The eldest son was Badr al-Islam Khan Bahadur,

<sup>26</sup> Such conditions related to the kinship-based form of state during the reign of the old Nawab can be observed through references of Ananda Ranga Pillai to the Walajahs, see: *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, III: 35, 112, 155-156, 177, 333-334, 337, 373.

<sup>27</sup> Duindam, *Dynasties*, 102; Joseph Schacht, "Nikāh," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al., accessed August 6, 2018, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei1\\_SIM\\_3485](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_3485).

who lived and died (in 1762) in North India; he did not play any significant role in the history of Karnatak.<sup>28</sup> His second son was Muhammad Mahfuz Khan Bahadur, the eldest male of all the siblings and half-siblings who stayed with his father in the South; he was the half-brother of the new Nawab. The third son, Muhammad Ali Khan Bahadur, was the new Nawab, while the fourth son, Abd al-Wahhab Khan Bahadur (the Nawab's full brother), and his two daughters, Amira Begam and Choti Begam (his full sisters), were born to Anwar al-Din Khan's second wife, Bibi Fakhr al-Nisa Begam. With his third wife, who is left unnamed in the chronicles, he had another son, Muhammad Najib Allah Khan Bahadur (the fifth male heir and the new Nawab's half-brother).<sup>29</sup> There are several reasons for assuming that the three wives of the old Nawab and their sons enjoyed equal rights and status. First, during the short reign of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan as Nawab of Karnatak (r. 1744-1749), he sent his four sons, from all three wives, to govern different principal districts of the state without discriminating between them, although on grounds of seniority the older sons were allotted the more important provinces. Muhammad Mahfuz Khan was assigned to the suba of Trichinopoly and the taluqs of Madurai and Tirunelveli, while Muhammad Ali Khan was assigned the taluq of Kanchipuram and its surrounding areas in the central Karnatak. The younger sons, Abd al-Wahhab Khan and Muhammad Najib Allah Khan, were assigned the taluqs of Nellore and South Arcot, respectively. Secondly, after the death of their father, all four sons had ambitions for autonomous domains and saw themselves as the rightful heir to their father's throne. Furthermore, there is evidence that, during the old Nawab's reign, conflict broke out between two other relatives of the Nawab over control of a taluq. This suggests that other leading male relatives, in addition to the old Nawab's sons, also had claims to his lands.<sup>30</sup>

The partition of a state between a ruler's male relatives (both brothers and sons)—either during his lifetime or after his death—was one of the Central Asian legacies followed by the Mughals and their nobles, especially those who traced their lineage back to Central Asia. Two prominent features of Mughal rule were derived from Central Asia and made it different from other, past South Asian dynasties (e.g. the Rajputs); these were the open system of succession and the appanage model of empire division. Both practices were based on the idea that a ruler is “first among equals” and that sovereignty can be shared.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Gurney, “The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot,” 5.

<sup>29</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 61.

<sup>30</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 127-129.

<sup>31</sup> Munis D. Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 253, 265; Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 76, 97; *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 754.

Throughout its history, the Mughal state acknowledged almost no law of succession, and so it was not only the eldest son of the deceased sovereign who sought to be the next ruler. Instead, all other sons, grandsons, and even sons-in-law could lay claim to the throne. For example, Emperor Jahangir ascended the throne after eliminating his own eldest son, Prince Khusrau, who had been the favorite grandson and prospective heir of Emperor Akbar. Emperor Shah Jahan's successor was not his eldest son, Dara Shukoh, but his fourth son, Aurangzeb, who murdered his older brother. The will or the nomination of a favorite son to ascend the throne by reigning monarch had little effect both before and after his death. Neither was the empire considered an indivisible entity. Emperor Babur's domain was inherited by both Kamran and Humayun. Emperor Humayun divided his empire between Akbar and Mirza Hakim. Emperor Aurangzeb initially intended a four-fold division of his empire. The Mughals' rivals, the Ottomans and the Safavids, had also followed these Central Asian models during their early periods. However, during the seventeenth century, their rulers made great efforts to abandon such practices. When not using the approach of murdering rivals from their childhood, they developed a system of bringing up children in the harem; their young princes were confined to the harem instead of being appointed to provincial governorships under a regent or guardian.<sup>32</sup> According to Faruqi, the Mughal emperors, especially in their early stages, generally avoided killing rival princes (and their supporters) once a succession struggle had ended, something he terms "the Mughal custom of forgiveness." The link between forgiveness and imperial greatness is repeatedly asserted in imperially-sponsored chronicles.<sup>33</sup> In fact, as Faruqi suggests, from the early seventeenth century, the Mughal emperors also increasingly showed less averseness to kill their princely rivals, leaving the defeated claimants no second chance to attempt to gain part of the empire. This attitude was manifested at the same time as the increasing belief in the indivisibility of the empire. The Mughals also increasingly saw emperorship "no longer a first-among-equals but rather the sole fount of all authority."<sup>34</sup> However, as Dale rightly points out, the Mughal rulers never developed a harem system for male children, nor did they use to kill the young and harmless princes.<sup>35</sup>

In the first half of the eighteenth century, such Central Asian legacies in the Mughal successor states, such as the Deccan and Karnatak, are widely evident.<sup>36</sup> In the Nizamate of

---

<sup>32</sup> Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 188, 199-200, 250; Duindam, *Dynasties*, 135-136.

<sup>33</sup> Faruqi, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire*, 255-259.

<sup>34</sup> Faruqi, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire*, 253; see also 250-252.

<sup>35</sup> Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 199-200.

<sup>36</sup> See also a Rajput case, in: Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 225.

the Deccan, Prince Nasir Jang, the second son of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah, wanted to seize his father's territory while the latter was still alive. After Nizam al-Mulk's death, all of his sons and a grandson took part in the war of succession; some of them sought the throne itself, while others expected an independent domain as part of the customary inheritance.<sup>37</sup> In Karnatak during Nawayat rule, when Nawab Sa'adat Allah Khan had gained control of the province he appointed his brother, Murtaza Ali, to rule the district of Vellore. That region and its governorship was later inherited by the latter's son, Murtaza Ali Khan. An attempt to reclaim it from Murtaza Ali Khan by the next Karnatak Nawab, Nawab Safdar Ali Khan (1740-1742), resulted in the Nawab's own death at the hands of his enraged cousin, who saw Vellore as his hereditary possession. During the reign of Nawab Dost Ali Khan (1732-1740), Chanda Sahib, one of his son-in-laws, dared to declare himself the Nawab of Trichinopoly, and as part of his efforts he strengthened the fortifications and administered southern Karnatak as an autonomous ruler. Furthermore, Chanda Sahib also divided the two southernmost districts of his own domain between his two brothers.<sup>38</sup> In brief, up to the eighteenth century, the Mughals and their successors generally based the rules for establishing domains on military superiority and the ability to create their own network of supporters, i.e. the system of fitna.<sup>39</sup>

With few rules of succession in place in Karnatak, any male relative of the Nawab could become his successor. This meant that Muhammad Ali Khan, as the third son of the Nawab, had a rightful claim to the throne. These claims were strengthened by the absence of his elder half-brothers, Badr al-Islam Khan Bahadur—who was living in North India—and Muhammad Mahfuz Khan—who had left for Hyderabad during the war against Chanda Sahib. However, this flexibility in inheriting offices also meant that any and all of the Nawab's brothers could return to the region at any time to claim the throne. Unfortunately for the new Nawab, this is precisely what happened. The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* presents Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan as having been an extremely generous brother. After he defeated Chanda Sahib and regained possession of Karnatak, he is said to have conveyed the good news to his siblings in Hyderabad, inviting them to return to his country.<sup>40</sup> This gracious

---

<sup>37</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 279-280, 592-593; II: 398-408, 420-424, 437-439, 872.

<sup>38</sup> Fox, *North Arcot*, 50; Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 50, 64-65.

<sup>39</sup> For details and a good discussion of the Mughal succession system and events, see: Munis D. Faruqui, "The Forgotten Prince: Mirza Hakim and the Formation of the Mughal Empire in India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, 4 (2005): 487-523; Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire*, especially Chapter 6, "Wars of Succession," 235-273.

<sup>40</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, II, 58-59, 150-151, 174.

gesture returned to haunt the Nawab, because it soon became evident that his brothers nursed ambitions of establishing their own independent states.<sup>41</sup>

The greatest threats were the Nawab's two half-brothers, Muhammad Najib Allah Khan and Muhammad Mahfuz Khan. Soon after the former returned to Karnatak in 1753, he was given an army and ordered by Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan to put down a rebellion in the district of Nellore. But instead of administering the suba as the Nawab's representative, the prince declared his independence after he had captured the fort, claiming it as an inheritance that his father willed to him "without the partnership of anyone."<sup>42</sup> The Nawab then wrote letters and sent several of his father's servants to negotiate with Najib Allah Khan in an effort to convince his brother to submit to his authority, but in vain. During the Third Carnatic War (1758-1763), Muhammad Najib Allah Khan even allied himself with the French in the hope of winning the throne of Arcot, considering it "the paternal heritage" that he had full right to claim.<sup>43</sup> Although he later withdrew from this alliance, he still refused to pledge obedience to the Nawab. Instead, he sent his envoy to the Madras Presidency, offering his submission to the EIC and requesting their protection on condition that it recognized his control over the districts of Nellore and Saraoily [Sarvepalli?]. The EIC, despite having supported Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, cared less for his sovereignty and prestige than it did for recovering the money it had spent in the wars. It confirmed Najib Allah Khan as the ruler of the districts for one year (1759-1760) on condition that he pay the Company a sum of 30,000 pagodas to cover part of Karnatak's debts.<sup>44</sup>

The Nawab's elder half-brother, Muhammad Mahfuz Khan, put up a similar show of resistance to him. He returned to Karnatak around the mid-1750s and, on his arrival, informed Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan of his desire to occupy Madurai and Tirunelveli. According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, out of generosity and respect for his elder brother, the Nawab agreed. However, only a few years later, in 1758, Muhammad Mahfuz Khan—together with Pulitevar, a powerful local Poligar, and other petty chieftains in the southern regions—prepared to wage war against the Nawab to gain more autonomy. The elder brother

---

<sup>41</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, II, 151; IOR, P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, 311.

<sup>42</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi Part*, II, 177.

<sup>43</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 174-178, 188, 202.

<sup>44</sup> IOR, P/240/17, MPP, Madras Consultation, 8 May 1759, 114.

also sent servants to the neighboring courts of Mysore and Hyderabad in an attempt to enlist their support.<sup>45</sup>

Fortunately for the Nawab, the relationship between him and his full brother, Abd al-Wahhab Khan, was cordial compared to that with his two half-brothers. Although he had been temporarily absent from Karnatak, Abd al-Wahhab Khan returned there and became Muhammad Ali Khan's staunch ally in his efforts to regain the Karnatak throne. He is praised in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* as "[the Nawab's] brother dear to him as life," "his boon companion and friend," and "the courageous and strong Bahādur."<sup>46</sup> He was entrusted with various important tasks by the Nawab. For example, in 1755, while the Nawab was engaged in attempting to subjugate local zamindars, Abd al-Wahhab Khan was briefly made the governor of Arcot district.<sup>47</sup> As the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* and the EIC's records both note, some of his actions met with the Nawab's disapproval, such as his delay in submitting revenues to the center during troubled times and his attitude towards autonomous rule. Once, like Muhammad Najib Allah Khan, he, too, entered into direct negotiations with the EIC, requesting that it protect him from the Nawab and confirm him as the ruler of Chittoor and Chandagiri. Nevertheless, Abd al-Wahhab Khan never seriously took up arms against the Nawab as did his half-brothers, and the pair were able to resolve their disputes quickly.<sup>48</sup> It appears that this brother, Abd al-Wahhab Khan, was one of very few royal family members in whom Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan placed his trust. During the Third Carnatic War, for instance, when the Nawab's life was at risk, he ordered Abd al-Wahhab Khan to be the na'ib (here meaning regent) for his eldest son until the latter came of age.<sup>49</sup> It is likely that having the same mother played a crucial role in the formation of this relationship, and the significance of the maternal link will be discussed further in later sections.

Another royal relative who played a vital role in the Nawab's court was Muhammad Khayr al-Din Khan Bahadur, a brother-in-law of the Nawab. Khayr al-Din Khan was a relative who shared a great-grandfather, Shaykh Muhammad Munawwar, with the Nawab, and was also married to one of the Nawab's full sisters, Choti Begam.<sup>50</sup> While Abd al-Wahhab Khan was entrusted by the Nawab with taking care of Arcot and the north during the

---

<sup>45</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 245, 264; *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, IX: 29, 59-60; Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 22, 84, 174.

<sup>47</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 82, 173.

<sup>48</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 151; IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 20 Aug. 1753, 162; P/D/41, MP, MMSC, 28 Feb. 1759, 21; P/D/43, MP, MMSC, 26 May 1760, 499; Fox, *North Arcot*, 72-73.

<sup>49</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 213.

<sup>50</sup> See the diagram on relations between the Nawab, and Choti Begam and Khayr al-Din Khan on page 115.

wars with the Nawayats, the French, and Mysoreans, Khayr al-Din Khan was appointed the Nawab's representative to protect Trichinopoly and other southern regions.<sup>51</sup> This suggests the significant level of trust that the Nawab must have had in this cousin. Yet even Khayr al-Din Khan was also capable of turning against the Nawab. For example, the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* suggests that he had once attempted to assassinate the Nawab and, after being arrested, the EIC proposed that he be hanged, according to British law. However, the Nawab pardoned him out of regard for his own sister. This brother-in-law died around 1760, as a source refers to his wife being a widow at the time. Despite his treason, his family did not fall out of favor. Khayr al-Din Khan's sons were raised by the Nawab, married to his daughters, and continued to play significant roles at the court.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Subjugation of the Nawab's Brothers**

His brothers' rebellious acts—especially when they sought the protection of the EIC—severely jeopardized Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's position as ruler of Karnatak. Shortly before these events in that region, the young Nawab of Bengal, Siraj al-Daula, had been overthrown by a conspiracy between alienated local Bengali factions and the EIC in Calcutta, which resulted in the 1757 Battle of Plassey. The rival factions in the court of the next Nawab, Mir Jafar, were also played off by the EIC to check the Nawab's power.<sup>53</sup> As a result of these developments in Bengal, diplomatic contacts between the British and his brothers must have made Muhammad Ali Khan apprehensive about his future. Another cause for concern were the financial problems that arose in the wake of the familial dissent with which the Nawab was faced. When his two half-brothers laid claim to two vital parts of Karnatak—Nellore in the north and Madurai and Tirunelveli in the south—the Nawab was deprived of significant revenue at a time when he most needed the money in order to conclude his wars with the French and repay his enormous debt to the EIC. According to EIC estimates from 1760, Nellore was a district worth at least 350,000 rupees (100,000 pagodas) annually, while the combined revenues of Madurai and Tirunelveli amounted to 700,000 rupees (200,000 pagodas).<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 168.

<sup>52</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 166-168; Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 59, 61, 184; IOR, P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, p. 321; PC, V, Nawab to Governor-General, 10 Sep. 1776, 37-39.

<sup>53</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 50; Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, 75-82.

<sup>54</sup> IOR, P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, 313-314. The transfer from rupees to pagoda here is my estimate, calculating from the exchange rate of Arcot rupees to Star pagodas, which, between 1770-1780, varied from 335 to 374 rupees per 100 pagodas. See: P/240/51, MPP, Madras Consultation, 5 Dec. 1780, 1067.

Throughout the 1750s, the Nawab was confronted with wars against neighboring states and the rebellions of various zamindars. As such, he had little time and few resources to manage his family's affairs effectively. Yet because the Nawab's patience with his troublesome siblings was wearing thin, his financial situation was reaching crisis, and his war with the French was drawing to a close, the subjugation of his half-brothers became his priority in the 1760s. The first significant step that the Nawab took to crush his siblings' rebellion was to sever their relations with the EIC. In 1760, the Nawab declared that he wished to conclude an official treaty with it. The most important aspect of the treaty was that, from that day forward, the management of all the Karnatak districts—except the lands that he had granted to the Company as jagirs (known as the Jagirs)—was to be transferred entirely into his own hands.<sup>55</sup> The EIC was asked to render all necessary assistance to the Nawab, whenever it was required, to achieve this.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the Nawab specifically requested that the Company not grant protection to any of his brothers, or local subjects, if it was contrary to the interests of his court. The EIC was also required to send official letters to all his brothers and all local zamindars informing them of the Nawab's monopoly of friendship with the British so that “they may not think of oppressing [sic] anywhere else but regard only their obedience to the *circar* [the Nawab's court/government].”<sup>57</sup> The EIC consented to almost all articles proposed by the Nawab as long as the ruler paid his debts to the Company—which at that time were around 5,000,000 rupees—according to the schedule that he set out in the treaty.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the very first official treaty between the Nawab of Karnatak and the EIC was signed.

---

<sup>55</sup> See the discussion about the EIC's jagir in Chapter Seven (7.3).

<sup>56</sup> IOR, P/D/43, MP, MMSC, 14 Jun. 1760, 554; P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, 316-318, 323-328.

<sup>57</sup> IOR, P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, 317-318, 326.

<sup>58</sup> Fox, *North Arcot*, 74.

*Table showing the values of jagirs the Nawab granted to his family members according to his estimation in 1760:*

Grantee	Value (rupees)
The mother of the Nawab	40,000
His sister (Muhammad Khayr al-Din Khan's widow and her children)	15,000
Abd al-Wahhab Khan (his younger full brother)	60,000 (from Chittoor and Chandagiri)
Muhammad Mahfuz Khan (his elder half-brother)*	100,000 (from Tirunelveli)
Muhammad Najib Allah Khan (his younger half-brother)*	50,000 (or a country worth the same amount to rent).
Umdat al-Umara (his eldest son)	15,000
Modar al-Mulk (his second son)	18,000
His third son**	20,000
His fourth son**	20,000

*\* For Muhammad Mahfuz Khan and Muhammad Najib Allah Khan, the Nawab promised to grant them the jagirs after the two brothers were defeated and subjected to his rule.*

*\*\* These were the Nawab's future designs for his two young sons.<sup>59</sup>*

The above table formed part of the financial plan that the Nawab presented to his debtor, the EIC, in their treaty negotiations. Most of the jagirs were to be distributed between his four brothers on condition that they submitted to his authority. His elder brother, Muhammad Mahfuz Khan, was to be given the biggest jagir, worth 100,000 rupees, while Muhammad Najib Allah Khan and Abd al-Wahhab Khan were to receive around 50,000 rupees each. Nevertheless, the promised lands and sums of money evidently did not match the expectations of his half-brothers. This was because Madurai and Tirunelveli, which, at the time, were under the control of Muhammad Mahfuz Khan, produced as much as 500,000-700,000 rupees, and Nellore, which had, for over half a decade, been under the control of Muhammad Najib Allah Khan, produced around 350,000 rupees per annum. Moreover, the share given to each brother seemed very small compared to the total revenue of Karnatak that

<sup>59</sup> IOR, P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, 320-322.

the Nawab would enjoy. This was estimated to be 4,300,000 rupees a year (31 from the Arcot countries, five from Srirangam and Trichinopoly, and seven from Tirunelveli and Madurai).<sup>60</sup> If the Nawab's plan were indeed successful, his brothers would all be denied access to the wealth necessary to wield political and military influence.

After the Nawab had received official assurance from the EIC to never support his brothers, he demanded the Company's military assistance to subjugate them, claiming that the EIC's consent to the treaty meant that it had to furnish him with the support necessary to consolidate his state. Furthermore, he convinced the British that he could repay his debts only if he were in complete control of all his provinces and the revenue that they generated (as shown in the financial plan highlighted above). At the time, the British had no desire to become involved in the internal politics of Karnatak any further, but regaining their money was a matter of utmost urgency and so the Company dispatched their sepoys to root out all opposition to the Nawab's rule. In July 1760, the elder brother, Muhammad Mahfuz Khan, was imprisoned, and Muhammad Najib Allah Khan was defeated a few years later. After defeating the French and putting down a rebellion in Vellore in 1761, the Nawab stormed the Nellore fort and captured his younger sibling—in 1762.<sup>61</sup>

The sources report that two half-brothers were set free shortly afterwards and treated with honor by the Nawab; it seems that the aforementioned Mughal custom of forgiveness, with its link to the ruler's greatness, was still in use in this successor state. Muhammad Najib Allah Khan never again raised the banner of revolt, although the elder half-brother, Muhammad Mahfuz Khan, tried several more times to carve out his own state. In 1766, the prince went to Hyderabad with a large army and many weapons and entered the service of the Nizam of the Deccan, who at the time was allied with Hyder Ali Khan of Mysore and planning to wage war against Karnatak (The First Anglo-Mysore War). As part of the alliance, Muhammad Mahfuz Khan fought several battles against his own brother. He was captured in 1768, placed in detention for a number of years, and released again in 1773/1774.<sup>62</sup> Thereafter, although Muhammad Mahfuz Khan was no longer a regional governor, he continued to be treated with high regard at the court until his death in 1778.<sup>63</sup> Muhammad Najib Allah Khan, on the other hand, briefly held the position of taluqdar in

---

<sup>60</sup> IOR, P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, 322.

<sup>61</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 274-275, 282.

<sup>62</sup> IOR, Mss Eur. E/379/3, DGP, Sep. 1772, 255-256; E/379/8, Mar. 1774, 29; P/251/56, MP, MMSC, 3 Jul. 1760, 410, 412.

<sup>63</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 25 Mar. and 4 Apr. 1774.

Arni, a district of relative insignificance both politically and strategically.<sup>64</sup> As the chronicles make no further mention of the political contributions of these two half-siblings, it is likely that they thereafter led the lives of pensioners, receiving allowances from jagir lands that were so modest they could not wield any influence. As for the large and strategic provinces—Arcot, Vellore, Nellore, Trichinopoly, Madurai, and Tirunelveli—from the early 1760s the Nawab recovered them from his rivals one by one, and he kept hold of them using a different method from that employed by the Nawabs who had ruled Karnatak in the early eighteenth century. From the mid-1760s, instead of allowing these important provinces and districts to be divided and distributed among the high-ranking royals under the system of appanage, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan assigned them to his most trustworthy servants, those he knew to be both loyal to him and efficient in collecting and paying revenues to his treasury. For these servants, who were not part of the royal family, I will elaborate further in the next two chapters.

However, there were a few exceptions. One royal who continued to be assigned political roles was the Nawab's full brother Abd al-Wahhab Khan, who had proved himself trustworthy. As a reward, he was appointed first to the governorship of Chittoor, and was subsequently made chief administrator of the more important province of Nellore.<sup>65</sup> The Nawab also occasionally entrusted the administration of some provinces to his children. In the late 1750s, when he was still at war, he appointed his two eldest sons—Ghulam Husain (sometimes called Umdat al-Umara) and Modar al-Mulk (otherwise known as Muhammad Munawwar and Amir al-Umara)—governors of the two most important provinces in Karnatak: the eldest one in Arcot and the second in Trichinopoly. At first glance, it may seem that the Nawab was following the age-old practice of dividing the state among his offspring. However, I would argue that the Nawab made such a decision in order to be able to protect these two provinces from coming under the control of other influential male siblings and relatives. Both his sons were, at the time, minors, and thus possessed no real authority. These districts were, in practice, administered by the Nawab's oldest and most trustworthy servants, who were appointed as deputies for the young princes. Although both sons were regarded as the Nawab's heirs—the elder son as “the young Nawab [of Karnatak],” and the younger son as “the Nawab of Trichinopoly”—both princes, as well as all the Nawab's other sons, were kept permanently at the court in Madras by their father, having a harem upbringing. They

---

<sup>64</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 20 Jun. 1774.

<sup>65</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 174; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 139; P/240/37, MPP, Madras Consultation, 3 Jun. 1774, 361.

possessed no private warband as Muhammad Ali Khan and his siblings had owned during the reign of the former Nawab, Anwar al-Din. They were only sent to the provinces on temporary missions and, as a result, they had neither the experience nor the opportunity to govern independently.<sup>66</sup> Another exception here is the case of Abd al-Hadi Khayr al-Din Khan Sam Sam al-Dowlah Bahadur. This prince was the eldest son of Choti Begam—the full sister of the Nawab—and his close relative Muhammad Khayr al-Din Khan, mentioned earlier,<sup>67</sup> and was also married to the Nawab’s daughter, Sultan al-Nisa Begam (aka Burhi Begam).<sup>68</sup> As his close nephew and son-in-law, Abd al-Hadi Khayr al-Din Khan was, for a period around 1774, entrusted with the governorship of Ramnad and was the revenue contractor of Sivaganga. However, his regional power was short-lived. In 1776, the Nawab removed him from office due to financial irregularities and, after that, no other royal family member was appointed to such a position.<sup>69</sup> In sum, apart from Abd al-Wahhab Khan Bahadur, from 1776 no member of the royal house was allowed to govern at the regional level and thereby accumulate power locally. In later periods, some of the most prominent royal princes continued to seek British assistance to establish their authority, but all such efforts were in vain as a result of the increasing influence of the Nawab over the EIC. In 1777, in a statement by the Nawab intended to prevent the EIC’s Madras Presidency from assisting any of his relatives, he wryly argued:

Beside my brothers & sons there are more than 30 of my relations here [in Karnatak] & if each of these like Khir ul Deen Khan should be misguided by my enemies & run away & like him make such requests, before he will return, in what manner, will my government be supported, & how is it possible that the country of the Carnatic should be sufficient to answer their requests.<sup>70</sup>

In conclusion, the subjugation of his brothers and the conscious distancing of prominent royal members from political resources from the early 1760s reflect Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s efforts to break away from the customary practice of dividing the state and instead to centralize political power into his own hands. This is because, otherwise, the Nawab’s male relatives would have been more likely to become independent rulers given that traditional ideas of shared sovereignty legitimated their attempted usurpations. Moreover, appointing

---

<sup>66</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 281; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Jan. 1773, 119; NA, VOC 3292, Mission to Arcot by Pieter Sluijsken, Sep.-Dec. 1770, 730r.

<sup>67</sup> See the diagram displaying the relationship between the Nawab and Choti Begam’s family on page 115.

<sup>68</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 65.

<sup>69</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 24 Jul. and 14 Aug. 1774; PC, V, Nawab to Governor-General, 10 Sep. 1776, 37-39.

<sup>70</sup> IOR, P/251/83, MP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 8 Feb. 1777 (enclosed in MMSC, 10 Feb. 1777), 242.

bureaucrats presented less complications for the Nawab when the need arose to transfer or remove them from office. This new practice also made both royal family members and court servants more reliant on the Nawab's favor.

Another important point to note here is the role of the EIC in this period. The Nawab's 1760 proposal of an official treaty with the Company was unprecedented, and all the articles proposed to the British reflect the fact that, after more than a decade in which the two parties had assisted one another in preserving their positions in the region, the Nawab began to sense the threat that the Company might pose to his sovereignty. The EIC, while being an indispensable source of military and financial support for the preservation of his rule, could also threaten the Nawab's efforts to control his subjects and consolidate his power. As a result of this dilemma, the Nawab attempted to re-orient his relationship with the British by resorting to the Western practice of concluding a treaty, one obliging the EIC to conform to his desires. The Nawab's main goals were to limit the EIC's influence over Nawabi Karnatak and ensure that full sovereignty lay in his hands. As such, being bound by the treaty of 1760 and the Nawab's debts to the Company meant that the British reluctantly became the Nawab's stooge in fulfilling his schemes for internal consolidation. As a consequence of the Nawab's calculated plan, they assisted him in quashing his brothers' resistance, capturing the Vellore Fort from the Nawayat prince, Murtaza Ali Khan, in 1761 and the Madurai Fort from the EIC's native military leader Muhammad Yusuf Khan in 1763, wresting the Ongole and Palnaud districts from its rajas in 1765, and subduing the Poligars of Madurai and Tirunelveli in 1767.<sup>71</sup> All areas of strategic importance in Karnatak, with the exception of the Maratha state of Tanjore, were in the Nawab's hands by the end of 1760s. I label the EIC "the Nawab's stooge" because although the British also gained a great deal, both financially and politically, from the sale of their military services to this local ally, the EIC's documents reveal that, at least in this decade, it, and especially its Directors in London, were unhappy with being forced into more direct involvement in local politics in order to satisfy the wishes of the Nawab. The Directors strongly reproached the Madras Presidency in 1769, stating: "conquests and plunder are not the objects of our pursuit but that we mean to confine ourselves to the [b]ranches of our commercial interest, and the benefit of such revenues [from the Jagirs] as have been granted to us by Mahomed Ali."<sup>72</sup> I am not arguing here that the EIC agents should be viewed merely as the merchants that they attempted to

---

<sup>71</sup> IOR, P/D/45, MP, MMSC, 8 Oct., 15 Oct., 20 Nov., 26 Dec. 1761, no page; P/251/49, MP, MMSC, 1 Aug. 1763, 103; P/251/52, MP, MMSC, 20 May 1765, 456; P/251/58, MP, MMSC, 25 Mar. 1767, 258-259.

<sup>72</sup> IOR, E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 17 Mar. 1769, 603.

present themselves as being, especially after what had occurred in Bengal following the Battle of Plassey.<sup>73</sup> But, evidently, the EIC did not see their military service to the Nawab as profitable enough to sacrifice the revenues from their lucrative trade and from the Jagir lands, both of which would be significantly reduced if war broke out.

### **The Nawab's Sons**

This section will explore the topic of succession in the context of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's own reign. With regard to putting into practice the customary laws of succession, the Nawab seems to have followed a different path from that of his father. Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan had treated his three wives and their sons equally. Nawab Muhammad Ali and his successors, on the other hand, placed their wives into a hierarchy. Nawab Muhammad Ali's first wife, Khadija Begam, was referred to and regarded as *Khass-Mahall* (chief consort) throughout the Nawab's reign, even though she died as early as 1767. Second in the hierarchy were the Nawab's three other nikah (legally-married) wives, none of whom was elevated to replace the queen consort.<sup>74</sup> The Nawab's mistresses occupied the bottom rung of the hierarchy. The Nawab had 18 sons and 21 daughters from these relationships.<sup>75</sup> However, the Nawab only considered the five sons born to his chief consort, Khadija Begam (and his grandchildren from these), as first-rank royals who had the birthright to succeed him. Of these five, only the eldest two, Ghulam Husain and Modar al-Mulk, appear to have been in competition to be the heir-apparent.

When his children were still young, his first son, Ghulam Husain (1747-1801), was regarded by both the Nawab and every relevant party in Karnatak as his heir-apparent. The prince was referred to as the "young Nawab" and often appointed by his father to carry out important tasks. He was the nominal ruler of Karnatak during his father's absence, and even represented his father when conducting affairs with the EIC. When the EIC helped the Nawab negotiate with the Mughal court to get the imperial farman that confirmed his independent status in 1765, and to gain similar recognition by the Deccan Nizam in 1768, the Nawab chose to also put the name of Ghulam Husain in both documents so the latter would be confirmed as his successor to the Karnatak throne after his death. With regard to the second prince, the Nawab appointed him the Nawab of Trichinopoly, seemingly expecting him to rule the area as a future tributary to Arcot. While it was widely known that the Nawab's two

---

<sup>73</sup> Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, 78-79.

<sup>74</sup> Nainar, *Savanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 86-90.

<sup>75</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 7.

eldest sons were sworn enemies,<sup>76</sup> no succession dispute arose until the early 1770s, when the Nawab wanted to alter the previous arrangement.

In 1771 and then 1773, the Nawab attempted to conquer Tanjore, the last significant semi-autonomous state in the Karnatak region. His eldest son, Ghulam Husain, was appointed leader of the first attempt, with the support of the EIC. The outcome was disappointing. The Karnatak-EIC force ended the struggle and concluded peace with the raja of Tanjore, against the will of the Nawab. The Nawab then sent a second campaign against Tanjore in 1773, appointing Modar al-Mulk as its leader, and this time Tanjore was conquered. These two events significantly altered the position of the two princes at court. After the first, failed attempt, the eldest son fell from grace and was ordered to leave Madras, to live first in Trichinopoly and later in Arcot. On the other hand, the second son, after his triumph over Tanjore, became his father's favorite and was subsequently seen by contemporaries as the most influential person at court.<sup>77</sup>

After 1771, the Nawab publicly and continuously held his eldest son responsible for many treacherous acts committed during the first Tanjore expedition in order to discourage any show of support for Ghulam Husain at court. According to the Nawab, his eldest son, together with General Joseph Smith—the EIC's Commander-in-Chief in Madras—had received a bribe from Tanjore to stop the attempted conquest.<sup>78</sup> The Nawab brought his eldest son into further disgrace through charges of misconduct, both at court and in his personal life, the gravest of which was that he had attempted regicide.<sup>79</sup> Yet another charge, one which seems to have most invited the Nawab's fury, was that he had attempted to clandestinely build good relations with many EIC servants. He supposedly bribed the British and placed the interests of Karnatak in peril by discussing private matters of state with them.<sup>80</sup> Amidst these conflicts, the Nawab explained to Paterson why he preferred his second son over his eldest: "one [Ghulam Husain] has been consistently seeking after the friendship of Europeans, who have spoiled him with the hopes of the succession, and the other [Modar-al Mulk] has paid his principal attentions to his father."<sup>81</sup> Although there is no real evidence to suggest that many of the charges levied against Ghulam Husain were true, it is certainly correct that he was in correspondence with British officials. As soon as he was exiled from the court,

---

<sup>76</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1771, 139.

<sup>77</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/8, DGP, May 1774, 61-63; E/379/9, DGP, Aug. 1774, 91.

<sup>78</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/3, DGP, Nov. 1771, 54-55; E/379/4, DGP, Dec. 1772, 101-102; E/379/9, Aug. 1773, 59-60.

<sup>79</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/4, DGP, Dec. 1772, 72-73; E/379/5, DGP, Mar. 1773, 62-65.

<sup>80</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Jul. 1773, 53; E/379/4, DGP, Jan. 1773, 133.

<sup>81</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Jul. 1773, 54-55.

Ghulam Husain wrote letters to many EIC officers, the British secretaries at the Nawab's court, and the Nawab's private British creditors, begging "his friends" to use their influence and friendship with his father to heal the breach in their relationship. He also planned to send letters to Britain to garner support from his friends there. Interestingly, these British men, believing the accusations to be nefarious attempts by Prince Modar al-Mulk to tarnish the reputation of Ghulam Husain, were sympathetic to the latter's demands and attempted to convince the Nawab to reconcile with his son.<sup>82</sup> However, this British interference in the Nawab's personal affairs only worsened the situation, as it merely served to increase his support for his younger son.<sup>83</sup>

In contrast to Ghulam Husain, the second prince, Modar al-Mulk, wasn't particularly liked by the British and received little support from them; he may have irritated them in some way when he was younger. However, it is significant that Modar al-Mulk did not himself dislike the proximity of the British to the Karnatak state. After his eldest brother's fall from grace in 1771, Modar al-Mulk tried hard to improve his relationship with them, and during the second Tanjore campaign he successfully changed the opinions of many EIC officers about him. In their reports and correspondence, these British soldiers recognized his military ability and praised his conduct in the army. They also reported to their friends that Modar al-Mulk had paid them special attention on the battlefield and that he had written positively about them to the Nawab.<sup>84</sup> He also tried to ingratiate himself with the Governor of Madras. There were reports that he was eager to join an EIC party to have a chance to speak with the Governor in private, and that he had, on one occasion, given the Governor a ring worth 5,000 pagodas as a present.<sup>85</sup> Modar al-Mulk was, quite clearly, trying to rally the support of those British who had previously backed the succession of Ghulam Husain. Furthermore, according to Paterson, Modar al-Mulk sought to curry favor in Britain, too. When two ministers of the British king visited the Karnatak court in the period 1770 to 1774, Modar al-Mulk paid special attention to these royal representatives, more so than did the Nawab's other sons.<sup>86</sup>

Modar al-Mulk was certainly able to turn the tide of opinion in his favor.<sup>87</sup> But most EIC officers were still apprehensive about the Nawab's decision to name Modar al-Mulk as his successor. There was virtually a consensus among them that the elder prince, Ghulam

---

<sup>82</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 150; E/379/8, DGP, May 1774, 110-112.

<sup>83</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/8, DGP, May 1774, 61-63; E/379/9, DGP, Aug. 1774, 91.

<sup>84</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 86-88, 106.

<sup>85</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/4, DGP, Jan. 1773, 114, 117, 133.

<sup>86</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1771, 300, 303.

<sup>87</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 77, 106, DGP, Oct. 1774, 191.

Husain, was good-natured, frank, sweet, and tender-hearted, while the second, Modar al-Mulk, was capable but cunning, arrogant, and untrustworthy. They also saw him as a highly ambitious and strong-willed individual.<sup>88</sup> As such, it is imaginable why the British, and especially the EIC, wanted Ghulam Husain to succeed to the Karnatak throne; they must have thought a crafty ruler like Modar al-Mulk would be more difficult to control. And this is likely the key reason why the Nawab, in contrast, wanted Modar al-Mulk to be the future ruler. However, during this period the Nawab also became suspicious about Modar al-Mulk's loyalty because he, too, had begun to negotiate with the British, just as Ghulam Husain had.<sup>89</sup>

And so the tables were soon turned. In 1774, at a time when Modar al-Mulk was almost certain of succeeding his father to the throne, the Nawab pardoned Ghulam Husain, invited him back to the palace, and granted him all the state honors that he had previously been deprived of.<sup>90</sup> However, by reinstating Ghulam Husain into the royal favor, the issue of succession was now unresolved. The Nawab made the situation even more ambiguous when he declared: "I am by no means pleased with the conduct of any of my three eldest sons, and it is not my intention that either of them should succeed me. But I am not old as yet, I may live 20 or 30 years please God and I may have more children [...]."<sup>91</sup> On another occasion, the Nawab also told Paterson that he was attempting "to bring his sons to themselves, that is, to make them sensible of their dependence on him."<sup>92</sup>

To sum up, after less than a decade in which the Nawab had tested the system of fixed succession based on primogeniture by publicly presenting his eldest son as his successor, he found this new practice troublesome and so sought to return to the old custom of his forefathers and of the Mughals by which the issue of succession was left relatively open and competitive again. In such a way, his sons could be trained and tested while the Nawab regained the right and ability to decide their futures. By making their prospects uncertain and making them paranoid and fearful, the Nawab expected them to compete with one another to gain his favor and thereby to become more dependent on him.

This practice of competing for the succession has been viewed negatively by many early modern eyewitnesses (e.g. François Bernier and Alexander Dow), colonial historians

---

<sup>88</sup> For the British opinion of Ghulam Husain, see: IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/4, DGP, Dec. 1772, 73; IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 84. For their opinion of Modar al-Mulk, see: IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1771, 300; E/379/5, DGP, Jun. 1773, 195, Jul. 1773, 232; E/379/8, DGP, May 1774, 92.

<sup>89</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/4, DGP, Jan. 1773, 114, 117, Feb. 1773, 160.

<sup>90</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/8, DGP, Mar. 1774, 31-32; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 26 Mar. and 17 Apr. 1774.

<sup>91</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 55.

<sup>92</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 139.

(e.g. James Mill and Hugh Murray), and modern scholars (e.g. John Keay and Peter Robb), since it has been seen as promoting factionalism, uncertainty, and chaos, wasting resources, and unnecessarily destabilizing states. Recently, Faruqui has argued against this, suggesting that the open-ended system of succession led to determined efforts by the princes to build robust networks of friends and allies. It afforded the opportunity to forge a fresh political consensus and also led to the integration of new groups of talented people into the polity; in the long run, therefore, the system gave more strength than weakness to the state or empire.<sup>93</sup> The specific circumstances of Karnatak seem to give another potential explanation for the advantages of open-ended succession, especially from the standpoint of the ruler who applied it. The evidence suggests that, for immediate practical purposes, the Karnatak Nawab saw it as a tool for maintaining harmony within his family, ensuring his own security, and increasing his own control over the royal family members rather than securing the future strength and stability of the state.

The aims of the EIC regarding the question of succession and Nawab's attempts to counter them are also worth discussing here.<sup>94</sup> Although the Nawab did not officially declare his heir-apparent, it was generally believed in the 1770s and 1780s that Modar al-Mulk was his father's choice because he was extremely influential at court. Yet most of Madras was apprehensive about the prospect. It was impressed upon the Nawab that the Mughal farman of 1765 and the 1768 treaty with the Deccan, the two main sources of the Nawab's legitimacy, only recognized and endorsed the succession of his eldest son. The EIC also stressed that it themselves would only acknowledge the first prince, who had been confirmed as heir-apparent by those treaties.<sup>95</sup> As Duindam suggests, the European colonial administrators of the nineteenth century were generally hostile to the system of contested succession as they viewed it as a source of disturbance. As such, they tried to impose and generalize the fixed pattern of father-to-eldest-son succession worldwide while attempting to outlaw other local customs.<sup>96</sup> Karnatak in the late eighteenth century was one of their earliest attempts, and it allows us to see the response of the local ruler on whom the Europeans had tried to impose their will. Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, evidently unhappy with the British stance, sought to fight their decision using every possible means.<sup>97</sup> Over the next half-decade, he sent letters and representatives to Bengal and London, to the Company's Directors, the

---

<sup>93</sup> Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire*, 236-238.

<sup>94</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/7, DGP, Jan. 1774, 190; E/379/8, May 1774, 92.

<sup>95</sup> IOR, H/286, HOME, Madras to Court of Directors, 15 Feb. 1775, 23-30; Court of Directors to Madras, 25 Nov. 1775, 33-38.

<sup>96</sup> Duindam, *Dynasties*, 130.

<sup>97</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 48-49; Mss Eur, E/379/8, DGP, May 1774, 104-106.

Governor-General of India, the British government, and even the British king to secure their promise and assurance that his choice of successor would be honored by the Company. To support his decision, the Nawab claimed that, according to both Muslim law and the customs of southern India, succession was determined by the will of the ruler. He argued that, if the ruler so wished, any of his male relatives could ascend the throne.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, his British opponents tried to convince the Company, their government, and their king not to support the Nawab on this matter because it threatened the interests of the British in Karnatak.

The Nawab then devised an innovative solution to the problem. In 1777, he drafted a will and dispatched it to King George III of Great Britain, requesting and obliging him to be the guarantor of it and with clear instructions that it should only be opened and read after his death.<sup>99</sup> His message to the king read:

Your Majesty will no doubt order all your subjects, who are concerned, to be informed that your Majesty is the keeper and executer of my will and Testament, and that no other person interfere therein, I do not know of any other method, by which I can more fully prove my entire dependence on your Majesty, [...] Your Majesty has firmly established my rights, on the foundation of the treaty of Paris [1763]. [...] I rely that you will add further security to my rights.<sup>100</sup>

Two copies of his will were produced, one of which was sent to Warren Hastings, the British Governor-General in Bengal, and the other to the EIC's Directors in London, giving them similar obligations in implementing the Nawab's demands in relation to the succession. It is important to note that, in the 1770s, the EIC, on the one hand, and the British king and government on the other, did not see eye-to-eye regarding affairs in South Asia. And within the EIC itself, there were many rival factions with different interests, and that led by Warren Hastings was particularly powerful. The details of these rivalries and factions in contemporaneous British politics and how they involved the Karnatak court will be further elaborated in Part III. But the point I would like to make here is that the Nawab took advantage of these rivalries, playing one off against the other, in order to achieve his goal.

---

<sup>98</sup> IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/3, DGP, Aug. 1772, 251.

<sup>99</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 153-155; IOR, Mss Eur, E/379/7, DGP, Jan. 1774, 181; one original copy of the Nawab's will is kept in IOR, BL (see further in footnote 76 of the Introduction chapter); see also IOR, H/286, HOME, Summary of the Succession of the Nabob of the Carnatic, 5-295. The latter archive contains numerous pieces of correspondence between many individuals in the Karnatak court and various European parties (the EIC, the British king, etc.) regarding the succession issue, dated from 1763 to 1784.

<sup>100</sup> IOR, H/286, HOME, Nawab to the King of Britain, 24 Jul. 1777, 142.

In short, with regard to the issue of the succession, the Nawab not only had the ambitions of his two sons to deal with; the fact that the EIC played such a significant role in the affairs of Karnatak also made the question of succession an important matter for the British and warranted their interference. However, after wrestling with the issue for a long time, the Nawab more or less managed to resolve the situation on his own. By not revealing his choice of heir through playing his cards close to his chest, the Nawab managed to keep both princes in line. One of them was appointed to the court council while the other administered the affairs of the state. Although tensions between his two sons continued, no trouble broke out. The EIC always assumed that the Nawab's will had named Modar al-Mulk as his successor (which was indeed the case). However, as it could not prove it, and because their king and the Directors of the Company were honorably obliged to be the guarantors of the Nawab's will, it could not dispute the issue, at least not during the Nawab's reign. However, to the relief of the British, his second son died suddenly from an illness in 1789. Subsequently, the Nawab requested the return of his secret will from the British and acknowledged his first son, Ghulam Husain, as his successor.

### 3.3 Affiliations

Marriages, especially within royal or elite circles, could be driven by political just as much as—or even more than—private romantic motives. Marriage could be a tool for dynasties to unify political and economic resources, gain political allies, and expand their territory.<sup>101</sup> It could also alter the dynastic profile of a royal family. To understand the political considerations behind the marital arrangements of the Walajah family we must first reflect on the Nawab's background and his position at the time.

As briefly noted earlier, the first two wives of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan were from different backgrounds. The first, Bibi Sahiba, was related to her husband on the paternal side and was the granddaughter of a “shaykh” named Abd al-Qadir who hailed from a noble family in Gopamau. One of Anwar al-Din Khan's sisters was also married to a grandson of that shaykh in order to further strengthen relations between the two families. His second wife, Bibi Fakhr al-Nisa Begam Sahiba (the mother of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and Abd al-Wahhab Khan) was, on the other hand, not from northern India. She was the daughter of a “Saiyida” from an Indo-Irani noble family of Hyderabad.<sup>102</sup> Viewing the two marriages of the Nawab's father from a political standpoint, the first was an attempt by the family to maintain

---

<sup>101</sup> Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 213; Duindam, *Dynasties*, 101-104.

<sup>102</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, Part II, 60.

their traditional links with their hometown of Gopamau; such marriages between close relatives or “noble families” in Gopamau and the surrounding areas was a usual practice, and there were plenty of other cases among the Nawab’s extended family. The second marriage, on the other hand, was part of the family’s efforts to forge relations with the elite Muslim communities of the Deccan. It presumably took place in the 1710s, after Anwar al-Din Khan had been involved in the imperial campaigns in that area, which suggests that the Nawab’s father, like many other northern Mughal warriors, entered into the union with the intention of developing his career and establishing his family in South India.

As was customary, both Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and his brother, Abd al-Wahhab Khan, whose mother belonged to the Deccani nobility, were, in their teenage years, also married to girls from distinguished Indo-Irani families of the Deccan. Abd al-Wahhab Khan was married to Saiyida Lar Begam while Muhammad Ali Khan was married to Khadija Begam Safawi al-Musawi.<sup>103</sup> It has already been noted in a previous section that the latter was related to both the Qutbshahi dynasty of Golconda and the Safavids of Iran on her mother’s side. On her father’s side, she was related to the Nawab’s father, Anwar al-Din Khan. Her paternal grandmother was a member of the Haqqani clan, residents of Sandila (in Uttar Pradesh) whose family claimed to be widely known among the Indian nobility.<sup>104</sup> Her family, like the Nawab’s, was an example of the close marital relations between elite families of northern India and the Deccan.

The nature of the relations that Anwar al-Din Khan and Muhammad Ali Khan sought to foster through such marriages reflects the interests of the Walajahs in establishing their family networks. While they sought to maintain links with their northern hometown, they were also determined to establish relations with the Deccan nobility in order to protect and promote their own political careers. Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan in particular wanted to put down roots among the Indo-Muslim community of the Deccan. Irrespective of whether this was the original intention of the old Nawab or not, it seems that the person who benefited most from this policy was Prince Muhammad Ali Khan. His mother, wife, and younger brother’s consort were all from the Deccan, and this allowed him to enjoy the support and networks of various Indo-Muslim families in that region. In Chapter Four, I will give further illustrations of how these connections were a crucial resource in Muhammad Ali Khan’s bid for the throne.

---

<sup>103</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 91.

<sup>104</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 6-7; Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 63; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 90.

Regarding his own family, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan had five sons and five daughters from his main queen, Khadija Begam. He married off his two eldest sons, the potential successors to the throne—Ghulam Husain and Modar al-Mulk—to the two eldest daughters of Abd al-Wahhab Khan (the Nawab's full brother) from the latter's queen consort Lar Begam. Muhammad Ali Khan's third son was married to yet another daughter of that family. The Nawab's fourth and fifth sons were married to two daughters of Hamid Ali Khan of Gopamau. His two eldest daughters died at a young age, and the remaining three girls were married to the three eldest sons of Choti Begam (the Nawab's full-sister).<sup>105</sup>

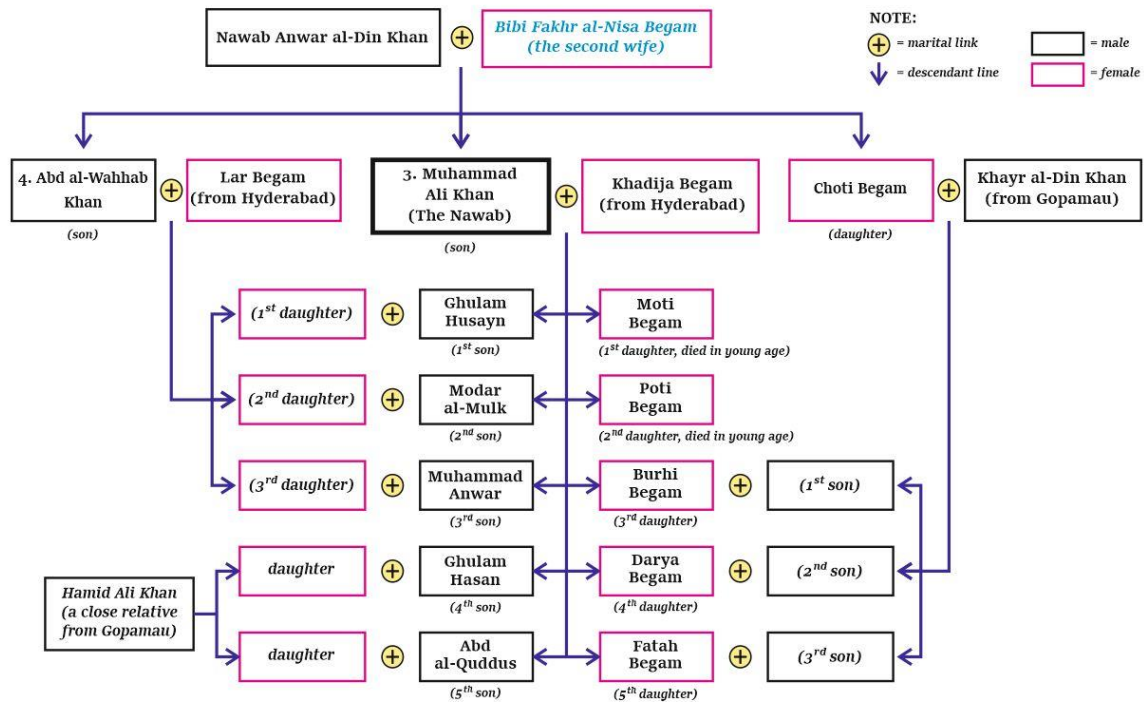
Four observations may be made regarding the Nawab's marital arrangements for his ten principal children. First, the Nawab married all of them to the offspring of only three of his closest blood relatives, namely Abd al-Wahhab Khan, Choti Begam (who married Khayr al-Din Khan), and Hamid Ali Khan. The former two were his full siblings, sharing with him the same mother. Again, we can observe here that the maternal link played a crucial role in the formation of alliances in this family. Khayr al-Din Khan, Choti Begam's husband, was also the cousin of the Nawab on his father's side; as mentioned previously, he had proved his allegiance to the Nawab during the difficult times when the latter was fighting for the Karnatak throne. Hamid Ali Khan belonged to one of Gopamau's noble families, and I presume that he was also one of the Nawab's closest relatives. This policy of strengthening his core family through a small circle of his nearest relatives may reflect the fact that the Nawab regarded his extended family as a threat to both him and his children; it was thus hard for him to find many trustworthy relatives or high-ranking officials with whom he could risk sharing political power. On the other hand, it may have been the result of the Nawab's determination to centralize power in his own hands, as a result of which all the other lineages—including his half-brothers and prominent male relatives in his extended family—were deprived of any right to the throne. This situation also reduced the chances of his own children being used against him.

Secondly, at first glance, it may seem that the Nawab's choice of consorts for his children was based exclusively on grounds of security. But if we consider this more carefully, they can also be seen as part of the Nawab's efforts to build family networks in the same manner as did his forefathers, i.e. to create familial bonds with both Gopamau families and Indo-Persian elites in South India. The marriages with the family of Khayr al-Din Khan

---

<sup>105</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 63-66. In the *Ruznama* of 1774, there is a mention of Saiyid Hamid as one of the Nawab's military commanders; it is very possible that he was this Hamid Ali Khan. See: TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 68, *Ruznama*, 31 Oct. 1774.

helped maintain the link between the two lineages of his great grandfather, Shaykh Muhammad Munawwar, in Gopamau. By marrying his two youngest sons to the daughters of Hamid Ali Khan, the Nawab was preserving his network(s) with other noble families in his northern hometown. As well as, perhaps, being the result of nostalgic feelings for the family’s past, the links with northern Gopamau served the Nawab’s rule in South India, and helped it profit; this will be discussed further in Chapter Four.



*Diagram displaying the marital links between the children of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and the children of his full brother, Abd al-Wahhab Khan, and of his full-sister, Choti Begam*

The third point is the fact that the Nawab married his two eldest sons—those who had the greatest chance of succeeding him as Nawab of Karnatak—to the daughters of Abd al-Wahhab Khan and Lar Begam. The simplest explanation for this would be that his full-brother, Abd al-Wahhab Khan, was the royal whom the Nawab trusted the most. However, the profile of the latter’s consort should not be neglected either. Lar Begam was said to have been the daughter of one Mir Adil Khan Sahib. I have been unable to find more information regarding this person, but, considering the honorable prefix and suffix of “Mir” and “Khan Sahib,” he may have been a high-ranking and respectable noble from the region. Lar Begam herself claimed to be a Saiyida, which further underscores her high status. By establishing

relations with such a distinguished family, the Nawab secured support for his sons from another source of power within the Muslim community of the Deccan in addition to that which they possessed from their own maternal Indo-Persian Safawi al-Musawi family. Here, I would like to once again stress the Nawab's efforts to link his family with "Saiyid," "Shaykh," "Mir," and other "foreign elements"—categories of people widely believed to have held the highest status among South Asian Muslims.

The last important point to be made about the marriage arrangements of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan are their links to the Nawayat community. As mentioned in the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, the three nikah wives of the Nawab who were ranked just below the Khass-Mahall were all Nawayats, the community of the preceding dynasty.<sup>106</sup> Although the family that ruled Karnatak previously had been deprived of its political prestige in the late 1740s, the Nawayat elites were still living in the region and, as will be highlighted in the next two chapters, many of them were, with varying degrees of success, integrated into the Walajah court. The Nawab's marriages to Nawayat women are good evidence of his determination to create harmonious relations with the old regime. However, it should also be noted that it was only the women of the Nawayats that were married into the Walajah house, not the men. This was different from the other marriages involving the Walajahs, where both male and female members of the Nawab's family were married to members of other clans. The offer of a daughter in marriage by one ruler to another was a well-known custom symbolizing submission in pre-modern South Asian states, one which made the former a subordinate ally of the latter.<sup>107</sup> Famous examples include Raja Bihara Mal, the first Rajput, who allowed his daughter to enter Emperor Akbar's harem, and Rai Bhoj, who offered his grand-daughter to Jahangir, both of which were signs of family submission and integration into the Mughal Empire.<sup>108</sup> But no Mughal princesses were married to Rajput princes in return. This is yet another unique characteristic of Mughal rule, as in both the Ottoman and Safavid empires the rulers usually wedded their princesses "downward," to the upper ranks of office-holders.<sup>109</sup> As such, and particularly in the South Asian context, the marriage unions with the Nawayats signalled the submission of the former dynasty to the Walajahs and also gave the Walajahs more rights and prestige in their claims to be the legitimate inheritors of the Karnatak throne.

---

<sup>106</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 86.

<sup>107</sup> Douglas E. Streusand, "The Process of Expansion," in *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia, 1000-1800*, ed. Jos J.L. Gommans and Dirk H.A. Kolff (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 357.

<sup>108</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, I: 409-410; Duindam, *Dynasties*, 114. According to Duindam, Akbar's harem included as many as eleven women given in marriage by Rajput princes to underpin their alliance.

<sup>109</sup> Duindam, *Dynasties*, 101-105.

## Chapter 4: Nawabi Sword

However much his companions persuaded him to vacate his seat, Ḥaẓrat-i-A‘lā replied, “At the time of the display of bravery, the guarding of one’s life is opposed to the honour of a soldier.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter explores the Nawabi military and dynastic servants under the general category of “the sword.” First, it will provide readers with a broad overview of the main military developments in South Asia prior to and during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Then, it will discuss briefly ideological aspects of the “Nawabi sword” and how the Nawab presented or positioned himself within this pillar of the state. Next, there will be an exploration of various prominent military groups that were linked to the Nawab’s court. The chapter will also reflect further on the political challenges in local society that the Nawab faced and his attempts to deal with them.

### 4.1 The South Asian Military Labor Market

#### Turkish Cavalry and Mughal Warfare

According to military historians, in the second millennium South Asia underwent two momentous military revolutions. Prior to the twelfth century, warfare was based on large numbers of infantry, to which were added available war elephants and small numbers of light cavalry.<sup>2</sup> From the twelfth century onwards, the semi-nomadic conquerors from West and Central Asia who established various Indo-Islamic polities brought with them a new type of warfare, one mainly based on more heavily-armed cavalry. This led to the first military revolution,<sup>3</sup> and from the sixteenth century the horse-based army became the dominant mode of warfare on South Asian battlefields.<sup>4</sup> Along with the Turkish-style heavy cavalry, the use of firearms increased over time, with metallurgical techniques mainly developed from Iran.<sup>5</sup> It has been widely acknowledged that, with their firearms, the Turkish-style cavalry were far

---

<sup>1</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 159.

<sup>2</sup> Streusand, “The Process of Expansion,” 341.

<sup>3</sup> The terms “Lord of Horses” (Ashwapati)—which was given by contemporaries in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries to the Deccan sultanate of Bahmani—“Lord of Men” (Narapati)—which referred to the southern Indic ruler of Vijayanagara—and “Lord of Elephants” (Gajapati)—which was given to the Indic king of Orissa—are good illustrations of the various modes of warfare used by Indic and Islamic rulers on the South Asian battlefield in the first half of the second millennium. See: Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 55-56.

<sup>4</sup> As Gommans and Kolff suggest, this phenomenon was not unique to South Asia, being part of a wider revolution in military warfare that occurred throughout most of the Eurasian continent. Cavalry warfare was both the cause and effect of the rise of transregional nomadic and semi-nomadic empires from 1200-1800, e.g. the Chingisid Mongol, Turkish-led Ottoman, and Mughals empires, as well as heavily-Turkified Safavid Persia. See further: Jos J. L. Gommans and Dirk H. A. Kolff, “Introduction,” in *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia, 1000-1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 31-33; Jos J.L. Gommans, *The Indian Frontier: Horse and Warband in the Making of Empires* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2018), 259-263; Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Gommans, *The Indian Frontier*, 165.

superior to the indigenous armies with their low-drilled infantry and light cavalry (such as those of the Rajputs, Telegus, and Marathas), and this was the driving force behind the Muslim conquests of North India and the Deccan, especially those of the Mughals.<sup>6</sup>

These semi-nomadic conquerors also introduced new military ideologies, based primarily on openness and equality—including that of organizing a military household—to South Asian warfare. The Mughal army could incorporate a wide variety of talented individuals regardless of their caste, social status, or religious background.<sup>7</sup> It was a grouping of many individual warband units, and it generally had no clear lines of command. The soldiers in each unit paid allegiance to their own commander and had no loyalty other than to him who paid them directly. Such a system could ensure cooperation between wide-ranging military forces throughout the subcontinent. However, it also contained several inherent disadvantages. In such a system, there was always a lack of unity among the various sub-leaders during a military expedition. Frequently, personal wrangling could prevent collaboration. Furthermore, *fitna* was an oft-employed aspect of military culture throughout the Mughal period. When a commander shifted alliance, the followers in his warband would all follow him. Furthermore, if a leader was killed, his military household tended to collapse and was only reunified after a new leader had come forward.<sup>8</sup>

### **Drilled Infantry and European Warfare**

Before the middle of the eighteenth century, the South Asian battlefield was still dominated by the Turkish mode of warfare. But from the 1750s onward, one can observe the rapid rise of a new military system inspired by Western Europeans.<sup>9</sup> From the sixteenth century, small numbers of European jamadars or mercenaries and the firearms they imported from Europe had appeared on the South Asian military market and been employed in the armies of many local rulers.<sup>10</sup> However, the European-style troop that was introduced in the mid-eighteenth century by the East India Companies, especially the French CIO and the British EIC, was a revolution. It was based on well-drilled infantrymen—who were equipped with more

---

<sup>6</sup> Gommans, *The Indian Frontier*, 159. However, how far firearms actually contributed to the success of the Mughals in their conquests is still debated. For discussions on this issue, see: Streusand, “The Process of Expansion,” 339, 348; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 60.

<sup>7</sup> Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 56-57.

<sup>8</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 131, 156; Gommans, *The Indian Frontier*, 166; Oak and Swamy, “Myopia or Strategic Behavior?,” 356; Karen Leonard, “Hyderabad Political System and Its Participants,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 30, 3 (1971): 574.

<sup>9</sup> In the same way that the cavalry age was linked to the rise of the Central Eurasian nomadic/semi-nomadic empires, the ascent of infantry warfare was related to the rise of many Western nation-states. See the further discussions in: Jos J.L. Gommans, “The Warband in the Making of Eurasian Empires,” in *Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives*, ed. Maaïke van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 375-380; Stein, “State Formation and Economy Reconsidered,” 391; Kaushik Roy, “Military Synthesis in South Asia: Armies, Warfare, and Indian Society, c. 1740-1849,” *The Journal of Military History* 69, 3 (2005): 652-654.

<sup>10</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 14.

advanced European firearms and tactics (such as matchlocks, flintlock muskets with bayonets, and disciplined light artillery). The army was organized into well-planned and tactical units like battalions, regiments, and brigades. The force was commanded by European officers who had clearly-assigned ranks and positions that mainly followed the model of the royal army in Europe (e.g. General, Major, Captain, etc.). The soldiery consisted of a small number of imported Europeans and a large number of locally-recruited South Asians, known as sepoys (derived from the Persian *sipahi*). The indigenous soldiers were trained and disciplined by European officers, and dressed in European-style uniforms.<sup>11</sup> In its first few battles in South Asia, the European infantry proved itself easily capable of overcoming South Asian opponents who were significantly larger in numbers; scholars usually point to the First Carnatic War of 1746, which directly involved the Walajah Nawabs, as the first example of such an encounter. The Mughal-style army of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, which consisted of 10,000 soldiers, was quickly and easily crushed by a small troop of 230 Frenchmen and 700 disciplined indigenous sepoys.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Robert Frykenberg, “the myth of European valor was born.”<sup>13</sup> Following this were the more renowned Battle of Plassey in 1757 and Battle of Buxar in 1764. In the former, the army of the Bengal Nawab, consisting of 50,000 soldiers, was defeated by 3,000 troops of the EIC, two-thirds of whom were well-drilled sepoys. In the Battle of Buxar, 40,000 soldiers belonging to the Nawab of Awadh were defeated by 1,000 European soldiers and 6,000 sepoys.<sup>14</sup>

Their performances proved that full-time, professional, and strictly-disciplined soldiers were extremely effective, and their coordination in battle was better than the traditional South Asian armies that consisted of various independent warbands. Regular payment in salaries, rather than the uncertain spoils of wars, gave them a sense of security and improved their performance. Uniforms increased their feelings of solidarity. Furthermore, the European-style army placed less emphasis on individual heroism, instead focusing on following orders from officers of superior rank, whomever they were. Consequently, the army would not quickly collapse when one leader was killed. These qualities, which seemingly could fix the problems inherent in the local, Indian style of

---

<sup>11</sup> Gommans, *The Indian Frontier*, 157-158; Roy, “Military Synthesis in South Asia,” 652-654, 685; Kaushik Roy and Peter Lorge, *Chinese and Indian Warfare – From the Classical Age to 1870* (London: Routledge, 2014), 330-333. For example, the sepoys of the EIC in Madras consisted particularly of *Telingas*—Telegu speakers from South India—as well as northern Indian mercenaries who had moved south to serve in the armies of various Mughal successor states.

<sup>12</sup> Phillips, “The Development of British Authority in Southern India,” 12.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Guntur District, 1788-1848: A History of Local Influence and Central Authority in South India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: The Softback Preview, 1998), 35; Roy, “Military Synthesis in South Asia,” 685.

warfare, meant demand for European-style troops and weapons dramatically increased in South Asia from the second half of the eighteenth century, and all prominent regional rulers tried, as far as possible, to procure them. Some of them hired European officers to westernize their forces, while others hired the ready-made mercenary troops of the European Companies, paying them in cash, land, or some other way.<sup>15</sup> Within a few decades, most South Asian armies were increasingly dominated by units of disciplined infantry sepoys, staffed with European officers, and equipped with European firearms, although some traditional elements remained. By 1800, this new-style army and mode of warfare had replaced the Turko-Mongolian warband as the chief military model in South Asia.<sup>16</sup>

### **Military Developments in South India**

As suggested by Susan Bayly, throughout the early modern period South India had been full of highly militarized societies. This was largely due to its geopolitics. Large sections of the region outside its core areas (the “wet-zone”) consisted of forests and hills and remained highly unsettled. These areas, the so-called “dry-zone,” were inhabited largely by “fringe peoples”—predators and plainsmen—who usually had highly-developed martial talents.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the second millennium, South India saw the downfall of many ancient Hindu empires, and the resultant power vacuum allowed many ambitious chiefs from the dry-zone to form independent chiefdoms and petty states, resulting in the growth of a militaristic atmosphere in the region. The zenith of the upwardly-mobile political power of the dry-zone warriors was during the Vijayanagara Empire, as large numbers of them, mostly Telegu-speakers—later known as the Nayakas—were recruited to form the core of the Vijayanagara military.<sup>18</sup> Vijayanagara imperial expansion led to an influx of Telugu Nayakas into the Coromandel Coast, who in turn formed semi-autonomous Nayaka states in Senji, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, and Madurai—the old Tamil dynastic centers.<sup>19</sup> In the Tamil regions, the Nayakas recruited unsettled pastoralists and forest dwellers from both the Deccan and Tamilnadu (such as the Kallar and Maravar people) as fresh troops and local collaborators. Hundreds of the forest warrior chiefs were elevated by the Vijayanagara emperors and the Nayakas to the positions of overlords in their petty domains, known as Poligars.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> See the discussions in: Roy, “Military Synthesis in South Asia.”

<sup>16</sup> Frykenberg, *Guntur District, 1788-1848*, 26; Stein, “State Formation and Economy Reconsidered,” 391; Metcalf and Metcalf, *Concise History of Modern India*, 50; Gommans, “The Warband,” 379; Gommans, *The Indian Frontier*, 165-166; Oak and Swamy, “Myopia or Strategic Behavior?,” 356.

<sup>17</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 19-25.

<sup>18</sup> Bes, “The Heirs of Vijayanagara,” 5-7.

<sup>19</sup> Bes, “The Heirs of Vijayanagara,” 7-8, 11; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 59-60, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 25, 51-52.

Vijayanagara fell in the sixteenth century, and most of the Nayaka dynasties had ended by the early eighteenth century. However, many of the small Poligar states managed to survive throughout the course of the eighteenth century. Ruled by networks of dry-zone Nayakas and Poligars from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, South India was thus transformed into an increasingly militarized society.<sup>21</sup> This was clearly manifested in the forms of religious belief and kingly self-representation prevalent in the area during this period. According to Susan Bayly, in other parts of South Asia the dominant form of Hinduism was the “orthodox” one, mainly based on concepts of purity and worship of “high” gods and goddesses (e.g. Siva, Vishnu, and Kali). In contrast, the most popular form of Hinduism in South India was the veneration of lesser, demonic, blood-drinking, warrior-style male and female deities, known as “bhakti devotionalism.” This was an ancient feature of South Indian religion, particularly popular among the “fringe” people, which expanded throughout the region concurrently with the political ascent of the Nayaka-Poligar petty states. Regarding rulership, all the chronicles of the prominent Poligar families depict the origins of their small states as periods of epic bloodshed, full of decapitations, and human sacrifice.<sup>22</sup>

In the realm of military technology, South India was also affected by changing methods of warfare in North India and the Deccan. Here, the openness and “inclusive” nature of the South Indian states and the southern military market to foreign elements and their high degree of integration should also be underlined. It is claimed that, in order to learn about military advances in the Indo-Persian world (in order to fight against them), the Indic ruler Devaraja II of Vijayanagara (r. 1432-1446) enlisted as many as 200 Muslim soldiers as officers, and many more, up to 10,000, at lower levels; at the Battle of Talikota in 1565 there were as many as 2,300 cannon and many more smaller guns deployed by his army.<sup>23</sup> This Vijayanagara policy was widely followed by their subordinates and successor states in South India over the next three centuries. Although these petty Hindu rulers drew most of their military men from their own caste groups, their forces also contained Muslim warriors from North India and the Deccan. One significant development in the local military market after the Vijayanagara downfall to the eighteenth century was the influx of many new groups of professional mercenaries in addition to the local Tamils and Telegu warriors, including Turanis, Iranis, Rajputs, Afghans, Nawayats, Marathas, and Europeans. These newcomers

---

<sup>21</sup> Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 44, 54-56.

<sup>22</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 30, 40-41, 49, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 56, 59-60, 63-64.

greatly increased the variety and quantity of soldiers and brought with them advanced new military tactics and weapons.<sup>24</sup>

## 4.2 Nawabi Self-Fashioning

Muhammad Ali Khan was certainly a man of the sword. Frequently referred to in the diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, during the reign of his father, Prince Muhammad Ali Khan (as well as his elder brother Mahfuz Khan) was constantly assigned by the old Nawab to lead armies to wage wars against their rivals, such as the Marathas and the French. In the first fifteen years of his own reign, the new Nawab also roamed around the Karnatak region with his army and the force of his British ally, subjugating rebellious subjects and consolidating his state.<sup>25</sup> It was only after the mid-1760s, that the Nawab altered this practice, stayed permanently in the palace and focused on resolving other problems. The role of the army's leader was then assigned to his generals, and sometimes his two eldest sons, who were ordered to work in close cooperation with the EIC's military officers. All previous historians have usually focused on the Nawab's debts, his military's dependence on the EIC, and his other activities, especially after the mid-1760s. As a result, the military role of the Nawab as well as his military household, have remained almost unseen in previous literatures. Furthermore, it seems that references to the Nawab's active military engagements in his court's literatures have been considered as fictional and self-praised, and thus neglected.

It is certain that one principle means of self-representation that the Nawab sought to craft of himself—and arguably the most prominent one which his main court chronicle, the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*—is that of a warrior. Many examples of this can be found in the text. Most take the form of conversations between the Nawab and various historical figures or between others speaking about him. These include a dialogue reported to have taken place between the Nawab and a group of his military generals, both South Asian and British commanders, including General Lawrence, one desperate night during his war with the Mysore prince Nand Raj and the Maratha general Murari Rao in the mid-1750s. The Nawab's army was cornered in Trichinopoly and surrounded by enemies “on all sides of the fort [so] even the birds did not fly.” The Nawab had only 5,100 soldiers and six cannons in his force, while the enemy had 95,000 men and 100 cannons. Therefore, as the chronicle continues, “the army of

---

<sup>24</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 12, 61-62, 96-103.

<sup>25</sup> *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*: II, 22-23; III: 112, 127, 212; IX, 206, 254, 265, 340, 345.

the Nawab was only one-hundredth of the enemy's force."<sup>26</sup> The conversation begins as follow:

The Nawab: [...] At present, considering the hopelessness of help from any one, [...] It does not behove [sic] our [here "my"] reputation that we [here "I" refers to the Nawab himself], in preference to the preservation of our borrowed life, lost the vast inherited kingdom for the sake of which in reality my father shed his blood. In this troubled state, I seek counsel from you, my trustworthy companions.

All the followers: In these delicate times we do not find any way but to risk our lives according to your command.

The Nawab: The same is our [my] counsel. As long as our breath remains we [I], in your company, will hold in our [my] hands the sword and try according to the maxim, the sword is the best of stratagems. [...]

All the followers: We hear and obey [...]

The Nawab: Tomorrow is the day for the exhibition of bravery, the occasion to display courage on the *maydan* of intrepidity, the opportunity for the performance of sword-play; it is the market to purchase honour and reputation.<sup>27</sup>

As the chronicle goes on to describe, at this desperate time many of the Nawab's companions sought to persuade him to give up his position. The Nawab refused, replying: "At the time of the display of bravery, the guarding of one's life is opposed to the honour of a soldier."<sup>28</sup> The Commander-in-Chief of the EIC's force, General Lawrence, requested that the Nawab shelter in a safer place and assured him that the British would fight to his achieve his goals: "It is advisable for your majesty to stay in the fort, take your seat in the tower and watch from there the *tamasha* of the bravery of your devoted servants [including the EIC forces]."<sup>29</sup> However, the Nawab refused, stating: "We [the Nawab] have also the same hope from the trustworthy English; we have faith in their eternal fidelity. [...] yet it behoves [sic] that the sardar [commander] in the battle remains behind the valiant fighters. It should not be like the saying

---

<sup>26</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 157. As the chronicle describes, the Nawab had 1,100 horse and 2,000 infantry—belonging to himself and his allies from Tanjore and Tondaman—and 500 Europeans, 1,500 armed EIC sepoy from the EIC, and six canons. On the other hand, the enemy's forces had 30,000 horse, 50,000 infantry belonging to the Mysore prince and Maratha mercenaries, and 12,000 armed men, 3,000 soldiers, and 100 canon belonging to the French.

<sup>27</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 155-157.

<sup>28</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 159.

<sup>29</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 159.

‘in the play of cards, confusion happens without the chief.’ [...]’<sup>30</sup> After the conversation ended, the Nawab readied his army. Two of his generals, Ghazanfar Ali Khan and Muhammad Abrar Khan, were placed on his right and left, while the armies of Tanjore and Tondaiman were at the rear. The EIC force, led by General Lawrence, was in the vanguard.<sup>31</sup>

This conversation was, of course, more the fictional invention of the chronicler than a real historical discourse. The size of the opposing army is also evidently greatly exaggerated. However, such accounts are very useful as they allow us to observe that the Nawab wished his audience to perceive him as an able warrior; thus, he was no different from other Indo-Islamic rulers of his and earlier ages in his desire to present himself as a great military leader. Ruling over such a highly-militarized society as South India, this image would have been particularly important for the Karnatak Nawab. Yet, what is perhaps more interesting is how the Nawab increasingly used the rising fame of the Europeans in the South Asian military market to enhance his own military image. The Nawab’s chronicle does not depict him and his family as reveling in bloodshed as had the Poligar chiefs of South India. Instead, it stresses the Nawab’s role as a supreme and decisive military leader, under whose banner stood not only South Asian warriors but also the powerful and renowned British commanders. It depicts these EIC officers serving him loyally and being ready to obey and sacrifice their lives to protect him and his interests. The image of the British soldiers as his servants is also reinforced in the scene of reward and gift-giving after the battle. As the chronicle states, the Nawab generously bestowed ranks, horses, robes of honor (*khilat*), gold, and precious stones to all his brave sardars. Such followed the usual custom of a Perso-Islamic ruler dealing with his subjects after defeating the enemy. However, the receivers here were not only local soldiers but British officers, too.<sup>32</sup> The use of Europeans to eulogize the Nawab was not limited to the British. His European rival, the French, were also often used in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*. A good example is the clearly fictional conversation between two of the Nawab’s sworn enemies during the early 1750s, in which, the French Governor Dupleix stated his admiration for the Nawab to Chanda Sahib:

War against Muḥammad ‘Alī Khān will bear no fruit. The striving in that direction will not bring any advantage. For he is a *sardar* possessing great wisdom and sagacity. He is a commander (endowed) with understanding and power. He is most experienced in every manner of attack, and engagement. He is skilled in the

---

<sup>30</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 160.

<sup>31</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 160.

<sup>32</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 163.

methods of war; the master of subdues the kingdom; the king who wields an experienced sword. [...] In opposing him the enemy loses his head and becomes helpless. I had occasions to know his method of fighting, and regretted having opposed him.<sup>33</sup>

On other occasion, Dupleix supposedly reported to the king of France that, in the whole country of Hindustan, there was now no ruler who could oppose the power of the French, with one exception:

but in the Carnatic, Nawwāb Muḥammad ‘Alī Khān is a blood-shedding sword; he is a storm on every battle-field [...] he is a fire that will quickly catch the heap of the enemy’s army. In opposition to him there is neither a place to stand on the battle-field nor a way to flee from it.<sup>34</sup>

### 4.3 People of the Sword

I will begin the investigation into the men of the sword by attempting to reconstruct the earliest military household of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, those individuals and groups who were attached to him when he was still a prince struggling for the Karnatak throne and in the earliest period of his reign. Then I will move on in time, to people who were recruited into his network of patronage later.

#### Indo-Irani Nobles from the Deccan

During the time of their father Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, a conflict had broken out between the future Nawab, Prince Muhammad Ali Khan, and his older brother, Prince Muhammad Mahfuz Khan. The princes were in competition over who would eventually acquire Trichinopoly from their father. Details of this conflict will be discussed elsewhere. But from this one event can be traced the names of some of the leading individuals who were attached to and supported Prince Muhammad Ali Khan (against his brother) in his pursuit of power during this early period. They seem to have been Indo-Iranian nobles from the Deccan in the service of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan. The most prominent among them was Saiyid Ali Khan Safawi al-Musawi. He is said to have been a companion of the previous Nawab at least from the time of Chicacole, and when Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan became ruler of the Karnatak, this person was “distinguished in the duty of deputing the Nawab (*mumtaz-i ahdeh-yi*

---

<sup>33</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 186.

*niyabat-i khas*).”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, he was also the maternal uncle of Khadija Begam, the chief consort of Prince Muhammad Ali Khan. Saiyid Ali Khan played a leading role, both strategically and financially, in assisting his nephew-in-law to defeat his half-brother and eventually gain the province of Trichinopoly.<sup>36</sup> When the mission had succeeded, as reward for his help the Saiyid was appointed the prince’s deputy and charged with taking care of the Trichinopoly fort. In the early period of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s reign, the Saiyid continued to occupy this position and played a crucial military role in Muhammad Ali’s army. This relative was clearly considered by the Nawab to be one of the two most trustworthy individuals, shown by the fact that, during at least two critical times in the Nawab’s life, as mentioned previously, the Nawab expressed his wish that, if he died, his full brother Abd al-Wahhab Khan was to be the regent for his eldest son while Saiyid Ali Khan was also trusted to raise and take care of his sons.<sup>37</sup>

Ghazandar Ali Khan of Hyderabad, who had been a military leader during the reign of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, was another prominent figure in this group. He came from the same Indo-Iranian family as Bibi Fakhr al-Nisa Begam, the second wife of Nawab Anwar al-Din and the mother of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. Ghazandar Ali Khan was thus another relative of the young Nawab on his mother’s side. He also appears in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* as having been one of the closest supporters of Prince Muhammad Ali Khan since the reign of his father. Ghazandar Ali Khan is also mentioned as the only one of Muhammad Ali Khan’s followers to have accompanied him when he made a secret and daring escape from Arcot to Trichinopoly in 1749, after his father had died and the whole army had dispersed.<sup>38</sup> He was also the Nawab’s right-hand general during the aforementioned desperate fight with the Mysore prince in 1755,<sup>39</sup> and during Muhammad Ali Khan’s reign he was commander of the cavalry.

We have already seen how the matrilineal links from both his mother and his wife (Khadija Begam) greatly benefited the Nawab ideologically (through blood-ties to both the Saiyids and the Iranian Safavids). The cases of Saiyid Ali Khan and Ghazandar Ali Khan are evidence of how these marital links benefited the Nawab’s power in practice, too, through improving his military capability. The Deccani-Iranian maternal networks thus played a

---

<sup>35</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi Part I*, 24, 108; for the Persian version, see: Burhan Khan Ibn Hasan Handi, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, ed. T. Chandrasekharan (Madras: The Superintendent Government Press, 1957), 116.

<sup>36</sup> I will discuss this event in more detail in Chapter Five (5.3).

<sup>37</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 108, 130-131; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 158, 212-213.

<sup>38</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 108, 131; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 160.

crucial role in strengthening Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's profile as he developed his core military strength.

### **Earlier Mughal and Asafjahi Warbands**

The next group consisted of former residents of northern India who had been the companions and colleagues of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's own father, Anwar al-Din Khan. Many of them, like Anwar al-Din Khan himself, had been warriors in the service of the Mughals, and, later, of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah, before following Anwar al-Din Khan to Karnatak when the latter was appointed Nawab. They seem to have played the most significant role in Anwar al-Din Khan's military household and in helping him to gain control of Karnatak. When the old Nawab was killed in battle, the warband dispersed and many of them returned to the Deccan. Later, when Muhammad Ali re-established the Walajah banner, they gradually returned to serve the new Nawab. The most significant figure in this group was, without question, Muhammad Najib Khan, along with his family. He had been a resident of Ajmir [Ajmer, Rajasthan?] and was said to have been in the company (*rekab-i khas*; royal riding) of Anwar al-Din Khan from their time together in Delhi. He became a servant of Nizam al-Mulk, was appointed as a diwan, and later, after 1743, moved to Karnatak with the previous Nawab. He was said to have been the latter's most intimate companion (*nadim-i hudur*) and his counsellor (*mushir*) in all matters, and to have been appointed the highest military commander in the Karnatak army.<sup>40</sup> Muhammad Najib Khan died in 1749, fighting alongside his master and companion in the First Carnatic War.<sup>41</sup> After that, his three sons went on to serve Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. The eldest, Muhammad Najib Khan Bahadur (who had previously had the name Muhammad Saiyid), appears in various documents from the early 1770s at least until the early 1780s as commander-in-chief of the Karnatak forces, just as his father had been. He was usually entrusted with leading the main army of the Karnatak Nawab (*lashkari ferozi*) in all major wars and was evidently one of only a few individuals in whom the Nawab placed significant trust and respect. To illustrate, in 1773-1775, at an extremely delicate time, when many factions around the Nawab—his sons, his officers, and various groups of British—were vying for control of the recently-conquered region of Tanjore, the Nawab chose Muhammad Najib Khan to take care of the fort.<sup>42</sup> During war with Mysore in 1782, when the Nawab temporarily handed over management of Karnatak's revenue to the

---

<sup>40</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 18; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 108; for the Persian version, see: Handi, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, 115-116.

<sup>41</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 147.

<sup>42</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 147; Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 310; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 22 Jun, 4 Oct. 1773, bundle 68, 31 Oct. 1774; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 124.

EIC, it was again that general to whom the Nawab entrusted his royal seal, with full power to apply it to any required order.<sup>43</sup>

There are other examples of North Indians occupying prominent roles within “the sword” group at the Karnatak court. Saiyid Nasir Ali Khan, another companion (*rafiq*) of the senior Nawab from his time in Hindustan, was, in Karnatak, entrusted with looking after the *bandars* (men who throw “iron rockets” in war).<sup>44</sup> Then there was Saiyid Muhammad Musawi Waleh, said to have been the son of a renowned Saiyid from Khurasan (Iran) who migrated to India during the reign of Emperor Shah Alam. He became a follower of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah, a former comrade of Anwar al-Din Khan, and was entrusted with the position of lieutenant-governor of the Trichinopoly fort.<sup>45</sup> The *Tuzak-i Walajahi* also mentions another “Mughal of Turani origin,” who was a distinguished military commander in the Karnatak army, named Muzaffar.<sup>46</sup> The three aforementioned individuals and some of their offspring fought for Karnatak into the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. Saiyid Nasir Ali Khan was fort governor and military leader of the Nawab’s armies as late as the early 1770s.<sup>47</sup> Saiyid Muhammad Musawi Waleh was appointed by Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan the commander of the infantry forces that had been organized and trained by the British officers. He was said to have been the first South Asian officer to have worn a western-style military uniform.<sup>48</sup> There are various other Muslim names among the Nawab’s military commanders on whose backgrounds there is no information. Many of them had the title Begh, such as Arshad Begh Khan, Amin Begh Khan, and Muhammad Begh Khan.<sup>49</sup> Begh or Beg was a title or surname that was usually used in Mughal times to indicate someone’s Turani origin, although this was not always the case.

### **Gopamau Residents**

Another prominent group of northern warriors who formed part of the Walajah military household were those who came from Muhammad Ali Khan’s ancestral hometown of Gopamau, in Awadh. It seems that sharing the same, faraway hometown as the Walajah rulers played a significant part in improving their profile in Karnatak. As an illustration, Masih al-Zaman, who was appointed the bakhshi of the whole army, had “the proud claim of

---

<sup>43</sup> PC, VI, Nawab to Eyre Coote, 6 Jun. 1782, 184.

<sup>44</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 109; for the Persian version, see: Handi, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, 116.

<sup>45</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 163.

<sup>46</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 131; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 193, 238; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Nov. 1771, 37.

<sup>48</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 163.

<sup>49</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 215, 237.

being a fellow townsman of the Nawwāb (*muftakhr-i nesbat-i ham waṭani-yi khwod be doulat*).” Muhammad Abrar Khan, the commander of all the infantry (who was also an envoy for the Nawab on a number of diplomatic missions), was also referred to as “the Nawwāb’s country man (*ham watan-i khas*).”<sup>50</sup> He was another individual who was in the military household of Muhammad Ali Khan from the earliest period and played an important role in the Nawab’s struggles during the 1750s, as did the Nawab’s maternal relatives. As the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* points out, during the war with Mysore in 1755, while his maternal relative Ghazanfar Ali Khan was on the Nawab’s right, Muhammad Abrar Khan was on his left.<sup>51</sup>

Both Persian and English documents demonstrate that, throughout his reign, the Nawab maintained connections with and paid a great deal of attention to the welfare of his hometown and the relatives who were living there. As mentioned in the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, many of his relatives moved to Madras, some in accordance with the Nawab’s wishes, others of their own accord. The Nawab arranged for the marriage of his sons and daughters to some of them and placed them under his protection.<sup>52</sup> The *Ruznama* reveals that people from Gopamau occasionally came to the Karnatak court to meet the Nawab and discuss its affairs with him. Furthermore, the Nawab often requested that the EIC’s Governors in Bengal assist him in sending his money to help charities in the town, to negotiate with the Nawabs of Awadh to grant or rent Gopamau to him, and to solve conflicts between his relatives and the Awadh rulers.<sup>53</sup> The Nawab’s motives in so doing, as he often explained, were his wish to express his respect to his ancestors and his desire to support his relatives and friends. I would also suggest that the military situation was of central importance in this regard. As has been discussed in Chapter Two, the recruitment of manpower from older political centers was key for the Mughal successor states in the South. The Nawab’s attempts to extend his patronage to Gopamau may partly have been to demonstrate to his countrymen his generosity and the promising careers they could have in his court as a means of stimulating them to migrate south. This supposition seems to be supported by the fact that many regions of Awadh, especially those around Lucknow and Kanauj, had been among the main military markets for the Mughal Empire from the reign of Emperor Akbar onwards. The Mughal emperors had

---

<sup>50</sup> Nair, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 108; for the Persian version, see: Handi, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, 116.

<sup>51</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 160.

<sup>52</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 59.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example: TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 24 Aug. 1773; CPC, II, Governor of Bengal to Nawab, 22 Mar. 1767, 53; Nawab to Governor of Bengal, 16 Oct. 1767, 163-164; CPC, IV, Nawab to Governor-General, 5 Sep. 1773, 92, 19 Oct. 1775, 348; CPC, V, Governor-General to Nawab, 11 Apr. 1776, 12, 6 Apr. 1780, 429.

repeatedly recruited large numbers of talented soldiers, especially infantrymen and musketeers, from those areas.<sup>54</sup>

### **Nawayats from the Old Regime**

A large number of military men from the Nawayat community, many of whom had been officers and relatives of the previous dynasty, were also recruited by the first two Walajahi Nawabs. Like the marriages of Walajahs to Nawayat women, this reflects their efforts to develop links between themselves and the old regime.

As the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* suggests, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan showed great kindness to the Nawayat people from their earliest encounters. In 1743, when Nizam al-Mulk appointed Khwaja Abd Allah Khan as regent for the last Nawayat Nawab, Khwaja Abd Allah Khan requested that the Nizam imprison the Nawayat nobles and take them to the Deccan, since they were a source of trouble in Karnatak. After Khwaja Abd Allah Khan's sudden death, the position of Karnatak regent was taken by Anwar al-Din Khan. The new regent promptly freed the imprisoned Nawayats and took them "in his happy company" back to Arcot.<sup>55</sup> In fact, while, during his reign, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan sent his sons and relatives to govern some strategically important places—such as Arcot, Trichinopoly, Nellore, Madurai, and Tirunelveli—he left many other districts, both large and small, undisturbed, in the hands of the killadars from the Nawayat community who had changed their allegiance and now acknowledged the sovereignty of the Walajahs. However, the sources state that many of these Nawayat officers would later cause great difficulties for Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan when Chanda Sahib returned to the region. According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, when Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan summoned all the zamindars and jagirdars to help fight Chanda Sahib, none responded except his sons, for the rest were all relatives or great friends of that Nawayat prince.<sup>56</sup> In the early period of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's reign, the situation was no different from the time of his father. During the 1750s, after the Nawab had subjugated a province there were only a few strategic places within it to which he was able to introduce direct control through representatives of his court; most districts were retained by their original governors, who sought pardon for their past "rebellious" acts, although a number of them repeated the same mistakes. The EIC expressed great concern about the Nawab's position during this time, mainly because the Nawayats "are

---

<sup>54</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 146.

<sup>55</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 56, 83.

<sup>56</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 138-139.

very numerous in the province.”<sup>57</sup> A few illustrations can help demonstrate the relationship between the Walajah court and various prominent Nawayat servants at the start of his reign.

The first is that of Mir Asad Allah Khan, a noble from the Nawayat community (*az ahul-i nawayat*) who became one of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s provincial governors. Mir Asad Khan was one prominent military general of Nawab Dost Ali Khan (r. 1732-1740) and Nawab Safdar Ali Khan (r. 1740-1742). He also occupied the post of Karnatak diwan in the latter’s reign. During the Nawayat civil war in 1740, he was a rival to Chanda Sahib. Later on, during another conflict, he was imprisoned by Murtaza Ali Khan, the Nawayat governor of Vellore. During the siege of that town in the early 1750s, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan released him from captivity. The Nawab brought this former member of the Nawayat elite into his service, gave him command of a fort, and in 1755 appointed him to a very important position: governor of Arcot province. During the late 1750s, when the Nawab fought against the son of Chanda Sahib, according to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* almost all the nobles originally from the Nawayat community who were in possession of jagirs and forts in Karnatak allied themselves with that Nawayat prince in Pondicherry and rebelled against the Nawab. However, Mir Asad Allah Khan proved loyal to the new dynasty and, after the war, was re-appointed as governor of Arcot. He also received Pondicherry, which the Nawab had managed to take from the French, as a jagir.<sup>58</sup>

The aforementioned Murtaza Ali Khan (d. 1762) was another important case. He was a prince of the Nawayat dynasty and a close relative of both Nawab Safdar Ali Khan and Chanda Sahib, while the fort town of Vellore, situated not far from Arcot, had been ruled by his family since the 1710s. After the Nawayats were ousted from the Karnatak throne, he was one of many provincial governors who chose to collaborate with the Walajahs in order to retain their positions and possessions. Yet when Chanda Sahib and the French invaded Karnatak, Murtaza Ali Khan performed acts that seemed, to the new Nawab, rebellious: strengthening his fort, failing to send tribute, and refusing to send military aid when it was demanded. According to the EIC’s records, during the early 1750s Murtaza Ali Khan was the most powerful zamindar in the Karnatak region. If he had chosen to side with the enemy, that rival party would have been truly formidable. However, despite rumors of him secretly negotiating with the French, Murtaza Ali Khan never openly took their side nor did anything

---

<sup>57</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 19 Mar. 1753, no page.

<sup>58</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 174, 188-189, 237, 272; *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, I:119, 198, 209; IX: 9, 11, 104-105; Fox, *North Arcot*, 49.

except defending his own domain.<sup>59</sup> And, eventually, in the mid-1750s, he decided to confirm his peace with the Nawab and the EIC. The Nawab embraced his proposals and the Nawayat prince retained his position for another decade.

Next is Muhammad Taqi Ali Khan, the brother-in-law of Nawab Safdar Ali Khan and the killadar of Wandiwash (Vandavasi). In 1752, the Nawab requested that the khan show his allegiance and pay tribute. At first, the khan arrogantly refused, so his town was seized by the Nawab's forces. He eventually sought pardon from the Nawab and agreed to pay a large amount of money as a penalty. Hence, the Nawab permitted him to keep his position. Yet, later on, when the Nawayat khan failed to send payment and a solution proved impossible, the Nawab expelled him from his position and imprisoned him.<sup>60</sup>

As such cases suggest, although Nawayat officers often caused problems, the Nawab followed the same policy as had his father, rather optimistically attempting to integrate them into his government, especially as provincial governors. The sources give us a good idea of the situation at the beginning of the new dynasty. First, they seem to confirm my previous assertion that a shortage of human resources was a serious problem that both the Nawabs faced, something that was also seen in the Deccan at the time. The situation was probably worse at the beginning of Muhammad Ali Khan's reign than it had been at the time of his father, because many of their relatives and servants had died or left the region during the series of wars that began in the late 1740s. As a consequence, the new Nawabs were not strong enough to eliminate potential insurgents and rule the entire country themselves. Hence, making compromises with elites of the old regime was probably the most practical choice. One further reason that pushed the Walajahs to rely heavily on Nawayat officials at the start of their reigns would have been the latter's greater expertise in and influence on local society compared to newly-arrived elites like the Walajahs' followers. The Nawayats, long resident in the region as zamindars, could allow the rules and the revenue collections to continue uninterrupted. This argument can be well illustrated by an anecdote in Ananda Ranga's diary about Mir Asad Allah Khan, the former Nawayat military general and diwan. According to Ananda Ranga, during the Nawayat civil war in the 1742, Prince Murtaza Ali Khan could capture Mir Asad Khan and was going to kill him, but the prince was stopped from doing so by one of his officer. Murtaza Ali was warned by this officer that if Mir Asad Khan died, "the finances of the state would fall into utter confusion," and that "he alone had knowledge of the

---

<sup>59</sup> Fox, *North Arcot*, 62, 71; IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 19 Mar. 1753, no page.

<sup>60</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 140-142.

actual arrears of pay due to the mounted troops and infantry; that their present ignorance of particulars might involve them in endless troubles.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore it was by his exceptional expertise in local affairs that the life of Mir Asad Khan was spared by his Nawayat rival. Supposedly it was by the same reason that the Walajah Nawab quickly promoted him to the important position of governor of Arcot province after his recruitment.

Public opinion should also be seen as something that shaped the Walajahs’ policy towards the old regime. Although the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* depicts the Nawayats as troublemakers in the region—both before and after the arrival of the Walajahs—there is evidence suggesting that the period of Nawayat rule, especially that of their first two Nawabs, was remembered very positively by many locals.<sup>62</sup> Showing too strong an antipathy towards their legacy would not only risk arousing more rebellions but could also create negative attitudes among the Karnatak population towards the new ruler. In contrast, by embracing and promoting former Nawayat servants to high positions at court the Walajahs would project an image of themselves as generous rulers who welcomed every capable individual. This representation not only eased the minds of the population but could help attract more talented people to the court, too.

However, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s approach changed significantly in the early 1760s, the time that he began to subjugate his rebellious brothers, as discussed in the previous chapter. At this time, he took a much harsher stance towards the Nawayat insurgents. Many of them were now removed from their positions and imprisoned. One such example was Murtaza Ali Khan, in Vellore. He was the father-in-law of Riza Ali Khan and, in the Third Carnatic War of the late 1750s, had helped the latter. In 1761, after negotiations had fallen through, the Nawab captured Vellore and, this time, took more direct control. Murtaza Ali Khan and his family, who had ruled the region for half a century, were removed from the fort and detained in Arcot.<sup>63</sup> However, according to the later diarist Paterson, despite being held captive the Nawayats were generally “not close prisoners”; they were instead allowed to live comfortably in various places around Karnatak. Such was the case up to 1769, when the result of the First Anglo-Mysore War (the British-Nawabi alliance against Hyder Ali Khan) drastically changed the situation for the Nawayats in Karnatak. This conflict ended with a peace treaty in which Hyder Ali Khan, who had gained the upper hand, was able to make

---

<sup>61</sup> *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, I: 202-203.

<sup>62</sup> IOR, H/94, HOME, Brief Relation of the Succession of Nabobs in the Province of Arcot from the Year 1700, 295-296; Fox, *North Arcot*, 48, 52; Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 38.

<sup>63</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 283; IOR, P/251/48, MP, MMSC, 4 Jan. 1762, 8.

various demands of the EIC and the Nawab. In one article, the sultan requested that all the Nawayat people in Karnatak be sent to him because of his friendship with the family of the late Chanda Sahib. The EIC Governor agreed to this, against the Nawab's wishes. Detachments of troops were sent to remove all the Nawayats from the region, although, according to the Nawab, "many of them had become useful and were unwilling to remove [sic]."<sup>64</sup> After this, the number of Nawayats in Karnatak must have fallen dramatically, although it is possible that not all of them migrated to the Mysore state. According to Paterson, Hyder Ali Khan's reason for making this demand was to humble and dishonor the Nawab, and indeed the Karnatak ruler had been deeply hurt, declaring that "Mr. Du Pré [the Madras Governor] would ruin him and blast his honor forever."<sup>65</sup> However, the Nawab's concern may have gone beyond the issue of honor. As the Nawab once claimed, one of Hyder Ali Khan's plans was to enter Karnatak and support the claim of his son, Tipu Sultan, who would then immediately be married to a daughter of Chanda Sahib.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the Nawab was afraid that Hyder Ali could use the remnants of the Nawayat elite to cause trouble for him in the future, just as the French Company and the son of Chanda Sahib had done previously.

### **Deccani Afghans**

Another group of swordsmen in Karnatak that merits discussion here is the Deccani Afghans, many of whom had settled in the region during the reign of Nawab Da'ud Khan Panni. Throughout Nawayat rule and the early period of the Walajah dynasty, the crucial roles played by Afghan officers and mercenaries, in both internal and external conflicts, are clear. Yet most of the evidence concerns their treachery. For instance, Chanda Sahib was caught by the Marathas in 1740 primarily because he was betrayed by an Afghan soldier in his force. In 1742, when the Nawayat Nawab Safdar Ali Khan was murdered by his cousin Murtaza Ali, the executioner who concocted the plan was an Afghan officer at the Nawab's court. Similarly, in 1744, when the final young Nawayat Nawab was assassinated as the result of a plot by an unknown individual, the person who was hired to commit the act was also an Afghan soldier, named Yadul Khan, who claimed that the Nawab had refused to pay his warband for its service to the former's late father.<sup>67</sup>

The Afghans were an exceptional case in Walajah history. Unlike other groups of warriors, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan seemingly did not want to recruit them into his army. In

---

<sup>64</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Dec. 1770, 123.

<sup>65</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Dec. 1770, 124.

<sup>66</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Dec. 1770, 144.

<sup>67</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 62, 65-66, 74-75; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 110-111.

fact, there is evidence in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* that, after the last Nawayat Nawab was killed by Yadul Khan, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan not only punished the murderer but also expelled all the Afghans from Karnatak “with great disgrace, unspeakable molestation and troubles.”<sup>68</sup> Ananda Ranga also referred to the old Nawab’s order for his troops to storm the houses of the Afghans in Arcot after this event.<sup>69</sup> It is said further in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* that, out of fear of the severe punishment and imprisonment threatened by the Walajah Nawab, the Afghans changed their dress, names, and manners to avoid detection. Despite this, their accent could not be disguised, and so “in a short period [of time] there was not even the name of Afghan in Payanghat [Karnatak].”<sup>70</sup> Yet, in reality, the Afghans did not completely disappear from Karnatak, since mention is made of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan sending his army to expel the rebel “Patans” (i.e. Afghans) from Madurai in the mid-1750s.<sup>71</sup> However, there is every reason to believe that the relationship between the Walajah Nawab and the Afghans never improved, especially considering the fact that the murderer of the Nawab’s father was an Afghan soldier of Chanda Sahib, as mentioned in Chapter Two. Furthermore, the Walajahs’ Deccan master, Nizam Nasir Jang, was also treacherously killed by the Afghan Nawabs of Kurnool and Cuddapah. Considering all this, it is not a surprise to see the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, composed in 1780, still depicting the Afghans in the blackest terms, referring to them as “the wicked people of the day.”<sup>72</sup>

### **Local Hindu Lords**

During the Nawab’s struggles for the throne in the first few years of his rule, most of the local Hindu zamindari lords in Karnatak behaved in similarly treacherous ways as did the Muslim Nawayat governors. As an EIC officer noted in the early 1750s, there was scarcely any Poligar in favor of the Nawab.<sup>73</sup> It was not attachment or loyalty to the Nawayat dynasty that meant these petty Hindu chieftains did not agree terms with the Walajah Nawab, rather that they did not want to risk having their territory ruined by the enemies of the Nawab while they still did not see the latter’s success as guaranteed. However, after the Nawab and his British ally had applied many carrots and various sticks, some of these Hindu rajas, such as

<sup>68</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part I, 110-111.

<sup>69</sup> *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, I: 258.

<sup>70</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part I, 111.

<sup>71</sup> Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 8-9.

<sup>72</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part I, 111.

<sup>73</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 18 Jun. 1753, 92.

the Tondaiman of Pudukkottai and the Maratha raja of Tanjore, began to send troops to aid the Karnatak forces.<sup>74</sup>

In the two subsequent decades, the Nawab gradually managed to make other Hindu zamindars throughout Karnatak acknowledge his power, either voluntarily or by force. The most important of them, who appear frequently in accounts of the Nawab's reign, were the Maratha raja of Tanjore, the Tondaiman Poligar of Pudukkottai, the Sethupathi Poligar of Ramnad (or the Great Maravar Poligar), the "Naalcooty" Poligar of Sivaganga (or the Little Maravar), the "Colastry" Poligar [of Sitarampur?], and the Poligar of Vencattygherry [Venkatagiri?]. In general, the Nawab followed the same policy towards these Hindu lords as he had with regards to the Muslim zamindars: those who accepted his sovereignty, paid tribute, and fulfilled their military obligations were allowed to retain their positions and possessions. Their estates and dynastic titles, such as Tondaiman or Sethupathi, were passed hereditarily from father to son.<sup>75</sup> The Tondaiman, Colastry, and Vencattygherry Poligars proved to be relatively good zamindars and useful military forces. The rajas themselves and their warbands were usually to be found in the Nawab's armies in the most significant battles.<sup>76</sup> An anecdote by Paterson from 1772 on one "Rajahwar Elmiwar" of the "Commiwar Caste" of Vencattygherry is one example of how these rajas were an important part of the "Nawabi sword" group. According to him, the people of this Hindu caste "are all soldiers and who always have a most sacred regard for their honour."<sup>77</sup> This raja had furnished the Nawab with a large number of men for his wars and even took to the field himself, fighting alongside the Nawab. In Paterson's words: "those people are his [the Nawab's] soldiers in time of war; and they cultivate the ground in time of peace."<sup>78</sup>

So far, I have not been able to determine the size and type of force that each of these Hindu Poligars sent the Nawab, yet I assume it would have been a few thousand each, most of whom were infantry. When the Nawab sent his army to subjugate Sivaganga in 1772, its ruler, the Naalcooty Poligar, was said to have had around 1,400 peons (irregular infantry) who fought to protect his fort.<sup>79</sup> These Poligars also possessed some warhorses, but probably

---

<sup>74</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultations, 14 Dec. 1752, no page, 17 Mar. 1753, no page, 21 Mar. 1753, 141, 25 Jun. 1753, no page, 30 Jul. 1753, no page, 13 Aug. 1753, no page, 27 Aug. 1753, 174.

<sup>75</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/1, DGP, Jan. 1771, 153.

<sup>76</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Jun. 1772, 191; E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 132; E/4/879, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 25 Jun. 1793, 621. It was only at the beginning of 1790 that the Nawab was in conflict with a Colastry raja over the possession of some lands in Sitarampur, and requested that the EIC move a troop to subjugate him. For this conflict, see: E/4/876, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 5 Mar. 1790, 140; Court of Directors to Madras, (no date) 1790, 474, 481-483.

<sup>77</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Aug. 1772, 234.

<sup>78</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Aug. 1772, 234-235.

<sup>79</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Jun. 1772, 193.

no more than a few hundred each. As a source from 1773 indicates, when the Nawab sent his 1,500 cavalymen to war, they were expected to meet, on the way, 400-500 more that had been sent from the three Poligars of Colastry, Vencattygherry, and Pudukkottai.<sup>80</sup> The Tanjore raja was an exceptional case. According to a 1773 estimate by the Nawab, the raja had 1,000 to 1,500 warhorses.<sup>81</sup>

In terms of military skill and technology, in the 1770s the Poligars were generally presented in European accounts as fearless forest warlords who fought in relatively traditional and primitive styles. Their main tactic was the skirmish, and their chief weapons were pikes 30 or 40 feet long.<sup>82</sup> However, it is reported that, in a battle of 1771, the people of Ramnad fought to protect their fort by firing artillery and small-arms fire into the Nawab-EIC army. Susan Bayly also mentions the Poligars' use of cannon and matchlocks—in addition to traditional swords, bows, and boomerangs—in the eighteenth century.<sup>83</sup> These accounts reflect the fact that the Poligars also possessed some firearms and tried to adapt themselves to the new mode of warfare and recent changes in the military market.

In contrast to the Tondaiman, Colastry, and Vencattygherry rulers, the Tanjore raja and the Poligars of Ramnad and Sivaganga proved to be perpetually troublesome for the Nawab. The Tanjore raja was the most powerful Hindu zamindar of Karnatak. From the time Vyankoji Bhonsla had founded a Maratha dynasty in the 1670s, Tanjore had been able to maintain a high level of autonomy. Some previous Karnatak Nawabs had been able to force the Tanjore rajas to accept the status of vassal and fulfil tributary obligations, but such occasions were the exception rather than the rule. During the early 1750s, Nawab Muhammad Ali was able to force the raja to send him military assistance, yet the raja paid no tribute whatsoever during that decade. Therefore, at the beginning of the 1760s, the Nawab was determined to bring Tanjore under his direct control, as he had managed to do with his siblings and many Nawayat zamindars. The Nawab also expected that the ten-year Tanjore tribute that he was owed, worth millions of rupees, would pay off a large part of his debts to the EIC and that such a fertile region would bring significant revenue into his treasury. Yet the Nawab's ambitious plan was thwarted by the EIC, who did not accept his demands on this occasion. For one thing, the Tanjore raja protested that he had, as a good subject, sent the Karnatak court significant assistance in previous difficult times and an attack on his country

---

<sup>80</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 151.

<sup>81</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 122.

<sup>82</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Nov. 1770, 102.

<sup>83</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 50.

would, therefore, be a great injustice. Another reason was that, recently, the EIC's Directors in London had given the Madras Presidency firm instructions to stop fighting and resume trading. Eventually, as a result of the EIC's influence, the Nawab was obliged to sign a peace treaty with the Tanjore raja in 1762 to which the EIC was guarantor. According to this treaty, the Nawab was to receive a large sum of money to cover that owed to him for past tribute as well as yearly payments in the future. However, the amount agreed was much lower than the Nawab would have received if the region had been completely subjugated to him. Furthermore, the Nawab was bound by the treaty not to disturb the sovereignty of the Tanjore ruler as long as the latter fulfilled his vassal obligations.<sup>84</sup> However, a decade later, in 1771, the raja of Tanjore sent his forces to invade the two Maravar Poligars of Ramnad and Sivanganga, which were also tributaries of the Nawab, something that gave the latter a good excuse to resume his attempt to take over Tanjore. This was followed by two attacks on Tanjore by the joint Nawab-EIC army, in 1771 and 1773, as previously mentioned. The Nawab put an end to the Tanjore dynasty in 1773, and officials were immediately sent from his court to establish direct rule over the area. However, the victory was very short-lived. Only a few years later, Tanjore was restored to its former raja by the EIC, something that led to bitter conflict between the Nawab and his British allies in the late 1770s and 1780s. As many issues related to the conquest of Tanjore can provide important insights into the relationship between the Nawab and the British, these events will be further elaborated on in Chapter Nine.

The Sethupathi of Ramnad and the Naalcooty of Sivaganga were no less unruly. They were always looking for an excuse to neglect their tributary obligations and thereby increase their independence, often cooperating with one of the Nawab's provincial governors who had been sent to rule the southern regions and who could become rebellious in certain circumstances.<sup>85</sup> Only when the Nawab's forces were sent to their lands did they seek pardon and offer submission. In 1771, the two Poligars sent petitions to the Nawab requesting that he punish the raja of Tanjore, who had invaded their regions. This led to the Nawab's first conquest of Tanjore, but, after the Nawab sent troops there in order to do so, and summoned military assistance from the two Poligars, the Sethupathi and Naalcooty rajas were reported to have behaved "very ill."<sup>86</sup> As a result, after the Tanjore conquest the Nawab ordered his army to invade these two Poligars. Before the siege, as was customary, the queen regent (*rani*) of

---

<sup>84</sup> Charles U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. X (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1983), 81-83; Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 98; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Jan.-Feb. 1771, 150, 169-170.

<sup>85</sup> The two most notorious cases during the 1750s-1760s were the Nawab's half-brother Muhammad Mahfuz Khan and the EIC's local mercenary commander, Muhammad Yusuf Khan.

<sup>86</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Nov. 1771, 40, Jun. 1772, 190-191, Aug. 1772, 248.

the late Ramnad Poligar requested that the Nawab's troops return home, promising to fulfil the tributary obligations and pay a huge indemnity for the war. But this time the Nawab was in no mood to compromise, as he wanted to put a permanent end to the two ancient dynasties and take direct control of their lands. The battles between the two sides proved that the Poligar forces were no match for the Nawab-EIC troops. According to reports, for example, the army of Karnatak was able to capture the forts easily, with few losses. The Naalcooty raja, who had tried to escape, was killed, while the rest of the two Poligar families were imprisoned. After this, the Nawab sent various amildars and killadars to govern those regions and manage the revenue collection.<sup>87</sup>

However, afterwards, the Ramnad and Sivaganga dynastic families were both restored to their former positions and status as Poligars. For the Sivaganga, this occurred a decade later, in 1781; such was probably also the case for the Ramnad.<sup>88</sup> These restorations were likely not the wishes of the Nawab but were instead heavily influenced by the EIC. This is because, in 1781-1785, during a conflict with Mysore (the Second Anglo-Mysore War), the Nawab was forced by the EIC to temporarily assign the administration and revenue collection of the whole of Karnatak to the Madras Presidency. This will be discussed further in Chapter Nine, but what I want to note here is an event of 1784. As recorded in the EIC's documents, the Nawab alleged that one Chinna Murdar, the "sherigar" of Sivaganga, (in the British translation: "the minister"), had rebelled against his government.<sup>89</sup> It was claimed that he was the son of a former Poligar of Sivaganga and thus a member of the local elite. Having initially displayed goodwill to Karnatak court in 1781, this nobleman was appointed by the Nawab as district minister. But later, the Nawab claimed, Chinna Murdar owed a large sum to the Nawab's treasury, and he had also captured and treated with great cruelty the family of the Naalcooty raja (now headed by the rani of the late raja). The Nawab thus requested the EIC's military assistance in subjugating him. However, after the British had investigated the case, their officers discovered that the charges against Chinna Murdar were fake, and had been invented by his rival, the raja of Ramnad. The former was, in reality, a man of great ability and punctual in his financial engagements. Local public opinion was also in his favor. The EIC therefore used its influence to secure his position.

---

<sup>87</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, May 1772, 182-184, Jun. 1772, 192-194, Jul. 1772, 209-210, E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 122-123, E/4/876, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, (no date) 1790, 524.

<sup>88</sup> IOR, E/4/876, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, (no date) 1790, 503.

<sup>89</sup> The term "sherigar" is probably corrupted from "Servaikkarar." It was a title of high military officer. The title appeared in the court of Ramnad, so it was probably also used in Sivaganga.

In 1784, the Nawab was still under the EIC's revenue obligations, so he could not move further in the Sivaganga affair.<sup>90</sup> But, after the Nawab had regained full control of his country in 1786 and found the opportunity, in 1789 he again moved against Chinna Murdar, with similar charges. Claiming that it was necessary to secure justice for the ancient raja family and restore peace in the region, this time the Nawab successfully got the EIC to help him remove Chinna Murdar. However, several years after his conquest of Sivaganga and despite many protests from both the Sivaganga rani and the EIC, the Nawab had evidently not restored the Naalcooty Poligar's family to its former position, attempting to establish direct management of the area himself instead. This eventually caused many of the petty Poligars in the surrounding areas to withhold their annual tribute in protest at this encroachment by the Nawab. Their rebellion made the EIC concerned that renewed warfare would soon follow, which would mean the interruption of the Nawab's debt re-payments to them. Consequently, it pushed the Nawab to restore the raja's family and re-appoint Chinna Murdar, as the latter was very popular with the local inhabitants.<sup>91</sup>

The case of the Sivaganga house and Chinna Murdar shows that the influence of the local Hindu rulers over their societies was both broad and deep, much more so than that of the Muslim rulers, who were recent immigrants. The cooperation of these Hindu rulers could have benefited the Nawab's consolidation of power greatly. Unfortunately, not until late in his reign was the Nawab able to achieve the total subjugation of many of these Hindu zamindari warlords. Although they were not powerful enough to cause him much harm, they often obstructed his centralizing tendencies and forced him into compromises in order to maintain the flow of revenue from and peace in the various regions of Karnataka.

The integration of Hindu notables into military service and ruling positions was not confined to the important dynastic zamindars. There were many other Hindu elites who were recruited directly into the Nawab's court circles and appointed provincial governors and sub-district officers. The number of Hindu provincial officials increased from the 1760s onwards after the Nawab had subjugated or eliminated most of his rebellious relatives and the provincial governors from earlier times, foremost among whom were the Nawayat Muslims. As such, the local Hindu elites were probably employed to fill some of these gaps. The clearest example of a Hindu provincial governor is that of Raja Beerbar Bahadur (aka Raja Peria/ Rayoji/Acchana Pandit), who is referred to in the sources as either the Nawab's na'ib

---

<sup>90</sup> IOR, E/4/876, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, (no date) 1790, 498-507, 512, 514, 517.

<sup>91</sup> IOR, E/4/876, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, (no date) 1790, 520-521; E/4/ 877, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 6 May 1791, 504-515, 519-522.

or the amildar of Arcot for around fifteen years from 1765/1767-1780/1782.<sup>92</sup> Although it is stated that he held the position of revenue collector, he was, in practice, the supreme governor of the large province of Arcot, the person the Nawab would contact first in all matters, both military and civil, related to the region. Persian and English documents both indicate that Raja Beerbar was one of the Nawab's favorite servants, someone to whom he paid the highest respect. According to the *Ruznama*, once, when Raja Beerbar came from Arcot to meet the Nawab in Madras, the latter ordered two other high-ranking Hindu courtiers, Rai Rayan and Rai Venkatesh Das, to go out with a procession to receive this provincial governor. After the raja's audience, the Nawab also paid him a visit at his residence in return, a sign of high esteem.<sup>93</sup> Paterson's diary also records that the Nawab once praised this Hindu raja as "one of the most sensible" of all his counsellors.<sup>94</sup> According to Paterson, this raja became the Nawab's favorite mainly because he maintained and increased the flow of revenue from Arcot into the Nawab's treasury. Moreover, he had good connections with local *sahukars*—the largest money-lenders in the region—so he could usually send huge sums of money when the Nawab was in need.<sup>95</sup> Other examples of provincial Hindu governors include: Raja Hukumath Ram, who was referred to as "the Executive Officer" of Tirunelveli; Ram Row [Rao], the fawjdar of Nellore (1780); Ram Sita, the amildar of Nellore (1782); and Serrenewas Row [Rao], the amildar of Trivady (1786).<sup>96</sup> There was also Raja Damarla Venkata Naidu Bahadur, whose official position is not known but who was likely to have had significant power because when the Madras Governor required a large number of people to repair a fort—50 masons and 2,000 laborers—the Nawab entrusted this to the raja.<sup>97</sup> Many other Hindu servants were also appointed to subordinate positions within district governments.<sup>98</sup>

A number of further observations about the Nawab's military officers and provincial governors can be made here. First, it is likely that there was no discrimination on the grounds of religion or ethnicity, since Muslims and Hindus seem to have had equal chances to serve the Nawab. For example, Ram Sita appears in a source as the amildar of Nellore district in 1782: a few years earlier, in 1777, the same position had been occupied by a Muslim, Nur al-

---

<sup>92</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 46; Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 31-32; Fox, *North Arcot*, 82, 120.

<sup>93</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 2 and 3 Feb. 1774.

<sup>94</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Jul. 1773, 27.

<sup>95</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 136-137; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 7 Jan. 1774.

<sup>96</sup> IOR, P/240/51, MPP, Madras Consultation, Nov. 1780, 1050; PC, VI, Fawjdar of Nellore to Nawab, 16 Mar. 1782, 145; IOR, P/240/63, MPP, Madras Consultation, Jun. 1786, 818

<sup>97</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 28 Jan. 1774.

<sup>98</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 2 Jan. and 5 Apr. 1774.

Din Khan. In 1780, the position of Nellore fawjdar was occupied by the Hindu Ram Rao, but two years later, in 1782, it was in the hands of the Muslim Mir Qutb al-Din Khan.<sup>99</sup> The fact that Raja Beerbar Bahadur and Raja Damarla Venkata Naidu Bahadur, both Hindus, received the Indo-Muslim honorific “bahadur” also indicates that Hindus could be promoted to very high positions at the Nawabi court. Hindu-Muslim communal conflict has long been a subject of heated debate in South Asian studies; eighteenth-century Karnatak may be able to shed light on such discussions. I will elaborate on this issue further in subsequent chapters when exploring other pillars of the state.

Secondly, it seems that, during the latter part of his reign, the Nawab’s officers could no longer expect their post in a particular area to be long-term, and there was no question of it being a life-long or hereditary possession. Instead, shifts in position were frequent and dependent on the Nawab’s whim. The aforementioned cases of the Nellore amildars and fawjdars are good examples. Other examples can be seen in the governors of Tirunelveli and Arcot. Before 1772, Tirunelveli was held by Ali Nawiz Khan; in 1781, by Fidvi Ali Khan; and in the early 1790s, by Eitabar Khan.<sup>100</sup> In 1752-1753, the Nawab appointed to Arcot one of his generals, Mir Madina Ali Khan; around the mid-1750s, the latter was replaced by Mir Asad Allah Khan, a former diwan of the Nawayat court who had proved his allegiance to the new dynasty;<sup>101</sup> after a decade, around 1767-1768, Raja Beerbar was appointed; and in the early 1790s, the office was occupied by another servant, Nizam al-Din Ahmed Khan Bahadur.<sup>102</sup> Whatever reasons the Nawab had for moving his servants around so often, these easily-managed transfers of specific positions, such as regional governor, may allow us to infer that he had a certain degree of success in centralizing his authority and controlling his courtiers.

Thirdly, the sources rarely provide much information about the backgrounds of the Nawab’s Hindu provincial governors, with the exception of their names and roles. We can probably assume from this that their profiles were not as high and distinguished as those previously-discussed ancient Hindu dynastic Nayakas and Poligars. However, the fact that the Nawab held in high esteem Raja Beerbar, someone who could increase the levels of revenue collected in Arcot and who was able to make the money-lenders cooperate with him,

---

<sup>99</sup> IOR, P/240/43, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1777, 462; P/240/51, MPP, Madras Consultation, Nov. 1780, 1050; PC, VI, Fawjdar of Nellore to Nawab, 16 Mar. 1782, 145.

<sup>100</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Jul. 1772, 220-221; PC, VI, Nawab to Manuel Marting, 29 Sep. 1781, 91; IOR, P/241/55, MPP, Madras Consultation, 24 Mar. 1795, 1547.

<sup>101</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 137, 174, 189.

<sup>102</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 136; IOR, P/240/45, MPP, Madras Consultation, May 1778, 560; P/241/35 MPP, Madras Consultation, 20 Nov 1792, 3272; P/241/38, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 6 Apr. 1793, 1460.

suggests that this Hindu was a very influential figure in local society. Both he and other Hindu provincial officers were likely to be, at some level, local lords, nobles, or owners of large tracts of lands, and their social status as petty rulers may have been a crucial factor in the Nawab's recruitment of them. While they—the petty Hindu rulers—had some influence over the population and elite networks at a local level, meaning that they could serve the Nawab well by controlling or administering local society and collecting the revenues (qualities that might be lacking in the recently-arrived Muslim servants), they were not powerful enough to, and had little dynastic prestige or military support with which they could, cause any real harm to the Nawab's government if they rose in revolt. This was especially true when compared to those larger, ancient Hindu dynastic zamindars.

Lastly, I would like to highlight an interesting development regarding the character of the Karnatak provincial governors. In a province, the Nawab could still appoint both a fort commander (fawjdar or killadar) and a chief civil administrator and revenue collector (the amildar). But, as the sources reveal, the individuals who were essentially regarded as the supreme governor of the domains by the Nawab, especially from the 1770s onwards, were the amildars. This was because the main skill most required of a provincial governor in the later period was proper management of the revenue collection, not military valor. The case of Arcot province is the best such example. In the early period, the Nawab appointed his general Mir Medina Ali Khan as governor; yet, later, it was given to Raja Beerbar, who was praised by the Nawab primarily for his ability to make revenue flow. The changing character of the Karnatak governor from sword-based to pen-based was, I would argue, directly related to the establishment of the Nawab-EIC joint force, a topic which I will now discuss.

### **Europeans: The Nawab- EIC Joint Force**

It could be said that, compared to many other contemporaneous South Asian hinterland rulers, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan had a rather “special” position as regards the military revolution that had recently occurred in Western Europe and was beginning to enter the South Asian market. First, he was among the earliest to witness the Europeans' formidable power directly, in the many battles involving the EIC and CIO that occurred in Karnatak during the 1740s and 1750s. Secondly, his position as the overlord of the southern Coromandel Coast allowed him to have relatively convenient access to the European arms and military men that came by ship to various South Asian ports. Nevertheless, the Nawab was also in a more precarious position, since one wrong move may have resulted in the powerful European

forces threatening his position. This is precisely what had happened to his father Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, whose army had been destroyed by a small troop from the French Company in the First Carnatic War. It was that battle with the French, in fact, that had led Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan to pay any price to procure the troops of the EIC to fight for him as mercenaries in the 1750s. In the mid-1760s, the political stability of Karnatak sharply improved, largely thanks to the performances of this EIC mercenary-*cum*-ally. The Nawab's financial situation also swiftly improved during this period, due to an increase in revenue that resulted from his country's more peaceful state. This is reflected in the opinions of EIC officers during this period, as they believed that, consequently, the Nawab would be able to repay his debt to the Company quickly.<sup>103</sup> The Nawab also repeatedly attempted to improve his military capacity. For example, instead of dissolving his troops at the end of Third Carnatic War to reduce costs, he recruited even more soldiers with the intention of building a large, centralized army that he controlled directly. According to several European eyewitnesses, it was impossible to know for certain the size of the Nawab's forces during this time as they were divided and kept in different places across Karnatak.<sup>104</sup> His eagerness to supply his indigenous forces with new European technology is clear; for example, he frequently requested that the British, as well as other European nations on the Coromandel Coast, provide him with thousands of European weapons, especially firearms such as chest muskets, pistols, flints, and blunderbusses, as well as gunpowder.<sup>105</sup> In 1765, at the time that the Nawab was improving his military capacity, he made a very important move: he established a permanent military force that I have labelled "the Nawab-EIC joint force." The creation of this joint force marked the beginning of a very complicated relationship between the Nawab and the EIC and significantly shaped the history of Karnatak and British India. As such, its origins should be explored here.

Before 1765, the army of the EIC's Madras Presidency was very modest in size. It had started in 1652 with 33 Europeans, and had increased to no more than 250 Europeans and 400 well-trained local sepoys by the early 1700s. Increased warfare during the twilight of the Mughal Empire and the growth of the French CIO in the Coromandel Coast forced the EIC to increase its number of sepoys to 3,000 by the time of the First Carnatic War in 1747.<sup>106</sup> It probably employed a few thousand more during the long decade of war in the 1750s.

---

<sup>103</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 67.

<sup>104</sup> IOR, P/251/49, MP, MMSC, 12 Jul. 1763, 68-69.

<sup>105</sup> IOR, P/251/49, MP, MMSC, 15 Nov. 1763, (no page); Z/E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 4 Jan. 1765, 49-50; P/240/24, MPP, Madras Consultations, 28 Jul. 1766, 371, 8 Sep. 1766, 424, 431.

<sup>106</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 8.

However, after peace was concluded between Britain and France in 1763, the EIC decided to let most of its sepoys go in order to reduce its expenses, and to keep only 2,000 to 4,000 men to protect both the Madras settlement and the jagirs it had received from the Karnatak Nawab as reward for their help.<sup>107</sup> Learning of the EIC's intention in 1764, the Nawab promptly suggested to the Madras Presidency that it not reduce the number of sepoys, but instead increase it to 10,000 (or more). According to his proposal, these soldiers would be mainly sponsored by the Nawab but organized and trained in the European style by the Company's officers. They would be formed into ten battalions, each consisting of a European captain, lieutenant, and ensign. A battalion would be sub-divided into ten companies of a hundred men, each of which would have one European sergeant and numerous native officers, as required.<sup>108</sup> This massive European-style army was to be used for the defense of both the Nawab's and the EIC's territory in Karnatak.

The EIC was very enthusiastic about this proposal, since it could see various advantages. First, it would be saved from the huge expenses that would otherwise have been required to maintain its own troops in the region. Secondly, the friendship between it and the Nawab would become even stronger as the ruler would be required to increase his military dependence on the Company. Thirdly, having this large joint force, the Nawab would no longer need to maintain large numbers of private troops, which, according to a 1766 report, numbered no less than 15,000 men. As such, he would be able to use the money saved to repay his debts to the Company.<sup>109</sup> To further convince the EIC to agree to his plan, the Nawab also promised that, soon after the establishment of the joint force, he would discharge most of his own troops and keep only a few *sibandis*—low quality soldiers—to facilitate revenue collection. After several rounds of negotiation, an agreement on the numbers of the joint force was reached: 12,000 sepoys, divided into twelve battalions. As for the expenses, seven battalions were to be paid for by the Nawab and five by the EIC. From 1767, the Nawab began to request that parts of this joint force, trained and led by the EIC's officers, be stationed in various strategic locations around Karnatak to help his provincial governors maintain the peace and collect revenue. For example, 100 Europeans and 500 sepoys were sent to Arcot. The EIC was very happy about this situation, saying that “the Nawab began to

---

<sup>107</sup> IOR, P/251/55, MP, MMSC, 24 Feb. 1766, 90.

<sup>108</sup> IOR, Z/E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 19 Feb. 1766, 332-343; 4 Mar. 1767, 599-601.

<sup>109</sup> IOR, P/251/56, MP, MMSC, 17 Nov. 1766, 652.

wear himself off his jealousy” and showed himself ready to place the protection of his country in the hands of the Company.<sup>110</sup>

By strengthening Karnatak’s central army with European technology and establishing a joint military force with the EIC in the mid-1760s, the Nawab was able to significantly reduce his military dependence on various unreliable locals. Furthermore, he was able to integrate into his army the most advanced elements of the South Asian military scene. The European-led army did indeed (mostly) bring him victories over many of his indigenous rivals and help him maintain the Karnatak state against many powerful neighbors during the next three decades. Nevertheless, it came at a very high price for the Nawab, not only financially but also politically. As may be inferred from some of the examples in this chapter, the role of the EIC in the later period of the Nawab’s rule—from the 1770s to the 1790s—was not confined to simply providing or training these European-style mercenaries. It seems that the Nawab needed to consult with and ask the permission of the EIC whenever he wanted to move his military forces. Often, he had to compromise or even disregard his own wishes when the EIC vetoed him or suggested other ideas (e.g. the aforementioned cases of Tanjore and Sivaganga). Did the Nawab’s policy of embracing European military elements go wrong? Did the Nawab really allow the EIC to control his military decisions? And how did the Nawab try to solve such problems, which were seemingly generated by his idea of a joint-force? Such questions—related to the complicated military relationship between the Nawab and the British—require much more detailed discussion and analysis, which will be provided in Chapter Nine. For now, I would like to underline the fact that the Karnatak Nawab was on the front line of the second military revolution in South Asia, that based on European infantry and weapons. He was one of the first South Asian rulers to experience directly military developments in the Western world. Moreover, he took the initiative and played an active role in stimulating their spread throughout the South Asian military market and their integration into his own military and political systems. Therefore, it is strange that, thus far, historians who have discussed the military changes that came about in many South Asian states during the second half of the eighteenth century in response to Western military innovations (such as Barua, Oak, and Swamy, as mentioned in the Introduction) have generally omitted the case of the Karnatak Nawab in their studies.<sup>111</sup> I will give more

---

<sup>110</sup> IOR, P/251/56, MP, MMSC, 17 Nov. 1766, 652; P/251/58, MP, MMSC, 16 Feb. 1767, 125-128; P/251/59, MP, MMSC, 5 Aug. 1767, 652; Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Sep. 1771, 14.

<sup>111</sup> Barua, “Military Developments in India,” 599-616; Oak and Swamy, “Myopia or Strategic Behavior?,” 352-366.

thoughts on their works after the discussion of Nawabi-British military relations in the final chapter.



## Chapter 5: Nawabi Pen

This chapter discusses “the people of the pen.” Like the chapter on the people of the sword, it will begin by sketching some important background information and the main debates regarding the early modern South Asian court, the main workplace of the people of the pen. Then, I will briefly examine the Nawab’s self-representation as a “man of the pen” and some of the most important sub-groups of the people of the pen. Finally, I will discuss what these people, their changing circumstances, and their rise and fall can tell us about broader historical developments in Karnatak and in eighteenth-century South Asia as a whole.

### 5.1 Early Modern South Asian Courts

#### Perso-Islamic Court Culture

Of all the Muslim conquerors, it was the Turanis and Afghans from Central Asia who were the most successful at establishing long-lasting polities in South Asia in the late medieval and early modern periods. As such, various aspects of Turkic rule were visible in many Indo-Islamic states and courts, and some examples were given in the previous chapters. No less obvious a characteristic that was shared by all the Indo-Islamic realms was the highly-Persianized state apparatus and court culture.<sup>1</sup> Here, I will briefly discuss the process of Persianization in South Asia and some of the most significant consequences it had for local elite society.

According to Alam, the domain of Islam can be divided (though certainly not in any clear-cut way) into two main politico-cultural zones. The first is the so-called Arab sphere—areas that have an Islamic culture based primarily on Arab traditions and often use Arabic as the main language of religion. The other is the Perso-Islamic cultural sphere, where Islamic ideas and practices are heavily influenced by Persian language, literature, tradition, and court and elite cultures; this area includes most of the non-Arab areas of the eastern part of the Islamic world.<sup>2</sup> South Asia was gradually integrated into the Perso-Islamic world, as many semi-nomadic warriors of various ethnicities—Turanis, Afghans, Iranis—invaded the region from that sphere. In the wake of these conquerors came large numbers of warriors and administrators from various parts of the Perso-Islamic world, ready to join the armies and administrations of the new Indo-Muslim states of North India and the Deccan. These people

---

<sup>1</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India: c. 1200-1800* (London: Hurst, 2004), 115-119, 143-144.

<sup>2</sup> For further discussions on this division in universal Islam, see: Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 7, 142; Francis Robinson, *The ‘Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (London: Hurst, 2001), 9-12.

brought with them Persian-style statecraft, court culture, and scholarship. The zenith of Persianization in North India occurred in the mid-sixteenth century, during the reign of the third Mughal emperor, Akbar. According to some scholars, his motives for this Persianization policy were his wish to bring in Iranis to balance the power of ambitious Turani nobles and his desire to elevate his semi-nomadic Mughal house to the same status as the Iranian shahs, both culturally and intellectually.<sup>3</sup> Persianization also took place across the Deccan sultanates, both earlier and more consistently than it had in the North, mainly as a result of their strong links with the Safavid Empire through sea routes and their shared Shia faith, as discussed in Chapter Three.

### **The Integration of Islamic and Indic Elements**

From the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, “orientalist” ideas regarding Hindu-Muslim communalism (Hindu-Muslim conflict) dominated the historiography of South Asia. This has had a profound impact on popular understanding of all aspects of early modern states and court society in the region up to the present day. In the last three decades, a group of scholars has attempted to correct this “anachronistic” perspective by arguing that, in reality, Hindu-Muslim communalism played a far less significant role in early modern South-Asian states than has been portrayed previously. These historians, including Phillip Wagoner, Muzaffar Alam, Susan Bayly, Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, have together developed a new framework for early modern South Asia as being highly tolerant to different religion and culture. For them, the term “Muslim period”—which is often given to South Asia in the period roughly 1200-1750 to differentiate it from the preceding “Hindu era”—is inappropriate. To prove the veracity of their argument, these scholars have highlighted various examples of how various “Indic” elements—people, material cultural, rulership rituals, artistic styles, etc.—were embraced and integrated into early modern “Islamicate” courts by many Muslim rulers of both North India and the Deccan.<sup>4</sup> A movement in the opposite direction—the embrace of Islamicate personal and cultural elements—was also visible in the contemporaneous Indic courts of the Vijayanagara Empire and its Nayaka and Poligar successor states in South India.<sup>5</sup> Hence the distinction becomes rather blurred.

---

<sup>3</sup> Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 122-128, 133-134; Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Phillip B. Wagoner, “‘Sultan among Hindu Kings’: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, 4 (1996): 853-854; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 3-5, 64. More examples of the existence of various Indic elements in Indo-Islamicate courts can be found in: Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 129; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 88, 105, 132, 168-169; Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 132.

<sup>5</sup> For further illustrations of the embrace of Islamicate culture in these South Indian “Indic” courts, see: Wagoner, “Sultan among Hindu Kings,” 853-854; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 53, 70-74, 163, 176-177, 221, 239-240; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 61-62.

According to a strict interpretation of the Sharia, one propounded by some Muslim theorists, the incorporation of Indic elements by Muslim rulers breaches its rules. This, then, leads to questions regarding the ideological basis of such incorporations. It is understandable that, in a context like South Asia, where Muslims were ruling over a majority Hindu (and other non-Muslim) population, accommodation with these elements was necessary to ensure peace. However, Alam has gone on to argue that the South Asian Muslim rulers' approach was not based simply on pragmatism or compromise. From the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Muslim elites in South Asia had developed important ethical concepts that allowed and even encouraged cross-cultural integration, both at their courts and in wider society. These principles can be seen in a set of Islamic political texts, known as *akhlaq*, that circulated widely in early modern South Asia, and especially in the Mughal intellectual sphere.<sup>6</sup> The *akhlaq* texts, highly influenced by the Greek legacy of rationalism, encourage generosity and openness in bringing non-Islamic norms into the Islamic sphere. The famous *akhlaq* of Nasir al-Din, for example, suggests that the ideal ruler can be either a Muslim or a non-Muslim; a non-Muslim who is just and talented can serve society better than an unjust Muslim sultan. The ideal leader of a polity is thus one who protects all members of society. Therefore, in *akhlaq* norms, people's rights are not determined by their religion.<sup>7</sup>

### **Tolerance in Eighteenth-century South Asia?**

Scholars have, up to now, mostly accepted that there was, in general, a syncretic atmosphere in the South Asian courts, at least up to the first decades of the seventeenth century. However, for the subsequent period, opinions on the subject differ. The classical narrative, suggested by both older and more recent generations of scholars, is that the level of religious tolerance in South Asia fundamentally changed during the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and was ended in the late seventeenth century, during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb. Both these rulers followed the orthodox Islam, and the latter was particularly zealous in attempting to enforce its principles.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> As Alam explains, there is a set of Islamic political literature that had a considerable impact on the political thought of Muslim rulers and elites, one which is collectively known as "mirrors for princes." These "mirrors for princes" can be divided into two types. One is *adab*, which emphasizes a narrow interpretation of Islamic law that is based on a theological interpretation and conforms to strict orthodox Islam. The other is *akhlaq* literature, which allows more liberal interpretations and often deviates from orthodox principles. The influence of *akhlaq* can be seen in many famous Mughal texts, such as the *Ain-i Akbari*, the *Mau'izah-i Jahangiri*, and large numbers of Mughal edicts that were sent to subordinate princes and governors throughout the empire. *Akhlaq* was also a basic requirement of Mughal courtiers, both Muslim and Hindu, something that can be seen in the writings of Chandra Bhan, a renowned Brahman secretary at the imperial court during the seventeenth century. See: Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 3-5, 11-12, 50-52, 62-65, 130.

<sup>7</sup> Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 10-13, 17-19, 55-59. Nasir al-Din Tusi was a prominent thirteenth-century scholar whose *akhlaq* writings were influential on many South Asian courts.

<sup>8</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 179-180, 185, 188-190, 193-194.

On the other hand, a number of “revisionist” historians—such as Muzaffar Alam, Catherine Asher, Cynthia Talbot, John F. Richards, and most recently Rajeev Kinra—have argued that communal conflict was a legacy of British colonialism and only began in the nineteenth century, not in the Mughal period and not in the eighteenth century. They argue that the few exceptional cases of religious discrimination during pre-colonial times were merely political tools used by individual rulers in response to opposition; while the two aforementioned Mughal emperors presented themselves as pious orthodox Muslims and issued many orders to remove Hindu elements from the imperial apparatus, in reality, such orders were only applied to a few Hindu mansabdars who had caused serious strife. It was thus caused by political conflict rather than religious discrimination. According to Asher and Talbot, the 96 new Maratha mansabdars who were enlisted in the imperial service is a good example of Emperor Aurangzeb’s pragmatism.<sup>9</sup> Their argument follows that of Richards, who states that Aurangzeb’s dismissal of high-ranking Brahmin officers in Golconda after its annexation was an exceptional case, the result of political expediency rather than religious motives.<sup>10</sup> Kinra has investigated the Mughal court during the reign of the emperors Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, and declared that, up to and including Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperors and their courtiers remained committed “to justice in the akhlaq tradition” and “to a relatively nonsectarian ethos of civility and gentleman conduct that crossed communal boundaries.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite new arguments and fresh evidence from many revisionist scholars on this issue, lately a number of rebuttals to this perspective—which re-confirm the classical narrative of communal conflict—have appeared. One historian who supports the classical assumption is Gijs Kruijtzter, who has studied the seventeenth-century Deccan. According to Kruijtzter, while there certainly was a large degree of religious tolerance within the Islamic courts of pre-colonial South Asia, this was significantly reduced in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, especially during the conflict between the Emperor Aurangzeb and the Maratha ruler Shivaji and following the annexation of the Deccan sultanates by the Mughals. In his words, after 1687 “it was simply no longer possible for political elites to experiment quite so freely and uninhibitedly with religious boundaries in India, or at least not in the way in which they had done previously.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, he argues that modern Hindu-Muslim

---

<sup>9</sup> Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 226-227, 231, 236.

<sup>10</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 64-67.

<sup>11</sup> Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (South Asia Across the Disciplines; Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 292-293; see also 2, 5, 48, 51, 53.

<sup>12</sup> Gijs Kruijtzter, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009), 267.

communal conflict has its roots in the period shortly after the 1680s. The eighteenth century, especially in the Deccan, thus unquestionably saw increased xenophobia and communalism. According to him, the eighteenth century might not have been a time of “pervasive Hindu-Muslim conflict,” but it was certainly one of “uncontained group conflict,” when large numbers of people “defined along lines of religion, language, region of origin, or occupation (not to say caste or class), or a mix of several of these [...]”<sup>13</sup> Another historian, Juan Cole, who studies eighteenth-century Awadh, has argued similarly, stating that there were signs of less tolerance and more factionalism, something caused by the religious policies of the Awadh Nawabi government. Its strong support of Shiism resulted in increased tensions between the Shia and all other sectarians, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and this laid the foundations for increased religious communalism in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

The recent works of revisionist and counter-revisionist scholars, discussed above, demonstrate that the nature of South Asia as regards communal conflict during the late pre-colonial period continues to be debated. We have seen in previous chapters that, while no Hindu women married into the Walajah family (as did happen with the Mughals), the men of the sword who surrounded the Nawab were not discriminated against due to their beliefs or ethnicities. Chapters Five and Six will shed more light on the Nawab’s court components and networks, and the case of Nawabi Karnatak will lead to some fresh observations and clarifications regarding this on-going debate.

## 5.2 Nawabi Self-Fashioning

He [God] placed you, o scribes (kuttab), in the most honoured position of the men of good education and virtues, of knowledge and composure. By your efforts the good things of the caliphate become well organized.<sup>15</sup>

These words, from the treatise *Risala ila al-kuttab*, written in the first half of the eighth century by the administrator Abd al-Hamid b. Yahya, are quoted by Van Berkel to reflect how the ideal penman was defined. As Van Berkel goes on to point out, in pre-modern Perso-Islamic “mirrors for princes” or “advice” literature (such as *adab*, *akhlaq* and *wasiyya*—advice from father to son or an administrator to his replacement), the basic qualities for which

---

<sup>13</sup> Kruijtzter, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India*, 277; see also 8-9, 257, 262, 266-268.

<sup>14</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 115, 223-228.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Abd al-Hamid b. Yahya, “*Risala ila l-kuttub*,” in Muhammad Kurd Ali (ed.), *Rasa'il al-bulagha* (Cairo, 1913), 172, quoted in Van Berkel, “The People of the Pen,” 384.

someone could be praised were—in addition to personal virtue and good character—an extensive education in many subjects and skills related to epistolary, literature, history, law, religion, geography, poetry, and so on. He also had to be refined and urbane—as opposed to uncouth—in all social and cultural situations, should know how to eat properly, dress codes, and rules of conduct, and know rhetoric or diplomatic conversation, among other things. For people with a specific profession—such as court administrator, scribe, or revenue collector—scribal and accounting skills and financial knowledge were also required.<sup>16</sup>

The Nawab was often praised by Europeans when they first met him as a result of his affable manners and courtesy.<sup>17</sup> Texts produced at his court and European records both describe how, in public ceremonies, he often dressed richly, presenting a majestic image of himself. For instance, it was once recorded that the Nawab had jewels on his head bound to a turban, to which was attached a fine feather on one side. His body was also decorated with jewels, strings of very fine pearls, and a necklace with an enormous square diamond pendant of immense value.<sup>18</sup> He went to great lengths to present his court as refined and civilized. In public ceremonies, it was always richly decorated and all the courtiers were neatly and richly dressed and trained in how to behave correctly.<sup>19</sup> He learnt the English language and European manners and customs well enough to interact with foreign visitors without experiencing any sense of inferiority. However, beyond such general displays of civility, the sources are silent regarding the Nawab's attempts to represent himself as possessing the other qualities, mentioned above, required by men of the pen. The Nawab's education and scholarly talent are not highlighted. Despite being known as a benefactor of many scholars, there is no indication that he composed anything himself. The main court chronicle certainly describes the Nawab's virtues—such as his generosity (*sakhawat*), modesty (*tawadu*), mercy (*rahim*) and kindness (*shafaqat*), justice (*adl*) and impartiality (*insaf*), intelligence (*fahm*) and sagacity (*firasat*)—but the examples that are given to illustrate these are all related to his pious religious acts or military skill.<sup>20</sup> In sum, the Nawab's self-representation made little attempt to present himself as possessing the qualities required of a man of the pen, especially when compared to those of the sword that he possessed.

---

<sup>16</sup> Van Berkel, "The People of the Pen," 386-387, 415, 428.

<sup>17</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/1, DGP, Jul. 1770, 293.

<sup>18</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1770, 25 Jan. 1771, 161.

<sup>19</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 9 Sep. 1773.

<sup>20</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 12-14, 20-21; for the Persian version, see: Handi, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, xix.

### 5.3 People of the Pen

#### Persianized Hindu Scribal Castes from Hindustan and the Deccan

Unlike the men of the sword, in the short list of elite officers who surrounded Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan that are recorded in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* there is found only one name of a Muslim who clearly occupied a civil position: Malik Aslam Khan. He is referred to as “a good-natured Nāit [Nawayat]” who was entrusted with the position of head of the chronicle office.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, there must have been other Muslims who held civil posts at the Karnatak court, yet both the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* and EIC sources suggest that, during the time of the old Nawab and in the early period of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s reign, the court administration was dominated by various Persianized Hindu officers from the Kayastha and Brahmin communities who had followed Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan from Hindustan or the Deccan. Some of the most important were: 1) Raja Sampat Rai, a Kayastha who occupied the position of chief diwan; 2) Rai Ganga Bashan (aka Bashan Das), a Kayastha or Brahmin who was appointed court treasurer; and 3) Manu Lal, a Kayastha who held the position of head clerk (*mir-munshi*) in the administration office (*daftar-i kardani*). Raja Sampat Rai had been a qanungo at Gopamau, and thus was a fellow-countryman of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan. There is no information regarding when or how he started to serve the old Nawab, but it was certainly before the latter became the ruler of Karnatak. Rai Ganga Bashan had served the old Nawab from the time the latter was the governor of Chicacole, and the Deccan seems to have been his home region. Manu Lal began to serve the old Nawab when the latter was the governor of Hyderabad.<sup>22</sup> Also listed are the names of other high-ranking Hindu officials whose castes or communities are not clearly identified. They were the underlings of the Kayastha officers mentioned above, so it may be assumed that they belonged to the same interest group(s) at court. The names most often seen in the sources are Antagi Pandit and Ninaree, who may have been Marathi Brahmins.<sup>23</sup> It is extremely likely that there were many other Kayastha and Brahmin migrants from North India and the Deccan who worked in these three main offices of revenue collection, treasury, and secretary.

His position as chief diwan means that Raja Sampat Rai had been one of the highest officials within Karnatak. The diary of Ananda Ranga also reflects that from the perspective of the diarist and his French employer in Pondicherry Raja Sampat Rai was the most

---

<sup>21</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 109; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 49.

<sup>23</sup> IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 25 Jun. 1753, 110-111.

important Karnatak minister during the reign of Nawab Anwar al-Din, whom they supposed to please next to the old Nawab and his two eldest sons, in dealing business with Arcot.<sup>24</sup> Yet the struggle between the two sons of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan—Muhammad Mahfuz Khan (the elder prince) and Muhammad Ali Khan (the Nawab)—over the governorship of Trichinopoly in the mid-1740s may provide the best indication of the influence that this Kayastha minister and his associates had. Originally, Trichinopoly had been granted to the elder prince, Mahfuz Khan, but after he made a number of mistakes the old Nawab retook control of it and was going to grant it to Muhammad Ali Khan instead. It was at this point that the Kayastha diwan revealed himself to be a supporter of Muhammad Mahfuz Khan, because he immediately secured a bill of exchange (*hundi*) of 300,000 rupees and gave it to the elder prince to buy back his position from the senior Nawab. However, this move failed, because, in response, Muhammad Ali Khan's faction immediately provided his father's treasury with 300,000 rupees in cash. Raja Sampat Rai, who understood that the removal of Mahfuz Khan would signify a decline in his influence, continued trying to save the fortunes of that prince. Through his diplomatic skills and his network at the Deccan court, he was able to procure a letter from Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah recommending that Anwar al-Din Khan appoint Mahfuz Khan as the na'ib of the Arcot suba; this implied that the Nizam was acknowledging that Mahfuz Khan was the heir-apparent of his father as the future Karnatak Nawab.<sup>25</sup> In this anecdote, while doubts could be raised about the *Tuzak-i Walajahi's* details regarding the old Nawab's preference for Muhammad Ali Khan over Mahfuz Khan, there is no reason to doubt the parts related to Raja Sampat Rai's role at court. Evidently, the power of this Kayastha diwan could make him a kingmaker. As a group, his faction was likely very influential at the Walajah court during this early period. In a work by Bellenoit on Hindu scribes in North India, he suggests that the Kayasthas were usually petty, subordinate scribes and revenue managers in the Indo-Muslim courts, who did not match the Muslim nobility, and not even with the Hindu Rajputs.<sup>26</sup> However, the case of Raja Sampat Rai in Karnatak proves that this assessment was not always true.

Considering their long history working at various Indo-Muslim courts, it is not surprising that Persianized Hindu scribes dominated the Karnatak court. Obviously, in the ancient Indic political system, while Kshastriya were supposed to be “of the sword,” it was the Brahmins who generally held positions of the pen. The Brahmins were in great demand,

<sup>24</sup> *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, I: 281; II, 382; III, 346.

<sup>25</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 130-134.

<sup>26</sup> Hayden Bellenoit, “Between Qanungos and Clerks: The Cultural and Service Worlds of Hindustan's Pensmen, 1750-1850,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, 4 (2014): 879, 881, 885-886.

for both their religious ability (e.g. in ritual and religious law) and their secular administrative skills. However, in the early medieval period, several other Hindu professional scribe communities gradually emerged in northern India. The most prominent of these were the Khatri and the Kayasthas, who were to challenge and compete with the Brahmins for secular administrative positions.<sup>27</sup> Each of these Hindu scribal communities would teach their members, from a young age, the specific knowledge and skills required for administrative and financial roles in government service, such as languages, writing, and accountancy. When Muslim courts were founded across South Asia, large numbers of Khatri, Kayasthas, and Brahmins were recruited to serve as assistants to the Muslim administrators, who were mainly immigrant Iranis. These Hindu scribes gradually became integrated into the Perso-Islamic world, acquiring the knowledge, culture, and (Persian) language of the Muslim rulers. Over time, Persianized Hindus not only came to dominate the lower strata of court administrations but some talented individuals even rose to high positions, such as chief or minister, posts which had previously been dominated by Indo-Iranis. According to Alam and Subrahmanyam, many of these Persianized Hindu scribes and administrators were also recruited into the Mughal courts, and their numbers rose quickly as Mughal territory expanded. Later, from the early eighteenth century, there was “a veritable explosion in their ranks” in many post-Mughal states, the most prominent being the Khatri officers in Bengal and Karnatak.<sup>28</sup> Bellenoit also highlights the domination of the “Rai Kayastha family of Lucknow” of the lower-ranks of the civil administration in eighteenth-century Awadh. According to him, since the 1600s these Kayasthas had worked as revenue and paper managers for the Mughals, continued to do so during the Nawabi state, and carried on even later, during the British Raj.<sup>29</sup> In another study, on the region of Banaras in the late eighteenth century, Cohn suggests that one third of qanungo posts in the region (out of a total of 168) were occupied by the Kayasthas or Baniyas. They were the largest proportion; Muslims numbered only seven.<sup>30</sup>

In South India, before the eighteenth century, Khatri and Kayasthas were also recruited into the courts of the Deccan sultans, but their numbers and influence were less than

---

<sup>27</sup> Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Contested Conjunctures: Brahman Communities and ‘Early Modernity’ in India,” *American Historical Review* 118, 3 (2013): 774-775. The origins of the Kayasthas or Khatri are still the subject of debate. According to Arnold Kaminsky and Roger Long, some Brahmanical religious texts refer to them as early as the seventh century. The Kayastha was originally a mixed community of literate men from different castes, recruited to work as scribes in various courts and provincial administrations. But later, they gradually cut their ties with their original castes, married among themselves, and developed into a new sub-caste based on this profession. See: Arnold P. Kaminsky and Roger D. Long, *India Today: An Encyclopedia of Life in the Republic*, vol. I (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 403-405.

<sup>28</sup> Subrahmanyam, “Iranians Abroad,” 357; Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 320, 369.

<sup>29</sup> For more details about the position of qanungo, see: Bellenoit, “Between Qanungos and Clerks,” 904.

<sup>30</sup> Cohn, “The Initial British Impact on India,” 228.

in the northern Indian courts. This is mainly because large numbers of Brahmin families or communities in South India also became professional, Persianized scribes in order to advance socially and economically and to compete with both the Irani migrants and the Hindu scribal castes from the North.<sup>31</sup> The most prominent of these were the Marathi-speaking Brahmins of the western Deccan and the Telegu-speaking Brahmins of the eastern Deccan. There is evidence of Marathi-Brahmin scribes serving in the courts of the Vijayanagara Empire and its Nayaka successor states, the Bahmani state and later Deccan sultanates, and the regional courts of local petty rulers, as well as in European enclaves along the Malabar Coast. The influence of the Marathi Brahmins increased in the western Deccan from the late seventeenth century in the Maratha state founded by Shivaji. However, they reached their political zenith in the eighteenth century, when the Maratha state was *de facto* ruled by Chitpavan Brahmin Peshwas.<sup>32</sup>

According to Richards, in the eastern Deccan the Telegu Brahmins dominated the lower strata of the Golconda administrative and revenue departments during the reigns of many Qutbshahi sultans, yet they reached their zenith in the period 1670-1686, when Sultan Abdul Hasan appointed Madanna Pandit, a Telegu Brahmin, as his wazir. This was the first time in history that a non-Muslim had been wazir of an Indian Muslim state, and Madanna wasted no time in seizing control of both pillars—sword and pen—of it by appointing members of his own community to important positions. However, this was short-lived, as in 1686 Aurangzeb forced Abd al-Hasan to dismiss the Brahman and his faction. This was followed by a massacre of Brahmin officials in Golconda by a Deccani mob who were angered by their rule. The Brahmins who survived the massacre lost their positions, and they disappeared completely when the Mughals brought Golconda into their Deccan province, replacing them with Muslim governors and northern Persianized Hindu scribes.<sup>33</sup> According to Alam and Subrahmanyam, the Khattris were the first of the northern Hindu scribal communities to rise to prominence in the administration and revenue offices of that Mughal province. However, after the Deccan fell to the Turani faction of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah and his successors, it was the Kayasthas who came to dominate.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> O'Hanlon, "Contested Conjunctions," 775.

<sup>32</sup> Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 51; O'Hanlon, "Contested Conjunctions," 775, 783. See also Rosalind O'Hanlon and Christopher Minkowski, "What Makes People Who They Are? Pandit Networks and the Problem of Livelihoods in Early Modern Western India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 45, 3 (2008): 381-416; David Washbrook, "The Maratha Brahmin Model in South India: An Afterword," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, 4 (2010): 597-615.

<sup>33</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 38-47, 64.

<sup>34</sup> Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 369; Leonard, "Hyderabad Political System and Its Participants," 580-581.

Developments in Karnatak were closely related to those in the eastern Deccan. From the 1670s until 1686, the Telegu Brahmin minister Madanna's brother, Akkanna, and various other relatives were the governors of Golconda territory in northern Karnatak, causing a new wave of Telegu-Brahmin migration to the Coromandel Coast.<sup>35</sup> In the early eighteenth century, when the Mughals gained control of the region, large numbers of Khatri were sent to assist the newly-appointed Muslim governors. When the Mughals appointed Da'ud Khan Panni as the fawjdar of Karnatak and Sa'adat Allah Khan as the diwan, the posts of peshkar and sarishtadar were given to two Khatri. After Nawab Sa'adat Allah Khan, a Nawayat, founded an independent state, it is said that a Khatri—Lala Dakhni Rai—played a significant role in it. Many other members of Dakhni Rai's family were also part of the entourage of the Nawayat Nawabs.<sup>36</sup> One such individual who is particularly significant for us is Khub Chand, because in Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's reign there was a prominent court poet and munshi named Rai Khub Chand;<sup>37</sup> it is highly probable that he was the same person as the Nawayat's Khatri officer. Furthermore, we can probably assume that other Khatri, who had moved to the region during the Mughal or Nawayat period, were also integrated into the Walajah court. However, after the Walajahs gained power, the leading civil positions, at least in the early period, were all occupied by Kayasthas; they had served in the Deccan and moved to Karnatak in the 1740s, along with the Walajah rulers.

Returning briefly to the previous anecdote regarding the competition between Prince Mahfuz Khan and Prince Muhammad Ali Khan over Trichinopoly, the account suggests that the Kayastha diwan Raja Sampat Rai had been a firm supporter of Mahfuz Khan and thus, it could be inferred, the natural enemy of Prince Muhammad Ali Khan. However, after gaining the Karnatak throne, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan chose to keep this Kayastha in his post and let him control the Karnatak treasury throughout almost all the 1750s. In 1758, he was entrusted with another important post, that of the Nawab's representative in his business-dealings with the EIC in Madras, especially those relating to the ruler's financial affairs.<sup>38</sup> Why were this Kayastha diwan and his faction so important to the Karnatak court that the Nawab chose to reconcile with them? Certainly, part of the answer is the skills, influence, and experience in revenue management within the region that they had gained during the reign of the Nawab's father; the fact that the diwan could quickly raise 300,000 rupees for Mahfuz

---

<sup>35</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 38-44.

<sup>36</sup> Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 368-369.

<sup>37</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 92; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 26 Jan. 1774.

<sup>38</sup> IOR, P/240/10, MPP, Madras consultation, Jun. 1752, 217; P/240/9, MPP, Madras Consultation, 17 Mar. 1753 (no page), 25 Jun. 1753, 110-12; E/4/861, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 23 Mar. 1759, 1078.

Khan is good evidence of this. Also, in a time of conflict it may have been difficult for the new Nawab to find a replacement of similar quality. Yet, another possibility is the influence of this Kayastha beyond Karnatak's boundary. Raja Sampat Rai's success in lobbying the Hyderabad court to declare the eldest prince to be the heir of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan suggests that he possessed a useful network of Persianized Hindu administrators in the courts of the Deccan and Karnatak.

Another example may help confirm the existence of such a network between the two courts and demonstrate how it could impact politics in Karnatak. In this second case, the network proved extremely useful for Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. According to the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Rai Ganga Bashan, the previously-mentioned Karnatak court treasurer, was an old friend of and had good connections with one Raja Ram Das (aka Raja Raghunath Das). The latter was a Brahmin, a soldier, a native of Chicacole, and one of the most prominent Deccan courtiers, and he had been a bakhshi of the army during the reign of Nizam Nasir Jang. In the early 1750s, Nizam Nasir Jang—the Mughal superior and supporter of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan during his wars with the Nawayats—ordered the Nawab to end his relationship with the British and drive them from the Coromandel Coast. In an effort to prevent his allies—who were also a potential new source of military support—from being expelled, the Nawab sent his diwan Raja Sampat Rai and his treasurer Rai Ganga Bashan, along with a large sum of money, to ask for help from Raja Ram Das, who at that time was bakhshi of the Deccan army. As the story goes, it was as a result of the “sweet words” of the two Hindu officers and “the familiarity of their long friendship” that Raja Ram Das eventually agreed to help the Karnatak Nawab convince the Nizam to reverse his decision. Eventually, they were able to calm the rage of the Deccan ruler and stop him from marching against the British settlements.<sup>39</sup> According to the *Maathir al-Umara*, this Brahmin would later play a significant role in the murder of Nizam Nasir Jang, and was promoted by the next Nizam, Muzaffar Jang, to the Deccan diwan. After Muzaffar Jang was murdered, Raja Ram Das and other grandees made Prince Salabat Jang the new Deccan Nizam, and the former held the position of wazir.<sup>40</sup> Thus, we again find a Hindu holding an extremely high-level position at a Muslim court. This Brahmin not only survived the wars of succession but his influence in the Deccan was that of a kingmaker, similar to the contemporaneous case of Raja Sampat Rai in Karnatak. These examples suggest that it was not only their scribal and financial skills but also their influence in and lucrative networks with other South Indian courts that made these

---

<sup>39</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 46-50.

<sup>40</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 433-434.

northern Hindu scribes or administrators valuable to Muslim rulers, including Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. One may compare this to the network of the Marathi Brahmins of the western Deccan in the mid seventeenth century, as depicted in an article by Rosalind O’Hanlon and Christopher Minkoski. During that period, Marathi Brahmin scribes were used by all the regional rulers—Shivaji, the raja of Savantwadi; the sultan of Bijapur; and the Portuguese in Goa—as political agents to make contact and conduct negotiations with each other.<sup>41</sup>

Although Raja Sampat Rai and his network were valuable to the Nawab, time proved that the former never warmed to the new monarch. Either his allegiance to the elder prince never wavered or his career under the Nawab did not progress as he had wished, but when Mahfuz Khan rebelled against the new Nawab in the mid-1760s, Raja Sampat Rai chose to join him once more. He acted as Mahfuz Khan’s envoy to the Mysore and Deccan courts, attempting to secure their assistance in the fight against Nawab Muhammad Ali.<sup>42</sup> After this, the Kayastha diwan never served the Nawab again. Antagi Pandit, a subordinate Brahmin colleague, was appointed as his replacement and as the Nawab’s agent in his dealings with the EIC.<sup>43</sup> Yet, soon after, the career of this old Brahmin servant also ended badly; as the Nawab told Paterson in the early 1770s, Antagi had played various tricks on the Europeans—or was corrupt—so the Nawab had felt obliged to remove him.<sup>44</sup>

From the late 1760s, sometime after the loss of Raja Sampat Rai and the removal of Antagi Pandit, some interesting changes at the Karnatak court can be discerned, particularly the rise of prominent new figures within the sphere of “the pen,” details of which will be discussed below. However, I would like to emphasize here that the rise of these newcomers did not mean the total expunging of those who were already at the court. Those from the latter group who caused the Nawab no trouble were promoted. For example, the Kayastha mir-munshi Manu Lal is said to have received “the right to ride an elephant and the title of ‘Rāj’” from the Nawab.<sup>45</sup> In records from the 1770s and 1780s, one still can find many Persianized Hindu officers serving at the court, and it is highly likely that these were migrants from the North and the Deccan who had moved to the region during the Mughal expansion and subsequently.

---

<sup>41</sup> O’Hanlon and Minkowski, “What Makes People Who They Are?,” 391.

<sup>42</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 264.

<sup>43</sup> IOR, P/240/18, MPP, Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1760, 316; P/D/44, MP, MMSC, 31 Aug. 1760, 736.

<sup>44</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Jan. 1773, 129.

<sup>45</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 25.

These included Rai Rayan (the mir-munshi), Rai Venkatesh Das (the head clerk of the treasury), and Rai Bishamdas (the Nawab's treasurer),<sup>46</sup> as well as Bhog (or Bog) Chand and Kishan Chand, who worked as a munshi; the latter was also the writer of the *Ruznama*.<sup>47</sup> There was also Rai Khub Chand, the court poet who, according to my earlier assertion, was one of the Khattris who had previously served the Nawayats. There are also signs that there were some northern Rajput servants, since one can find various courtiers with the surname Singh. These include: Rai Singh, who seems to have worked in a financial post because he was ordered by the Nawab to settle the account of sahlukars; Jai Singh, who was appointed treasurer after the previous treasurer, Rai Bishamdas, had died; and Chater Singh, who was ordered to take care of the rice supply.<sup>48</sup>

### **Muslim Counsellors**

As is reflected in the *Ruznama* and the diary of Paterson, by the early 1770s there was no individual officer or faction at the Karnatak court in possession of exceptionally high executive power or the ability to control the court or state affairs apart from the Nawab himself. It could be said that the Nawab was relatively successful in centralizing power, since all important affairs of state had to be referred to him before any decision was made. Yet, the Nawab was not able to decide or manage everything by himself. For almost all issues, he would summon a small group of his most trusted men, whom he would consult; I will collectively term these the Nawab's "Privy Council." In the Privy Council, the head of which was the Nawab himself, sat two Muslim officers—Saiyid Asim Khan and Abd al-Rashid Khan—who were the most indispensable. They were his two principal counsellors, and the Nawab would summon them daily to request advice on and assistance in all matters, both large and small, related to the affairs of state, whether public or private issues. Saiyid Muhammad Asim Khan Bahadur is referred to in various documents as the Nawab's chief diwan, while the post of Abd al-Rashid Khan is rather confusing. He is sometimes referred to as the "steward" and sometimes also as the diwan. As such, they were not just the Nawab's closest counsellors but were also the controllers of the civil administration and revenue management. As they are rarely seen in the historical record prior to the late 1760s, it can be assumed that these two Muslims were part of a new generation of administrators who had only recently gained the Nawab's trust, and they had been promoted to prominent positions to replace some of the older and more influential courtiers from his father's reign, such as Raja

---

<sup>46</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 2-3 May 1773, bundle 67, 26 Jun. 1774.

<sup>47</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 26 Apr. 1773, bundle 67, 26 Jan. 1774.

<sup>48</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 12 May and 2 Jun. 1774.

Sampat Rai and Antagi Pandit. To these Council members could be added the Nawab's two eldest sons (Prince Ghulam Husain and Prince Modar al-Mulk), one of the Nawab's Brahmins, named Venkatachalam, and various other courtiers, depending on the matter under discussion.

Abd al-Rashid Khan was the second son of General Muhammad Najib Khan (senior) and the younger brother of General Muhammad Najib Khan (junior), both of whom held the post of supreme military commander of Karnatak and whose lives were discussed in the preceding chapter.<sup>49</sup> Abd al-Rashid Khan was likely one of the Nawab's companions who had grown up with him, similar to his elder brother. After the death of his father while fighting alongside the old Nawab in 1749, his family temporarily migrated to the Deccan. Abd al-Rashid Khan returned to Karnatak around the late 1750s and, after some time, gained the confidence of the Nawab and obtained the post of diwan-i khas.<sup>50</sup> In an EIC document from 1767, he is called a "steward" to the Nawab, and he appears between the late 1760s and the 1770s as the Nawab's representative in various vital matters relating to land revenue, trade, the payment of the Nawab's debts, and other affairs related to court administration.<sup>51</sup> It is very possible that he remained in this trusted position until his death in 1777.

At this point, the nature of Abd al-Rashid Khan's family should be underlined once more. While his elder brother became the commander-in-chief of Karnatak's forces, he—the second brother—was made the Nawab's diwan, steward, and one of his closest advisers. The third brother, Abd al-Quddus Khan, also held an important position at the Nawab's court. Two other relatives, Manauwar Ali Khan and Chisti [Ya...] Khan, held the posts of *mir saman* (a type of steward) and amildar of Chidambaram, respectively.<sup>52</sup> This family must have proved their loyalty to the Nawab to the utmost as its members were trusted with the highest posts of both pen and sword.

Saiyid Asim Khan, like the Walajahs, had been in the company of the first Deccan Nizam. His grandfather, Muhammad Abd Allah, had been a merchant at Surat, and had known Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan in northern India. Later, Saiyid Muhammad Asim Khan served Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah in the Deccan, and the latter appointed him governor (*hakim*) of Masulipatnam. After that, he was chosen to be a tutor to Prince Nasir Jang. But, during the

---

<sup>49</sup> While the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* refers to Abd al-Rashid Khan as the second son of Muhammad Najib Khan, Gurney, instead, thought he was his son-in-law; see: Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 233.

<sup>50</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 244. The term *khas* (which is both Arabic and Persian) means special, particular, or private.

<sup>51</sup> IOR, P/240/25, MPP, Madras Consultation, Feb 1767, 67; P/240/34, MPP, Madras Consultations, (no date) 1772, 568, 683, 703.

<sup>52</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 19; Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 233; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 147.

tumultuous years of the early 1750s, he was suspected by Nasir Jang of having treacherously given assistance to the French, and fell from favor. After the end of the war with the French he found employment in Karnatak under Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. He was, for a time, the amin at Palnaud. In the *Tuzak-i Walajahi's* account of the subjugation of Nellore in the early 1760s, it is reported that the Nawab sent one Khwaja Asim Khan to demand that his rebellious brother, Najib Allah Khan, return to obedience. This Khwaja Asim Khan was the grandson of Khwaja Abd Allah Khan and the Nawab's boon companion.<sup>53</sup> This figure is very possibly Saiyid Muhammad Asim Khan, and the story thus reflects the long friendship between the Nawab and this officer. In 1771, Saiyid Asim Khan was appointed Karnatak's diwan.<sup>54</sup> The Saiyid was often assigned by the Nawab to be his representative, with full power to manage the most important political and diplomatic negotiations with other actors. For example, he was sent to both the Maratha camp and the EIC Governor-General in Bengal when the Nawab wanted to conclude a treaty with each of them.<sup>55</sup> When Tanjore was conquered, everyone in the Nawab's circle wanted the responsibility of managing its revenue. However, the Nawab chose to send Muhammad Asim Khan to be the head of the administration there. At this time, the Saiyid requested that he be permitted to appoint his own peshkar. This was contrary to the usual custom, because a peshkar was supposed to be appointed by the central government to assist and check the work of the regional governor. As such, many of the Nawab's officials were against this request. However, the Nawab agreed to it because he did not want to cause the Saiyid offence. This account reflects just how high was the esteem in which Saiyid Muhammad Asim Khan was held by the Nawab.<sup>56</sup> However, his career in the Nawab's service did not end well. In 1788, almost at the end of the Nawab's reign, he ran into financial difficulties that involved the Nawab and fell dramatically from favor.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Madras Dubashes: The Nawab's Brahmins**

In both Persian and EIC archives from the early 1770s, in addition to the two Muslim counselors (Saiyid Asim Khan and Abd al-Rashid Khan) and the Nawab's two eldest sons can be found the name of a Hindu officer, one Avangheddela (or Avani padeli, or Avinigaddala) Venkatachalam, a participant in the Nawab's Privy Council. He is often referred to in English documents as the "Nabob's Brahmin" or "the little Brahmin." There is

<sup>53</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 281.

<sup>54</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 19-20.

<sup>55</sup> *CPC*, VI, Nawab to Governor-General, 26 Mar. 1781, 42.

<sup>56</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 5 Jul. 1773; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 148-149.

<sup>57</sup> Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 233.

no clear information as to when he started to serve the Nawab. He worked mainly as the Nawab's Persian-English interpreter and secretary, and the nature of his job meant he was present for all the important discussions between the Nawab and various British individuals, either EIC officers, private traders, or the British king's representatives. He was also summoned by the Madras Governor when the latter needed to talk about the Nawab's debts to the EIC, a task that had previously been the responsibility of the Kayastha Raja Sampat Rai.<sup>58</sup> According to an anecdote in Paterson's diary, on one occasion a British group tried to bribe some of the Nawab's close counsellors in order to get some business done with the court. They offered to give the diwan Saiyid Asim Khan 20,000 pagodas and the Brahmin Venkatachalam 3,000 pagodas.<sup>59</sup> Considering the different amounts proposed, the Brahmin's rank and prestige at court must have been small compared to the Muslim elites. However, the trust that the Nawab placed in this Brahmin does not seem to have been any less. In 1771, Paterson referred to this Brahmin servant as someone "who was now entirely in the Nabob's confidence," and in 1773 as "who by being constantly at Chepauk [Palace], and ministering to the lowest foibles, has got the ear of the Nabob."<sup>60</sup> Once more, in 1774, Paterson wrote: "this Brahmin knows the Nabob's disposition to a hair and in such trifles he suits his advice to the Nabob's weak side, in order to preserve his own influence."<sup>61</sup> Avangheddela Venkatachalam appears most often in the sources, but he was not the only member of his community or caste at the Nawab's court. In fact, the first Telegu Brahmin with that surname to have been in the Nawab's service was Guntur Venkatachalam, known as "the Nabob's Brahminey," who worked for him in the early 1760s. He was the Nawab's business agent in dealings with the EIC regarding revenue-farming, but left his post in 1765.<sup>62</sup> At the same time as Avangheddela in the 1770s, there were at least three other Brahmins with the same surname—Amarapundi, Kuppu, and Unigaddala Venkatachalam—at the Karnatak court. They mainly did general scribal work, made Persian-English translations of correspondence, and facilitated transactions between the Nawab and various European nations.<sup>63</sup>

These Venkatachalams were Telegu-speaking Brahmins from a scribal community. What made their background distinct from other groups of Hindu scribes was their close connections with the European enclaves on the Coromandel Coast in general, and the EIC in particular. Many of them were dubashes (for details, see below) for the Company or

---

<sup>58</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 26 Jun. 1774.

<sup>59</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Mar. 1773, 67.

<sup>60</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Nov. 1771, 45; E/379/7, Dec. 1773, 125-126.

<sup>61</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/9, DGP, Oct. 1774, 185.

<sup>62</sup> See the discussion in Chapter Seven.

<sup>63</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 2, 17, 22, and 25 May 1773.

individual British officers. Guntur Venkatachalam, (possibly) the first of these Telegu Brahmins to serve the Nawab, left his court in 1765 because Robert Clive had requested that he move to Bengal to become his dubash during his second period as governor there.<sup>64</sup> Being summoned as Clive's favorite, it is likely that he had served Clive during the latter's time in Madras, before serving the Nawab. Due to these connections with high-ranking Company officers, it is not surprising that the Nawab used this Brahmin dubash as his agent in his business dealings with the EIC. Similarly, before Avangheddela Venkatachalam became the Nawab's Brahmin in the 1770s, he had been the dubash of various important EIC officers in the Madras Presidency, such as General Eyre Coote, Calliaud, Monson, and General Joseph Smith.<sup>65</sup> Also during this time, another member of his community, Aya Tamba Venkatachalam, served as the dubash of Madras Governor Joseph Dupré (1770-1773).<sup>66</sup> According to Gurney, the dubashes never worked alone. Their sons, brothers, and nephews also attached themselves to the Company's servants, and their jobs were passed on, from one to another, as a syndicate.<sup>67</sup> Hence, it may not be wrong to assume that there were many other Telegu-Brahmins who served as the dubashes of EIC officers, as well as in the Nawab's court, during this period.

What was a dubash? In her study of the eighteenth-century institution of Madras dubashes, Susan Neild-Basu explains that the word "dubash" literally means a man of two languages, and it was generally used in pre-modern South India to refer to an interpreter. But the usefulness of the dubashes, especially for the eighteenth-century Europeans in their enclaves along the Coromandel Coast, extended far beyond their language skills. They could be found in most departments of the European companies and performed a variety of tasks, including interpreter, translator, secretary, accountant, and mediator between European officials and local people and societies.<sup>68</sup> In more personal roles, a dubash could also function as a household steward, advisor, broker, and frequently moneylender for a European master. Many of them also supervised and took care of their patrons' private investments. Nearly every European, both officers of the companies and free traders, had at least one dubash as a personal assistant. Many dubashes first developed their skills as servants to lower-level traders, accumulating knowledge of different local regions regarding the mercantile system and the supply of and demand for commodities, as well as improving their diplomatic skills.

---

<sup>64</sup> Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," 26; Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 21, 51; IOR, P/240/21, MPP, Madras Consultation, 1 Dec. 1763, 461; P/251/49, MP, MMSC, 28 Mar. 1763, 162.

<sup>65</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Nov. 1771, 45.

<sup>66</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 41, 163.

<sup>67</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 43.

<sup>68</sup> Susan Neild-Basu, "The Dubashes of Madras," *Modern Asian Studies* 18, 1 (1984): 4.

Then they advanced their careers by becoming dubashes to higher-ranking company officials and large private entrepreneurs. Because of the increasing need of the EIC and private traders to make contact with the hinterland administrations and local societies in the eighteenth century, Madras became a city largely populated by a “tribe of dubashes.” As an institution or a collective group, they had significant influence and played an important role in Madras and the Coromandel Coast, both politically and economically. Neild-Basu also points out that the rise of the dubashes was a sign of the ascendancy, both socially and economically, of new groups of people who would eventually replace the local mercantile classes. The largest number of Madras dubashes came from scribal and administrative castes not traditionally associated with trade in South India, namely Vellalars, Kanakkapillais, and Yadavas, while many were Telegu and Marathi Brahmins.<sup>69</sup>

Particularly attached to the Karnatak court were the Telegu Brahmins. How did these Brahmins, originally members of the scribal and bureaucratic communities, penetrate the eighteenth-century mercantile world of the Coast as subordinate collaborators of the EIC? To understand this, we should refer back to the rise of Marathi and Telegu Brahmins in the state administration of the Deccan in an earlier period. As O’Hanlon points out, rapid economic expansion and social change in the Deccan during the early modern period pushed large numbers of Marathi Brahmin communities in the western Deccan to compete with the Muslim administrators and Hindu scribal castes from northern India in an attempt to gain political and social advancement. These administrative positions gave many Marathi Brahmin families the chance to gain access to and accumulate wealth in the mercantile world. Quickly, the Marathi Brahmins emerged as a powerful economic force in the region, being traders, revenue farmers, major landowners, bankers, and moneylenders.<sup>70</sup> A similar development occurred with the Telegu Brahmins in the eastern Deccan. According to Richards, by serving in Muslim courts as scribes, accountants, revenue managers, tax collectors, and agents for various powerful men, whether Muslim nobles or Hindu, Armenian, or European merchants, the Telegu Brahmins were able to amass substantial wealth. At least from the early sixteenth century, when Golconda emerged as the most important market for large diamonds in the world, Telegu Brahmins participated in this lucrative business.<sup>71</sup> According to Kanakalatha Mukund, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries some Telegu Brahmins started to appear as business competitors in the Tamilnadu markets that had previously been dominated by the

---

<sup>69</sup> Neild-Basu, “The Dubashes of Madras,” 1-2, 10-11, 14-15, 27; Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India,” 24-25.

<sup>70</sup> O’Hanlon, “Contested Conjunctures,” 776; O’Hanlon and Minkowski, “What Makes People Who They Are?,” 392, 396-398.

<sup>71</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 15, 18.

mercantile castes of Balijas, Komaties, and Chetties, among others. One specific way in which they fiercely competed, especially from the mid-seventeenth century, was in their attempts to become the local business partners of European companies and European private merchants, by holding posts such as brokers, chief merchants, and dubashes.<sup>72</sup> The political expansion of Golconda into Tamilnadu during the period of Telegu Brahmin Madanna's leadership helped bring about an increase in numbers and influence of these Telegu Brahmins on the Coromandel Coast. The subsequent Mughal expansions brought about the rise of the Khattris and Kayasthas at the expense of the Telegu Brahmins in the state administration during the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>73</sup> But it seems that, by this time, the Telegu Brahmins had already cemented their position in the Coromandel mercantile world, particularly in the European enclaves.

In her study, Neild-Basu examines a single Telegu Brahmin family whose members served the EIC for generations, from 1679-1746, as chief dubash (i.e. the dubash of the Madras Governor). It was only the temporary fall of Madras to the French in 1746 that led to a shift in the fortunes of the family, which at that time was headed by Vyasam Venkatachalam Papaiya. The family lost its dominance over the Madras dubashi institution to another dubash family, from the Vellalar caste. However, later, Vyasam Venkatachalam Papaiya and his successors were able to re-establish their old ties with the Company. Some members of his family got their jobs as Company translators back and regained the various economic benefits associated with being a dubash. In the mid-1770s, Vyasam Venkatachalam Papaiya, like other top dubashes who were associated with the EIC at that time, was able to acquire considerable economic influence by being a tax farmer and merchant in the region.<sup>74</sup> The background of the Nawab's Brahmin Avangheddela Venkatachalam—as a dubash to various high-ranking EIC officers—suggests that he was probably also a member of this Telegu Brahmin dubashi family that had served the EIC for many generations, or of another dubashi family with similar levels of influence. This link is also presumably applicable to all other Venkatachalam Brahmins at the Nawab's court whose names were mentioned above.

I argue that the recruitment of the Telegu-Brahmins to the Walajah court was closely linked to the rise of the EIC as a formidable power in the Coromandel Coast and the rise of the dubashes as an influential group under the British in the second half of the eighteenth century. In other words, it shows the effort that the Karnatak Nawab made to adapt his court

---

<sup>72</sup> Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 43-44, 67-69, 160.

<sup>73</sup> Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 38-47, 64.

<sup>74</sup> Neild-Basu, "The Dubashes of Madras," 5-6.

to the changing political and economic circumstances of the area, where the ascendancy of British power at the expense of the formerly-dominant Mughal elites and their associates (including the northern Indian scribal castes) was increasingly clear. For the Nawab, whose links with the British were particularly strong compared to many other South Asian states at the time, the local anglicized scribes, with their ability to do business with the European enclaves, must have been particularly useful. Their networks of kinship and family ties with the Madras Presidency and British officers must have greatly facilitated the Nawab's business ventures.<sup>75</sup> In addition to the direct recruitment of various former Madras dubashes and their associates into the Karnatak court, there is further evidence of strong connections between the Nawab and other Madras dubashes at the time. Christopher Bayly mentions one Venkatanarayana Pillai, whose family had served both the British and the French companies since 1680 and who was himself the dubash of Warren Hastings, the EIC's first Governor-General of India. Over time, he secured the protection of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and helped him manage the Company's land-revenue holdings around Madras. A relative of Venkatanarayana had been a dubash of Straton, a member of the Madras Council, and was later appointed "revenue under-manager" for the Ramnad district by the Nawab. Furthermore, various other relatives and descendants of Venkatanarayana invested heavily in the bonds that were sold by the Nawab to accommodate his debts.<sup>76</sup>

### **European Servants**

At least from the beginning of the 1760s, the Nawab employed a number of British civil-servants at his court, mainly medical doctors, secretaries, accountants, and political advisers. Some of them combined several or all of these tasks in one individual. Their origins were varied. Some of them had worked for the EIC or the British government and been sent to South Asia, after which they either resigned from their posts or waited until their contract expired and then moved into the Nawab's service. There were also private merchants and adventurers who left their homeland to try their luck in South Asia directly. As well as using their own skills—such as medical or scribal—they assisted the Nawab in improving daily communications between the Chepak Palace and the EIC and British government, tasks which otherwise could only be done by the anglicized Brahmin scribes, as mentioned previously.<sup>77</sup> According to Henry D. Love, during the late 1770s, the Nawab had as many as

---

<sup>75</sup> The Nawab's business dealings with the EIC will be discussed in greater detail in Part III.

<sup>76</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 60.

<sup>77</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 55-57; Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 300; Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 229; Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 566.

eight British doctors in his service—two physicians and six surgeons. In addition, he had a number of European engineers, musicians, saddlers, and coachmen,<sup>78</sup> reflecting his keen interest in various branches of Western knowledge.

Here, I will focus on a number of British individuals or groups who were able to advance their careers by being political advisers to the Nawab and playing important roles at his court. The first two examples are Alexander Boswall, who was the Nawab's principle British secretary during the 1760s, and George Paterson, who rose to prominence in the period 1771-1774. The Nawab used these men as "walking encyclopedias" and as doors through which he could gain access to the European world. He learned from them European history, politics, culture, ceremonial, customs, and so on. He consulted them on everything related to Europeans to prevent any mistakes or misunderstandings on his part when dealing with them. The Nawab also hired various British men as his political advisers-*cum*-envoys, the most prominent of whom were a Scotsman, an Irishman, and an Englishman: John Macpherson, Lauchlin Maclean, and Paul Benfield, who served the Nawab in different ways and at different times. John Macpherson and Lauchlin Maclean served as the Nawab's political envoys to the British government in London and the Bengal Presidency several times during the late 1760s and 1770s.<sup>79</sup> Paul Benfield had been an engineer for the Madras Presidency before becoming one of the most important private entrepreneurs in Madras in the second half of the eighteenth century. He began to be associated with some of the Nawab's businesses from the mid-1760s, and by the 1770s-1780s he was one of the Nawab's largest European creditors.

I would like to give two examples of the tensions that arose between some of the Nawab's British political advisers, and between them and the Nawab. The accounts reveal some important aspects of court politics and of the Nawab's policies towards European agents.

1) Alexander Boswall versus George Paterson:

Alexander Boswall entered the Nawab's service as a doctor in 1762 or earlier, and later became one of his political advisers. For many years, at least until the early 1770s, he was considered by the people at court as having the Nawab's total trust. As Paterson narrates,

---

<sup>78</sup> Henry D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800: Traced from the East India Company's Records Preserved at Fort St. George and the India Office and from Other Sources*, vol. III (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 55, 139; Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 229.

<sup>79</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 59, 61.

although the Nawab had many doctors, only Boswall could give him medicine, and he was able to speak to the Nawab in a way no-one else dared to by “storming at him like an emperor” or pursuing him to the harem quarter in anger.<sup>80</sup> However, soon after the Nawab recruited Paterson into his service, the latter rose to become the most prominent of all the British advisers; Boswall was still at court and was well treated by the Nawab, but his position as a political adviser had been eclipsed by Paterson. The change of the Nawab’s favor from Boswall to Paterson can be explained by various factors. First, Boswall was primarily a medical doctor and he had lived in Madras for more than a decade. As such, he would not have had up-to-date knowledge of British politics and political networks. The Nawab’s dealings with the EIC and the British government became increasingly complicated in the 1770s, and so the ruler naturally needed a more informed adviser, like Paterson, who had just left the motherland. Paterson’s political sophistication, experience, and networks seem to be confirmed by the fact that he had been chosen as the private secretary of Sir John Lindsay, the first British king’s representative to the Indian courts. Furthermore, Boswall had been an officer of the EIC and had close links to the Madras Presidency and the Company’s men. Such links must have benefited the Nawab greatly in the preceding decade, when he needed to establish good relations with the EIC. But in the early 1770s, the EIC-Nawab relationship turned sour and increasingly difficult, and as a result the Nawab attempted to draw in the British government to help balance the Company’s power.<sup>81</sup> At this time, the Nawab thus needed “the king’s people” more than “the Company’s people” as his consultants. Presumably, the Nawab’s trust in Boswall was diminished because of his close links with the EIC. As Paterson wrote in his diary sometime after he began to serve the Nawab, he felt the jealousy of Boswall towards him, commenting that: “he [Boswall] seems exceedingly hurt, that he finds the Nabob neither consults him nor follows his Council, and supposes everything must go wrong about the Durbar [the court] in which he is not consulted.”<sup>82</sup> In fact, Boswall, who wanted to leave India for Britain soon after, had been planning to develop a long-term network in the Karnatak by schooling Robert Storey, another of the Nawab’s surgeons and Boswall’s friend, to succeed him as the Nawab’s close adviser.<sup>83</sup> Storey was indeed made a surgeon and secretary at the court, but it was Paterson whom the Nawab raised as his new favorite. This was another disappointment for Boswall.

---

<sup>80</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Apr. 1774, 50; Gurney, “Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot,” 228-229.

<sup>81</sup> I will discuss how the Nawab-EIC relationship turned sour further in Part III.

<sup>82</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 104-105; E/379/5, Mar. 1773, 61.

<sup>83</sup> Gurney, “The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot,” 171.

## 2) George Paterson versus John Macpherson and Lauchlin Maclean:

After around four years in the Nawab's service, during which time he had consistently received great honor from the Nawab, Paterson found himself in a similar situation to that of Boswall. In 1774, Paterson sensed that the Nawab's trust in him was diminishing following the arrival of a new group of advisers at the court, led by John Macpherson and Lauchlin Maclean. They were private Scottish and Irish adventurers, and John Macpherson had been the first political agent of the Nawab to be sent to the British government in London—in 1768—which led to the visits of two British “king's ministers” to his court. Returning to Madras in 1774, Macpherson and his friend suggested various ideas and schemes to the Nawab in private meetings;<sup>84</sup> Paterson, who had had the Nawab's full trust for years, found himself prevented from knowing what had passed between the Nawab and these adventurers, and felt extremely irritated. As he wrote: “[A]nd after all I had done for four years in the Nabob's service, without my having given the least course, he had openly in the face of all those people withdrawn his confidence and had transacted this business by other means. This was not using me well and had hurt me, [...]”<sup>85</sup> Although the Nawab still treated him very well and with all courtesy, Paterson felt that his advice was no longer sought on most issues. Feeling his usefulness coming to an end, Paterson began to stay away from the durbar, made a trip through Karnatak, and then returned to Britain.

As was revealed later, Maclean and Macpherson were both friends of Warren Hastings, who had recently—in 1773—been appointed the first Governor-General of India. And, according to Ramaswami, Maclean had been first introduced to the Nawab by Hastings.<sup>86</sup> An idea that Macpherson and Maclean suggested to the Nawab in the mid-1770s was to make one of the latter's sons the ruler of Bengal, which had, from the mid-1760s, been under the *de facto* control of the EIC. Maclean and Macpherson claimed that they could use their connections with Warren Hastings and various other influential people—in both the Company and Britain—to achieve this. We cannot know whether the Nawab really believed that these political adventurers could bring his plans for Bengal to fruition, as he would have known that it would not be easy. Furthermore, it could easily have produced increased conflict between him and his opponents in the EIC. However, building a stronger relationship with Warren Hastings—the first Governor-General and the head of the Bengal Presidency—seems to have been important enough for the Nawab to do business with these people. After

---

<sup>84</sup> Gurney, “The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot,” 259, 266.

<sup>85</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, May 1774, 96. See also Gurney, “The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot,” 241.

<sup>86</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 249.

the visits of two of the British king's representatives to his court, where they stayed for several years in the period 1770-1774, the Nawab seems to have realized that the British government could not improve his bargaining position with the EIC or solve his conflicts with the Madras Presidency. As such, his contacts with the British government seem to have become less and less important to the Nawab, and so the Governor-General of Bengal (and his supporters in the EIC) became potential new allies for the Nawab. This may explain the declining role of George Paterson and the rise of Maclean and Macpherson as the Nawab's preferred British advisers.

We will discuss the visit of the British king's representatives to the Nawab's court and the Nawab-Hastings relationship in more detail in Part III. Here, I would like to stress that the rise and fall of various British advisers at the Nawab's court was linked to the Nawab's scheme to build up political alliances with different British factions at different points in time. I argue against the assumption that has prevailed in the historiography of Karnatak up to now, such as in the work of Gurney, which depicts the Nawab's actions merely as unwitting shifts of reliance from one European adviser to another. In Gurney's opinion, "it was plain that he [the Nawab] was only escaping from one set of masters to submit to the influence of another."<sup>87</sup> In his view, the Nawab was far too keen to listen to the advice of political adventurers who tried to use his money and his causes to advance their own fortunes in British politics, and the Nawab was long manipulated by opposing groups of advisers.<sup>88</sup> It is true that the Nawab often changed his British advisers, from one person or group to another, and when one of them rose to prominence they gained large favors and many benefits from the Nawab, so much so that observers considered them as being trusted more than anyone else and as extremely influential over both the Nawab and his court. But, as the cases above suggest, no individual or group of British advisers could have exerted control over the Nawab or dictated their fate at his court. The Nawab used different groups of them for different purposes, and when circumstances changed or his designs altered he would turn to new ones who were better able to serve his requirements. Those Europeans who lost the Nawab's favor and their former privileges, or those who opposed the Nawab's new advisers, certainly criticized the Nawab for foolishly trusting the wrong people. As such, modern historians should be careful about accepting such biased opinions (especially if they are lacking sufficient contextualization) when judging the Nawab's actions. At a time when he was flourishing at court, Paterson advised the Nawab to make Paul Benfield the sole manager of

---

<sup>87</sup> Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 229.

<sup>88</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 237.

all his revenues. Paterson worked hard to make the Nawab and Benfield agree to this, as he sincerely believed that it would be the best solution to clear the Nawab's debts in only a few years.<sup>89</sup> The Nawab acknowledged Paterson's sincerity but eventually declined. As the Nawab commented to Paterson about Benfield: "He is my friend today and may not be my friend tomorrow."<sup>90</sup> This message suggests that the Nawab probably understood the politics of the time much better than some contemporaneous Europeans might have believed him capable of.

---

<sup>89</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 219-226, 232, 254, 257.

<sup>90</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/9, DGP, Oct. 1774, 182.

## Chapter 6: Nawabi Religion

If you wish to see the features of Allāh  
Go and look at the countenance of Wālājāh<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will discuss the Nawab's religious beliefs and his religious patronage. Unlike the other pillars of the state, many aspects of the Nawab's religious activities have been highlighted before, especially in Susan Bayly's study of Islam and Christianity in Tamilnadu. Bayly has pointed out Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's many attempts to create a "high" orthodox Islamic identity within his court while at the same time—and similar to his methods as related to statecraft—making himself a patron and protector of all other major sects in Karnatak, in both formal and mystical aspects. As Bayly underlines, the Nawab created links to Sufism and the Hindu Tamilnadu pirs in particular; this was because he had a profound understanding of Tamilnadu's society. In this, these mystical forms of both religions were complicatedly intermixed and their sacred places revered by members of the local population, thus transcending religious boundaries. As such, their shrines were crucial resources of mystical power and thus could help support his rule.<sup>2</sup> Bayly has provided a good overall picture of the Nawab's inclusive religious policies and I am in full agreement with her propositions. However, some important issues related to the Nawab's pious activities can be further elaborated, especially regarding his religious self-representation and the motives for his patronage of each sect. Instead of taking the latitudinarian policy for granted—based on the simple assumption that he tried to please as many parts of the population as possible—I will further investigate the links between his religious patronage and the political situation in his state, as well as the changing cultural landscape of South Asia more widely during the eighteenth century. Like those examining the pillars of the sword and the pen, this chapter will start with an overview of some of the most significant religious developments in South Asia, with particular focus on the eighteenth century. Then, I will discuss the Nawab's self-fashioning and the most prominent religious institutions or groups with which he associated.

---

<sup>1</sup> A verse in Hindi composed by Prince Ghulam Husain and presented to Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, his father and spiritual guide, in thanks for his grant of *Khilafat* of Chishtiyya to him. See: Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 161-179. See also: Susan Bayly, "The South Indian State and the Creation of Muslim Community," in *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, ed. Peter J. Marshall (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203-239.

## 6.1 The Role of Religion in Early Modern South Asia

### Islam in Mughal India

The Mughal emperors, like the Ottoman sultans, were officially Hanafi Sunnis.<sup>3</sup> Although they followed the same Islamic legal school, relations between the Mughals and both the Muslim caliphate and the sharifate of Mecca—at the center of universal Islam—were certainly not cordial. The Mughal rulers acknowledged only the first four caliphs, not any later caliphs or caliphates. Emperor Akbar even claimed that he himself was the caliph and called Mughal territory *Dar al-Khilafa* (“The Abode of the Caliphate”).<sup>4</sup> Although the Mughals occasionally sent ships with pilgrims to Mecca, the numbers were insignificant compared to other major Muslim polities in Egypt, Syria, and Turkey at the time. Furthermore, insults were frequently thrown between the Mughal emperors and the sharifs of Mecca. The Mughal emperors regarded the sharifs as corrupt people who pocketed cash donations meant for the holy cities. On the other hand, the Meccan sharifs looked upon the Mughals with derision. An example of their mutual intolerance occurred in 1659, when Emperor Aurangzeb sent a gift of 660,000 rupees to Mecca but deliberately arranged for it to bypass the sharifs, and distributed it to local scholars, jurists, and citizens directly. The sharifs, for their part, rejected the donation as insignificant and refused to recognize Aurangzeb—known to be the most devout orthodox ruler of all the Mughal emperors—as legitimate.<sup>5</sup> Yet these should also be viewed as part of the competition between the Mughals and the Ottomans at the time; since the early sixteenth century, the Ottomans had gained control of most of the Islamic heartlands (i.e. the Arabian Peninsula), including the *Haramayn* (“the two holy sanctuaries [of Islam],” the cities of Mecca and Medina). From then on, the Ottomans declared their empire to be “the Ottoman Caliphate,” the leader of the Muslim world, and the protector of the Haramayn and the sharifate. The Ottoman Empire was acknowledged as such by many Muslim polities, ulama, and people across the world.<sup>6</sup> However, the Mughal imperial house was one exception.

Regarding the other most prominent strands of Islam in South Asia, namely Shiism and Sufism, the Mughal court was generally tolerant, although degrees of patronage varied from one emperor to another. Most of the emperors tolerated Shiism, which was followed by

---

<sup>3</sup> Hanafism is one of the four main Sunni legal schools. The other three are Malikism, Shafiism, and Hanbalism.

<sup>4</sup> Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, 24, 30, 56.

<sup>5</sup> See further details in: Ziauddin Sardar, *Mecca: The Sacred City* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 258-259.

<sup>6</sup> Jan-Peter Hartung, “Enacting the Rule of Islam: On Courtly Patronage of Religious Scholars in Pre-and Early Modern Times,” in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (London-New York: Routledge, 2011), 313.

many Indo-Irani officers at the court and much of the empire's population. However, the emperors never explicitly promoted the sect. In some periods, such as the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, Shiism was extremely restricted. However, according to Cole, after Aurangzeb's reign, the imperial court became decidedly more tolerant towards Shiism.<sup>7</sup> Sufism, on the other hand, generally received significant patronage. As Alam underlines, the akhlaq treatises were not alone in supporting religious tolerance in early modern South Asia; the powerful influence of Sufi ideals, which circulated throughout the region, did so too.<sup>8</sup>

The three most prominent Sufi orders in early modern South Asia were the Chishtiyya, Qadiriyya, and Naqshbandiyya. Although there was distinctness or discreteness among the Sufi orders and masters, most Sufi sects—as well as the most popular Sufi saints—sought to promote religious syncretism, tolerance, and respect between believers.<sup>9</sup> One of the principal doctrines held by these Sufis—that of “The Unity of Being” (*wahdat al-wujud*)—referred not only to the various branches of Islam but to all non-Islamic beliefs, too. Therefore, while their doctrines and ritual were often branded as un-Islamic by “orthodox” Muslims,<sup>10</sup> Sufi masters were generally credited with greatly contributing to the expansion of Islam and conciliation between Muslim and non-Muslim populations.<sup>11</sup> There is much evidence indicating that Sufi saints were widely venerated by Hindus, of all classes and castes, throughout the subcontinent. This may, at least in part, have been the result of Sufi efforts to understand Hindu philosophy and spread doctrines of unity. However, as the historians Richard Eaton and Mattison Mines suggest, their popularity among the commoners was also largely thanks to their inherent mystical characteristics, which easily fitted the mind of people who were predisposed towards mysticism.<sup>12</sup> As Nile Green has proposed, due to their significant influence over a large part of the population of South Asia, Sufis (and their writings) were an effective tool by which Muslim conquerors were able to link the old politico-cultural center to the newly-conquered territories and the newly-arrived rulers to the

---

<sup>7</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 40, 188.

<sup>8</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 6, 81.

<sup>9</sup> Nile Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 6-7; Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 171; Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 105, 168, 226; Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 230; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 17; Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2011), 54-55.

<sup>10</sup> Various Sufi doctrines and practices which are often seen by ulama as “unorthodox” include the veneration of the *dargahs* or tombs containing the relics of saints; the *urs* celebrations to commemorate the anniversary of a Sufi saint's death; and the veneration of masters by their disciples, using prayers. See: Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 6, 81; Nile Green, *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 31-64 (the latter is especially for the origin and development of the *urs* ritual).

<sup>11</sup> Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 6, 82, 91, 110, 113, 159; More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras*, 27; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 166-170; Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, 8; Mattison Mines, “Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity in South India,” *Man*, New Series 10, 3 (1975): 407. According to Eaton and Mines, many Sufi practices, from the veneration of individual Sufis, through festivals at saints' tombs, to the celebrations of *urs*, are very much in keeping with Hindu traditions in venerating gods/goddesses and pilgrimages to and festivals at Hindu shrines. Also, the Sufi '*urs*' festival is, in many ways, reminiscent of the Hindu “cart” festival, with feats of faqirs, processions, and the sanctification of residential areas.

local population(s). The basic principle was to encourage the locals in newly-conquered places to worship the same saints and share the same imagined religious boundaries as the center.<sup>13</sup>

Many Mughal emperors and officials were closely linked to one or more Sufi order and publicly revered individual Sufis as their spiritual masters. Many also claimed descent from famous Sufis.<sup>14</sup> The most notable Mughals who had a profound interest in Sufism were Emperor Akbar and Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-1659). Akbar's imperial cult, *Din-i Ilahi*, contained many aspects of Sufism, especially various syncretic elements and the enrolment of disciples.<sup>15</sup> Prince Dara Shikoh, like many other Sufi scholars, searched for religious truths beyond the boundaries of the Sharia, not only in Sufi doctrines (especially those of the Qadiriyya order) but also in Hindu mysticism. Even Emperor Aurangzeb was a Sufi disciple, too, but one who followed the rather conservative and puritanical Naqshbandiyya order.<sup>16</sup>

### **Religious Movements in Eighteenth-century South Asia**

Religious movements in eighteenth-century South Asia varied from one region to another. The imperial center of Delhi saw the continuation of the orthodox movement, led by Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762), a leading Sunni scholar and a Sufi of the Naqshbandiyya order. As the power of the Mughals declined, he became increasingly active in his attempts to revive and purify Islam. His school placed emphasis on the traditional sciences—such as studying and memorizing the Quran and Hadiths—which were viewed as the principal means by which society could draw nearer to Islamic truths. At the same time, they saw rationalist Islam and the mystical doctrines of other Sufi groups as dangerous.<sup>17</sup>

In the North-East, around Bengal and Awadh—which, in the Mughal's heyday, had been strongholds of both orthodox Sunni Islam and Sufism—could be found increasing numbers of Irani emigrants and the expanding political power of the Shia ulama. Furthermore, there were internal changes within the latter group; the Usuli faction, known as more conservative and less tolerant, were rising to prominence at the expense of the more liberal Akbari group. This corresponded to what was occurring in the Shia heartlands of Iraq and Iran at the same time, and reflects the increasingly strong links between north-eastern

---

<sup>13</sup> Nile Green, "Geography, Empire and Sainthood in the Eighteenth-Century Muslim Deccan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67, 2 (2004): 216, 220; Green, *Making Space*, 170.

<sup>14</sup> Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 101-102. For more on Akbar's religious policies, see: *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 899-901.

<sup>16</sup> Kruijtzter, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India*, 267; Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 96; Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 196, 258; Green, "Geography, Empire and Sainthood in the Eighteenth-Century Muslim Deccan," 217; Green, *Making Space*, 267-268.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 15, 28-30.

India and those Shia centers.<sup>18</sup> The increasing influence of conservative Shiism led to mounting tension between Shia populations and people of all other sects in these regions,<sup>19</sup> and this is one of the most regularly-cited pieces of evidence that scholars such as Juan Cole and Gijs Kruijtzter have used to support their view that eighteenth-century South Asia witnessed a decline of religious harmony.

However, in the same period, there were also movements towards less orthodox doctrines and the promotion of syncretism. These were, arguably, reactions to the growth of orthodox trends during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb and subsequently. One famous example is the ulama of the Farangi Mahall family, which was also based in Awadh. As the Farangi Mahall family was directly involved with the Karnatak Nawab, its background should be explored here. The Farangi Mahall was a famous family of Sunni Hanafi ulama based in Lucknow that had close links to the Mughal court.<sup>20</sup> One of their leaders, Mulla Hafiz, had been acknowledged as a distinguished scholar by Emperor Akbar. In 1695, Emperor Aurangzeb assigned to Mulla Hafiz's great-grandson, Mulla Qutb al-Din, a Dutch merchant's house, known as Farangi Mahall, to be the family residence from then on. Later Mughal emperors continued to patronize the institution, particularly by sponsoring, from the imperial treasury, its students' expenses. In the eighteenth century, the descendants of Qutb al-Din turned Farangi Mahall into one of the largest centers of Sunni learning and trained future ulama and scholars for judicial positions. Their students came from all parts of South Asia and beyond, including Arabia, Central Asia, and even China. There were even some Shia and Hindus among them.<sup>21</sup> In terms of doctrine, in the eighteenth century Farangi Mahall emphasized the rational sciences, logical thinking, and non-sectarian attitudes, approaches that were in sharp contrast to the traditional sciences.<sup>22</sup> Many of the Farangi Mahallis (Farangi Mahall masters) were also known for their efforts to balance knowledge of formal Islam with Sufism. Mulla Nizam al-Din and his sons, for example, were disciples of Saiyid Shah Abd al-Razzaq Bansawi (1636-1724), a famous eighteenth-century Qadiriyya Sufi.<sup>23</sup> Some Farangi Mahallis attached themselves to Chishtiyya saints, too,<sup>24</sup> and saints' tombs and the urs ceremony (see footnote 10, above) were also the focus of their attention.

---

<sup>18</sup> Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 254; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> See further details in: Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 49, 152, 156, 171, 226-228, 249.

<sup>20</sup> The Farangi Mahall's ancestors can be traced back to Ayyub Ansari (d. 674), who was the Prophet's friend and "Islamic standard bearer," and also another renowned Sufi scholar, Abd Allah Ansari of Herat (1006-1088). They migrated to India during the time of the Delhi sultanate.

<sup>21</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 43, 210; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 1-2, 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> Their lessons culminated in a famous curriculum called *Dars-i Nizamiyya*, which was developed by Mulla Nizam al-Din in the eighteenth century and became the dominant system in South Asian Islamic education up to the twentieth century.

<sup>23</sup> For further information about this Sufi, see: Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 99-101, 105-110; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 16, 58.

<sup>24</sup> Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, 58-59.

The Farangi Mahallis were, therefore, both Hanafi Sunni orthodox scholars and Sufi mystics.<sup>25</sup> The rise of the Usuli Shia ulama in Awadh in the 1750s led to an increase in Shia-Sunni conflict and significantly impacted the position of Farangi Mahall scholars; their lives were at risk from militant Shia, and the government of Awadh failed to address the situation. Many of the Farangi Mahallis, therefore, decided to emigrate. Meanwhile, many Sunni Muslim rulers and nobles throughout South Asia wanted to sponsor them and so sent invitations to this effect. This resulted in the spread of the Farangi Mahalli curriculum across South Asia, to places such as Lucknow, Rampur, Farrukhabad, Buhar (Bengal), Hyderabad, and Karnatak.<sup>26</sup> Their impact in the latter area will be discussed further in a subsequent section.

One also finds diversity in the religious policies of various eighteenth-century Mughal successor states. The Nishapuri dynasty of Awadh declared Shiism to be the religion of the state, something that was unprecedented in northern India and which contributed greatly to the growth of Shiism in the region. The Awadh court became steadily more Shia-focused in its institutions and culture, and its rulers increasingly based their legitimacy on religious charisma. Nawab Asaf al-Daulah of Awadh (1775-1797) and his chief ministers were famous for donating money to the Shia sacred centers of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq and for attracting Shia ulama to his new capital at Lucknow.<sup>27</sup> The Awadh elites' development of close connections with the Shia heartlands was, as Cole suggests, a direct consequence of Mughal decline. As the political value of ties to the Mughal emperors diminished, the Nawabs of Awadh instead searched for other sources of legitimacy.<sup>28</sup> Looking to the religious heartlands of the Middle East, as the Nishapuri Nawabs did, should probably be seen as part of a wider trend among eighteenth-century South Asian rulers if it is compared to the case of a contemporaneous South Asian Muslim ruler, Tipu Sultan of Mysore. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to have his rule recognized by the Mughal emperors, Tipu Sultan broke completely with them and instead sought confirmation from the Ottoman sultan and caliph at Constantinople as a means of raising his prestige as a Muslim sovereign.<sup>29</sup>

The Asafjahi Nizams of Hyderabad took a rather different approach. Instead of turning outwards, they chose to tie themselves more closely to local Deccan society. They

---

<sup>25</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 43-44; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 22-23, 58-59, 69-73; Muhammad Wali al-Haq Ansari, "Farangi Mahall," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, accessed July 27, 2018: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/farangi-mahall>.

<sup>26</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 49, 209-210; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 3, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 40-41, 138-139, 195.

<sup>28</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 135.

<sup>29</sup> Brittlebank, "Assertion," 274-279; Kaveh Yazdani, "Haidar 'Ali and Tipu Sultan: Mysore's Eighteenth-Century Rulers in Transition," *Itinerario* 38, 2 (2014): 108.

were famous as rulers who honored and cultivated religious scholars from everywhere, both inside and outside of India, and especially Sufi saints, from all orders. However, according to Faruqi, they were particularly attached to the Chishtiyya order. For example, Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah demanded that, after his death, his body was to be buried in the shrine of Shaikh Burhan al-Din Gharib, the celebrated Chishtiyya Sufi, in Khuldabad, Aurangabad. This act firmly linked the political legitimacy of his dynasty to the spiritual legitimacy of the most powerful Chishtiyya branch within the Deccan, and also to the Chishtiyya order across South Asia. This can also be seen as part of the Asafjahi house's attempts to highlight its associations with its Mughal predecessors, who had been famous for their long-standing and close links with the Chishtiyya Sufis.<sup>30</sup> This would have helped the Asafjahi rulers in their attempts to present themselves as true and loyal Mughal successors.

### **Islam in South India**

The Muslim warriors from North India who invaded the South and established various sultanates from the mid-fourteenth century were not the first to take Islam to South India. From the eighth century, the South had been home to large numbers of Arab Muslims who had reached the region by sea. These Arab merchants, mercenaries, and missionaries gradually set up communities on both sides of the peninsula and, over time, the Indo-Arab population became linked with many distinguished groups (tribes or castes). Well-known examples include the Mappilas (situated chiefly) in Malabar, the Nawayats in western Karnataka, and the Marakayyars in Tamilnadu.<sup>31</sup> Through these Indo-Arab communities, the indigenous peoples of South India were first introduced to Islam, and this resulted in the emergence of various communities of local Muslim converts.<sup>32</sup> We have seen in previous chapters that the Nawayats became an elite group in the Deccan and Karnatak. It seems that they were also held in high regard in the neighboring state of Mysore, because the wife of Hyder Ali Khan and the mother of Tipu Sultan were also from that tribe.<sup>33</sup> The literature on South India shows that the Marakkayars were equally highly regarded. They were the most prominent mercantile Muslim ethnic group in eastern Tamilnadu—economically, culturally, and politically—from medieval to early modern times.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Green, *Making Space*, 181-182; 278-287; Faruqi, "At Empire's End," 38; *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 422.

<sup>31</sup> Dennis B. McGilvray, "Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32, 2 (1998): 436; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 1, 51-52.

<sup>32</sup> Labbais and Ravuttan are two examples of a converted caste/tribe. However, their origins are still debated. See: Pais, "The Navayats," 46.

<sup>33</sup> Pais, "The Navayats," 41-43.

<sup>34</sup> Many of the Marakkayars were traders or capitalists whose businesses extended from South East Asia to Arabia. Some Marakkayars received honorable titles from Hindu rajas and Nayakas in Tamilnadu, indicating their financial and political influence within local society. The Marakkayars also played a significant role as benefactors of Islam; many mosques in the region were built by them, and they were the

As noted in the previous chapter, North India was part of the Perso-Islamic cultural zone. Coastal South India, in contrast, had, from the eighth century, been gradually integrated into the so-called Arab sphere, where Islamic culture developed mainly on the basis of Arab traditions. From the fourteenth century, the intense and constant contacts with North India and Iran gradually transformed the Deccan into part of the Perso-Islamic world, yet aspects of Arab culture still persisted in South India, especially Tamilnadu, until the eighteenth century. Persian had not been the language of government and intellectual life in the region before the mid-seventeenth century, at least.<sup>35</sup> Many scholars of early modern Tamil literature and culture have noted that the Arabian influence was increasingly manifested the deeper south into Tamilnadu one went. According to Kokan, although they used Tamil as their mother tongue, Tamil Muslims were generally familiar with Arabic and its literature. It was customary to praise a talented Tamil Muslim scholar by saying that their command of Arabic language and literature would impress the people of Mecca. Furthermore, in the southern districts of Tamilnadu, the Quran was recited with a more accurate Arabic intonation than was the case in the northern domains, where people were becoming increasingly Persianized.<sup>36</sup> Jean-Baptiste Prashant More notes that Arabic-Islamic texts had long been of central importance for Tamil Muslim literature, in contrast to the works that were produced by northern, Urdu-speaking immigrants in the late seventeenth century, whose ideas were heavily influenced by Persian literature.<sup>37</sup> Ronit Ricci's study has illustrated that eastern Tamilnadu was, significantly, part of a "translocal" Islamic sphere that she refers to as the "Arabic Cosmopolis."<sup>38</sup> In short, unlike the Muslim communities in northern India and the Deccan, which were dominated by Perso-Islamic culture, in the eighteenth century South India was still primarily influence by Indo-Arab culture.

As in the North, throughout South India Sufism was the most popular form of Islam. According to Kokan, the Sufi orders were so prevalent among Tamil Muslims that there was the saying: "no man could get salvation except by acting and practicing through these orders."<sup>39</sup> According to a legend that was widespread in local society, the first person to bring Islam to South India was the Sufi saint Saiyid Hadrat Nathar Wali, a legendary figure from

---

sponsors of many poets and scholars. In this light, the Indo-Arab Marakkayars were certainly seen as elites and cultural leaders by other groups within the local Tamilnadu population. See: More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras*, 22-25; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 96.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 53, 56.

<sup>37</sup> More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras*, 25-27.

<sup>38</sup> Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* ("South Asia across the Disciplines"; Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3-4.

<sup>39</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 2, 52-53.

the thirteenth century whose dargah is situated and still venerated in Trichinopoly. Most of his hagiographers have portrayed him as a noble from Rum (Turkey) or Syria who believed he had been commanded to spread the word of God in distant lands. This drove him and 900 devoted followers to South India.<sup>40</sup>

Sufi masters from all the main orders were venerated in the South. However, according to Mines, the most widespread and popular order was the Qadiriyya. Even today, the urs commemoration of Saiyid Abd al-Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), the founder of the order, is the most significant event of the year for Tamil Muslims, especially in the villages of the far south.<sup>41</sup> According to Gurney, the Qadiriyya order's branch in the South was founded by Hadrat Saiyid Abd al-Qadir of Nagore (d. 1570), whose dargah was situated in the port of Nagore, in the district of Tanjore.<sup>42</sup> As Eaton points out, the Qadiriyya differed from all other orders in several significant respects. One is that it had its spiritual center in Baghdad, where Saiyid Abd al-Qadir Jilani had lived. As such, the order "looked more to the Arab world for spiritual nourishment" and "led its members in India to emphasize the Middle Eastern more than the Indian aspect of their spiritual ancestry."<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, many Qadiriyya Sufis in South India were said to have been migrants from Arabia who had moved to the Deccan as late as the seventeenth century; thus, they were relatively inclined to the Arab model of Islam.<sup>44</sup> This order was rather distinctive from the Chishtiyya and the Naqshbandiyya, who were more attached to Central Asia and North India as their sources of spiritual inspiration.<sup>45</sup> The Arab-orientated outlook of the order must have fitted into the local communities of South India well, thus contributing to its popularity. Nainar also points out that the order was widespread, particularly in the Arabic-speaking zones of South India and elsewhere in Asia.<sup>46</sup>

## 6.2 Nawabi Self-Fashioning

Like his Mughal masters, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan officially declared himself a Sunni Muslim of the Hanafi school.<sup>47</sup> As is reflected in his court literature, the Nawab went to great lengths to present himself as a pious Muslim who followed strictly all the obligatory practices in the formal tradition of Islam. He was diligent in his prayers and the study of Islamic

---

<sup>40</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 116-117.

<sup>41</sup> Mines, "Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity in South India," 411-412. Saiyid 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani came from Mazandaran, and later became the head of the most famous school (*madrassa*) in Baghdad.

<sup>42</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 176; see further about his legend in: Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 196-197, 243-244.

<sup>43</sup> Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 54; see also: Green, *Making Space*, 12-13.

<sup>44</sup> Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 124, 126.

<sup>45</sup> Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century*, 5-7, 13-15, 18-22; Green, *Making Space*, 12-13; 131-134.

<sup>46</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 14 (footnote).

<sup>47</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 18.

thought, built mosques, opened inns, founded hospitals, patronized the ulama, and relieved the troubles of the poor, among others, both in Karnatak and elsewhere.<sup>48</sup> It is recorded that the ulama frequently visited him to discuss matters relating to Islamic law.<sup>49</sup> The formal Muslim festivals, such as Id al-Fitr (at the end of Ramadan) and Bara Wafat (the birthday of the Prophet), were celebrated in his court with great magnificence.<sup>50</sup> These acts were all, as his chronicle is keen to underline, “in the way of Allāh.”<sup>51</sup>

Such acts of piety were essentially no different from those of other Indo-Muslim state-builders of the time, but the Nawab’s deep engagement with Sufism is a rather remarkable aspect which is worth further elaboration. The Nawab was not only declared a disciple but a Sufi master, too. To get a full understanding of how Sufism formed part of the Nawab’s self-representation, a ceremony held in the Chepauk Palace provides good evidence. According to the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, it was an annual practice during the Nawab’s reign to prepare the Chepauk Palace to celebrate the anniversary of the death date of Saiyid Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the founder of the Qadiriyya order. This was a seven-night ritual, during which the palace was finely decorated; the main hall was furnished with a pavilion and an embroidered green throne, and two green banners with the name Hadrat Mahbub Subhani—one of Saiyid Jilani’s names—were erected in front of the pavilion’s two pillars. Many of the Nawab’s highest officials were involved in the ceremony. Muhammad Najib Khan, supreme military commander and the Nawab’s boon-companion, was appointed to manage everything. Qadir Nawaz Khan was assigned to gather all the shaykhs and learned men “who had the good fortune to become disciples” of the order. Shah Qudrat Allah, who had been appointed by the Nawab as his khilafat, led the thanksgiving. Khilafat (or *khalifa*), literally meaning “successorship,” is the permission granted by a Sufi master to one or a few of the best disciples (*murids*) from his inner circle to be his religious-spiritual successor(s). Only those who received the khilafat had the authority to preach the doctrines of the master and to accept other devoted followers into the circle of murids.<sup>52</sup> His claim that he was a khilafat indicates that the Nawab did indeed view himself as a Sufi master of the Qadiriyya order.<sup>53</sup> This assertion can be proved further by the descriptions of the Nawab’s acts and dress during the ceremony. Every night from 11<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> at around 8’ o’clock, the Nawab would come to give

---

<sup>48</sup> The mosques built by Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan include the majestic red sandstone Walajahi Masjid in Trichinopoly, the Masjid Mamur in Georgetown, Madras, and the sandstone Walajahi Masjid in Triplicane. See: Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 171.

<sup>49</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 1 and 22 Aug. 1773; bundle 67, 22 Apr. 1774.

<sup>50</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 22 Feb., 11 May, 21 Jun. 1774; bundle 68, 5 Dec. 1774.

<sup>51</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 11-12.

<sup>52</sup> Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 165-166, 320.

<sup>53</sup> It is said that the Nawab was introduced into the order and later received the rank of khilafat from a less renowned Sufi named Shah Zahir al-Din Qadir of Hyderabad. See: Gurney, “The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot,” 176; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 91.

guidance and advice to the participants “in accordance with the regulations of the Faith, and thus admitted them as his disciples.”<sup>54</sup> On the 17<sup>th</sup>, the Nawab put on the green dress of the shaykhs, wore the crown of the khilafat, put around his neck a rosary composed of 100 large onyx stones—a holy relic of his religious guide—and held in his hand an ordinary olive rosary for the purpose of saying his salutations. The names of the large number of other royals and courtiers who had attained discipleship and participated in the holy ritual are also given in the chronicle. They are said to have been admitted into the order by various Sufi masters—including the Nawab himself—who were preaching in the Deccan and Karnatak at the time. The Nawab also shook hands with all “his disciples” after the prayers.<sup>55</sup> The *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* also hints that to be a disciple of the order somehow conferred special benefits on that person in the Karnatak court during this period. As the chronicle notes, those who were appointed by the Nawab in affairs related to this order were considered as having received special royal favor. It says that many courtiers had initially participated in this order “with a view to please him [the Nawab], and move along with times.”<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz* also states that, during an urs ceremony for the Qadiriyya saint in the early 1790s, the Nawab bestowed on his eldest son, Prince Ghulam Husain, the khilafat of another order, that of the Chishtiyya. He initiated the prince into the Chishtiyya and invited his five grandsons and other courtiers into the sect as well. He also gave them guidance in accordance with Chishtiyya regulations and dignified them by admitting them as his disciples.<sup>57</sup> This account highlights that the Nawab also presented himself as a Sufi master of the Chishtiyya order, one who had the authority to teach, admit new disciples, and appoint the khilafat. The Chishtiyya order played a significant role in the Nawab’s nasab as well. As is claimed in the *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz*, during the reign of Emperor Akbar in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in their home region of Awadh, several members of the Nawab’s family became the disciples of Shaykh Nizam al-Din of Amethi, a well-known Chishtiyya saint. One of the Nawab’s ancestors had attained great fame, being granted the *khilat-i khilafat-i Chishtiyya* (the robe of successorship of Chishtiyya) and given the crown of khilafat, and he later became a famous pir who had the title Shaykh al-Mashayikh Alim-i Zaman. Later, Shaykh Nim Allah, the eldest son of Shaykh Alim-i Zaman, succeeded his father as a Chishtiyya Sufi. However, in the next generation, Shaykh Muhammad Munawwar—who was the great-grandfather of Nawab Muhammad

---

<sup>54</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 13-16.

<sup>56</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part I*, 14-15.

Ali—renounced Sufism and became “a devotee placing his reliance upon Allah,” i.e. an orthodox Sunni Muslim.<sup>58</sup>

It is important to note that the Nawab not only presented himself as a Sufi master in the sense of being learned or one of the literati; he also claimed to have magical powers, as did many other celebrated Sufi saints from around the world. There are a few records in the diary of Paterson that relate the Nawab’s attempts to explain to his British secretary a supernatural ability he claimed to possess, which was called “caromet” (i.e. *karamat*). This included the ability to predict the future and knowledge of events that were occurring far away. The Nawab said that he had experienced this many times and it had been witnessed by his courtiers. The Nawab gave Paterson a few examples. Once, in 1768, he had known in advance the message that was contained in a letter that had not yet arrived at his court. On another occasion, the Nawab received a report from his diwan in Tanjore that one of his own orders—that the jewelry of the noble ladies of the Tanjore raja, which had been taken from them during the struggle between the two states, be returned to them—had been miraculously given by him in Madras at the exact moment that the ladies of the Tanjore raja had expressed their desire to have their jewelry returned. The Nawab did not seek to present these events as being the result of superstitions in front of his British secretary, merely saying that he had very good senses. However, as Paterson records, the Nawab even called on his courtiers—including his scribes and messengers—to hear these astonishing acts.<sup>59</sup> Paterson’s “caromet” comes from the Arabic term *karamat* (sing. *karama*), which in the Islamic context means divine grace or the ability to perform magic. It can take various forms, such as flying through the air, knowledge of future events, or the ability to heal the sick. *Karamat* is usually said to be one of the main features of renowned Sufi saints.<sup>60</sup> However, it can also be a feature of great rulers. For example, it was widely claimed that Emperor Akbar had the ability to leave his physical body and travel spiritually.<sup>61</sup> There are also accounts in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* that suggest that Emperor Aurangzeb, as well as Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, the Nawab’s father, had various miraculous powers, such as the ability to read people’s minds, to know people’s hidden thoughts, and to predict events.<sup>62</sup> In this light, it seems that the Nawab was presenting himself as both a Sufi and a charismatic ruler.

---

<sup>58</sup> Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part II*, 58.

<sup>59</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 65-66, Sep. 1773, 219-220.

<sup>60</sup> Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism*, 146-147; L. Gardet, “*Karāma*,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., accessed October 13, 2018: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0445](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0445).

<sup>61</sup> *Maathir al-Umara*, II: 902.

<sup>62</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 22-23, 25-26, 66-68.

No less important than the Nawab's self-presentation as a strict orthodox Muslim and a Sufi master was his openness and generosity to all other religions, and he deliberately cultivated a harmonious and tolerant atmosphere at his court. For example, as described in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, every day at about half past seven in the morning the Nawab would sit in his court's hall in the company of various learned men and accomplished individuals, his brothers and sons, friends and relatives, "discussing the problems pertaining to jurisprudence and discoursing on the various religious sects."<sup>63</sup> The *Ruznama* also records that, on one occasion, the Nawab summoned his two sons and all his courtiers to talk about the seventeenth-century prince Dara Shikoh and his book about Islam.<sup>64</sup> As mentioned previously, this prince had been a champion of syncretism within the Mughal Empire. The Nawab also made it possible, and even customary, for Shia devotees to use the large water-tank of the Hindu temple in Triplicane during their ceremonial Muharram procession.<sup>65</sup> There are many other examples that seem to reflect the Nawab's eclectic attitudes, which I will explore in the following sections.

### 6.3 Religious Groups

#### The Ulama of the Islamic Heartlands

The first group I will discuss in relation to the Nawab's attempts to develop a religious network consisted of the ulama and other dignitaries of the Islamic heartlands. Each year from the beginning of the 1770s, and possibly several years earlier, the Nawab would send his two ships, *Safina Allah* and *Safina al-Rasul*, from Madras to Mecca, Medina, and other renowned Islamic centers in the Arabian Peninsula and Africa. These ships were loaded with presents, donations, and pilgrims. A public announcement would be made around Karnatak for anyone who wanted to perform the Hajj, as they would be able to travel in the ships at the Nawab's expense. On the day of departure, the Nawab and his courtiers would come to the port to distribute money and clothes to the pilgrims by their own hands.<sup>66</sup> Examples of the gifts that were sent include Indian cloth, and stone implements such as mill-stones, mortars, and pestles; these were said to be rare in Arabia and so could help the people there. The Nawab also ordered his representatives to reside permanently in the two holy cities in order to look after the Karnatak pilgrims and others who were in need. The ships also carried letters and presents from the Nawab to members of the political elite and religious scholars who

---

<sup>63</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 24 Jun. 1774.

<sup>65</sup> Bayly, "The South Indian State and the Creation of Muslim Community," 229.

<sup>66</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 68, *Ruznama*, 6, 8, and 9 Feb. 1775.

were living in various Islamic cities. There is evidence that, at least during the period 1771-1791, the Nawab was in correspondence with the sharifs of Mecca and Medina, the viceroy (*khedive*) of Egypt, and various other rulers, ulama, and dignitaries of regions around the Arabian Peninsula, such as the Hejaz, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt.<sup>67</sup> The Nawab also developed strong connections with the Ottoman sultans, each of whom claimed to be the caliph. As his chronicle proclaims, like his grandfather before him, the Nawab received the honorable and hereditary rights from the sultans to sweep the carpets and light the candles at the holy places in Mecca and Medina, highly-prized activities.<sup>68</sup> This privilege meant that his position as a Muslim ruler and the status of his state were acknowledged by the Ottoman caliphate.

The Nawab's decision to buttress his position by developing clear links with the Ottoman caliphate, the sharifate of Mecca, and other Islamic authorities in the Muslim heartlands is comparable to that of other eighteenth-century South Asian rulers, such as the Nawabs of Awadh and Tipu Sultan of Mysore, who, as discussed previously, looked for legitimacy and acceptance from the Islamic world more widely, outside the waning sphere of the Mughals. Such acts of religious piety may also reflect an attempt to compensate for the relatively humble position of his dynasty within the Mughal Empire through wider acknowledgment of him as an independent and prestigious Muslim ruler. Considering the fact that the Mughals had sometimes been looked down upon by the Meccan sharifates, such as the case of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1659, the assertions of the Nawab may be interpreted as him boasting of his religious superiority vis-à-vis his Mughal masters and other contemporaneous Indo-Muslim rulers. This assumption is given credence by an immodest statement that is reported in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*; as the chronicle claims, the people of Arabia were extremely grateful for the charitable favors of the Karnatak Nawab, so much so that they embroidered their head-dresses with the name of "Wālājāh Sulṭānu'l-Hind," surnamed the Nawab "Sulṭānu'l-Hind," and mentioned his name next to that of the Ottoman Sultan when praying.<sup>69</sup>

I also suggest that the links between the Nawab's pious acts in the Islamic heartlands and claims to an aristocratic Arab lineage—as the descendant of both the Kuraysh and the second caliph—found in his nasab, as well as the other aspects of Arab orientation in his

---

<sup>67</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 12-13; Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 91, 198, 211; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 30 Aug. 1774, bundle 68, 6 and 8 Feb. 1775.

<sup>68</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 13.

court, should not be overlooked. At first glance, the Karnatak court may look like any other Islamic court of either North India or the Deccan from that time, all of which were dominated by Perso-Islamic culture; yet, in fact, the Karnatak court was just as influenced by Arabic elements as by Persian ones. The Nawab, his brothers, and his sons were all well versed in both Persian and Arabic language and science. Associated with his court were many scholars who specialized in, or at least were familiar with, Arabic literature and traditions. The two most prominent examples are Moulana Baqir Agah (1743-1805), an Indo-Arab Nawayat who served the Nawab by writing letters on his behalf to the notables of Arabic-speaking lands and teaching various Arabic sciences to his two sons, and Mir Ismail Khan Abjadi, a Persian littérateur and the author of the *Anwarnama*—the first official history of the Walajah family—who also produced various Arabic texts.<sup>70</sup> Under the Nawab’s patronage, many works were translated from Persian to Arabic and vice-versa. Furthermore, an account in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* praises the Nawab’s grandfather, Muhammad Anwar, as having been an Arabic littérateur. It is reported that, during the latter’s Hajj pilgrimage, he was challenged in Mecca by a talented Muslim qadi from that city, who posed a difficult question. Muhammad Anwar gave such an ingenious response that the sharif acknowledged and praised his skill in Arabic as superior to that of the local Arab scholars.<sup>71</sup> As previously suggested, it was customary in Tamilnadu to praise a distinguished scholar by saying that their command of Arabic would impress the people of Mecca.

Why were highlighting his Arab noble pedigree, increasing his connections to the Arabian heartlands, and integrating Arabic elements into his court important to the Nawab? Improving his position internationally, as discussed previously in Chapter Three, must be part of the answer. Yet I argue that local competition within South India also had much to do with it. As discussed previously, a unique feature of South India was that it was home to large numbers of Indo-Arab Muslim elites, like the Marakkaryars and the Nawayats, and many local convert communities who saw these people as the nobility. The Marakkaryars and the Nawayats both linked their nasabs to those of the Arabian heartlands and prominent figures of early Islam. The Nawayats claimed they were descendants of the Kuraysh and related to the Prophet’s family, and they declared Medina to be their ancestral home.<sup>72</sup> The Marakkaryars claimed that their forefather was a descendant of Abu Bakr, the first caliph and

---

<sup>70</sup> For Baqir’s life and works, see: Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 198-211; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 97, 176. For Abjadi’s, see: *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 91, 174-190; Muhammad Baqir, “Abjadi,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, accessed July 27, 2018: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abjadi-18th-century-south-indian-poet-of-persian-and-urdu>.

<sup>71</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 79-83; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 64-65; Pais, “The Navayats,” 41-43.

the father-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, meaning the noble blood of the Prophet ran through their community.<sup>73</sup> Taking all this into account, it is obvious that the Nawab needed to compete, both culturally and ideologically, with other local Muslim elites to gain prestige within that societal context.

### **The Farangi Mahall**

During the latter part of his reign, in 1787, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan achieved one significant success in the expansion of his religious network, by inviting Moulana Abd al-Ali (1730-1811), aka Bahr al-Ulum, one of the most prominent ulama of the Farangi Mahall from northern India, to stay in Madras. As discussed previously, the Shia-Sunni tension in Awadh in the mid-eighteenth century drove many Farangi Mahallis from the region. Bahr al-Ulum left Lucknow and moved to Shahjahanpura, Rampur, and Buhar (Bengal) successively. Everywhere, he was offered leading posts in state or regional madrasas by different Sunni patrons, and, when his benefactor died in 1787, Nawab Muhammad Ali invited him to his court. Wanting to have that celebrated scholar there, the Nawab paid the relocation expenses for his whole party—family and disciples—said to have numbered as many as 600. When the party arrived in 1790, the Nawab came out of the palace and personally shouldered the palanquin of the scholar in order to publicly pay Bahr al-Ulum the highest possible respect. The ruler then established a religious school, known as the *Madrassa-i Kalan*, and appointed him its director, with a monthly salary of 1,000 rupees. From then on, Bahr al-Ulum was always given the most important posts dealing with religious and royal rituals at the Nawab's court. For example, he was requested to sit at the Nawab's right hand during court ceremonies that various other religious masters and scholars also attended. When Prince Ghulam Husain, the eldest son of the Nawab, ascended the throne in 1796 following his father's death, it was this Farangi Mahalli who took his hand and led the new Nawab to the throne. He taught in the *Madrassa-i Kalan* until his death in 1810 and is said to have inspired a revival of Islamic learning in southern India. According to Francis Robinson, Bahr al-Ulum and his father Mulla al-Din were remarkable Farangi Mahallis as they managed to combine orthodox knowledge, such as that of the Quran and Hadith, with the teachings of mysticism.<sup>74</sup>

Considering the fame of the Farangi Mahallis throughout South Asia and beyond, it is not necessary to explain how this invitation improved the Nawab's reputation on both

---

<sup>73</sup> See for example, the family's nasab of Shaykh Sadaqat Allah in: Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 51-52.

<sup>74</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 201, 227-232; Nainar, *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz, Part 1*, 14; Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall*, 71-72, 78, 81.

interstate and local levels. Furthermore, the Farangi Mahallis could link the Nawab and his court to the Mughal house, especially Emperor Aurangzeb, who was remembered as the main sponsor of the Farangi Mahall. The personal religiosity of the Nawab was probably also a significant factor here. As discussed earlier, the Nawab was particularly attached to Sufism. Likewise, both Bahr al-Ulum and his father were disciples of a celebrated Qadiriyya Sufi—Saiyid Shah Abd al-Razzaq Bansawi—and various Chishtiyya masters. It may be assumed that the Farangi Mahall had considerably influenced the Nawab’s religious ideas long before the arrival of Bahr al-Ulum.

### Sufis

As well as proclaiming himself a Sufi, the Nawab also linked himself and his court to various legendary Sufi saints of the past and to contemporaneous South Indian masters and scholars. This section seeks to investigate how connections to each of these Sufis, and his self-fashioning as one of them, were of significance to the Nawab in his consolidation of power.

Beginning with the Sufis of the past, the aforementioned Saiyid Nathar Wali—believed to have been the first person to bring Islam to South India—was the individual whom the Nawab most intensely and closely associated with his family. Displaying the highest level of veneration for that saint, the Nawab gave the Islamic name “Natharnagar” to Trichinopoly, the southern capital of Karnatak where the saint’s tomb was situated. The ruler also ordered the large-scale renovation of Nathar Wali’s dargah and built a beautiful dome over it, one described as “so high as to surpass the sky and brings under the shade of its protection the fort (Trichinopoly) which is within an arrow shot.”<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, the Nawab’s queen consort and various other members of the Walajah royal family were buried in that sacred place, resting under the protection of the saint.<sup>76</sup>

The aforementioned Saiyid Abd al-Qadir of Nagore, who founded the Qadiriyya order in South India, was another Sufi from the past with whom the Walajah court sought to connect itself. This Sufi’s life—including accounts of his miracles and the Nawab’s displays of veneration to his dargah—is related in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi*. According to this chronicle, during his subjugation of French Pondicherry in 1759, the Nawab went to Nagore and visited the Sufi’s dargah in order to give him nadhr.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Paterson recorded that, when Prince Modar al-Mulk, the second son of the Nawab, took Karnatak’s armed forces to wrest Nagore

---

<sup>75</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part I, 132.

<sup>76</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 228.

<sup>77</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 196-197, 243-244.

from the VOC in 1773, the first thing he did after arriving was prostrate himself in front of the saint's tomb, giving him thanks and praying that his father would have a long life.<sup>78</sup> After the conquest of Tanjore, the Nawab renamed its capital city Qadirnagar, after the Sufi.<sup>79</sup> Another illustration of an earlier Sufi saint who is presented in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* as a holy protector of the Nawab's dynasty is Shah Fatah Allah Sahib, whose dargah was beside the walls of Trichinopoly. Once, in a time of crisis, the saint showed his magical powers by appearing to Khayr al-Din Khan—the commander of the Nawab's forces in that city—in a dream, warning him that his enemies, Prince Nand Raj of Mysore and some Maratha mercenaries, were about to invade the fort. As a result, the citadel was protected.<sup>80</sup>

As described by Susan Bayly, for centuries the veneration of Saiyid Nathar Wali transcended the boundaries between followers of orthodox and “folk” Islam, of Muslim and non-Muslim adherents, of Deccanis and Tamils, and of all social classes and occupations. Therefore, all the rulers of South India considered his shrine to be a crucial source of legitimacy.<sup>81</sup> Saiyid Abd al-Qadir was no different. According to Dennis McGilvray, his dargah constantly attracted the devotion of the local Tamil people, especially the Marakkayar elites.<sup>82</sup> As such, it is not surprising that the Nawab chose to clearly link his house with the dargahs of both these saints. The case of Shah Fatah Allah Sahib is the best example of how the Nawab used the spiritual power of a deceased Sufi to help secure his political position. By claiming that the spirit of this legendary Sufi had assisted him in saving Trichinopoly from the invasion of his enemies, the Nawab was broadcasting to the public that it was he, not the Mysoreans or the Marathas, who had been chosen by the saint as the legitimate ruler of this ancient Tamil capital.<sup>83</sup>

Regarding the Sufis of his own lifetime, it is evident that Qadiriyya Sufis played the most important roles in the Nawab's religious network. The first example is Saiyid Shah Abd al-Qadir Mehrba Fakhri (1729-1790), whose maternal family was one of the great Sufi families of the Deccan, one that was held in high esteem by the local population for its profound mystic scholarship and spiritual powers. Around 1769, shortly after the Nawab had moved to Madras, he invited Saiyid Shah Abd al-Qadir to come from the Deccan and live near him in Mylapore. Subsequently, that Sufi master was well taken care of at the Walajah

---

<sup>78</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Oct. 1773, 296.

<sup>79</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part I, 60.

<sup>80</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 167-168.

<sup>81</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 116-117.

<sup>82</sup> McGilvray, “Arabs, Moors and Muslims,” 442.

<sup>83</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, Part II, 166-167.

court. He spent the rest of his life there, teaching and writing books on mysticism, and some lands in Vellore and Mylapore were granted to him.<sup>84</sup> The next example is that of Saiyid Shah Abd al-Latif Zawqi (1737-1780), the Qadiriyya master of a celebrated Vellore *khanaqah* (Sufi hospice) known as the Hazarat Makan. His family, which owed its pedigree to Imam Husain and Imam Hasan, had migrated from the Middle East to Delhi and then moved south to Bijapur, before finally settling in Vellore, where the father of Saiyid Zawqi—Saiyid Shah Ab al-Hasan Qurbi—founded the Hazarat Makan.<sup>85</sup> Saiyid Zawqi was a polymath who composed more than 150 books and made his school into an important center of learning. Other masters from this school were also venerated by the local people. The influence of the Hazarat Makan over local society and the Karnatak court was seen most clearly at the time of the Nawab’s conquest of Tanjore in 1773. As it is related, when the Nawab was about to send his army to conquer it, he sought permission and blessings from that Qadiriyya master. The Sufi, in response, promised the Nawab that the fort would easily be conquered. Saiyid Zawqi also kept in regular contact not only with the Nawab but also with many other important figures at his court, such as the Nawab’s two eldest sons and Muhammad Najib Khan Bahadur, the supreme military commander.<sup>86</sup> Maulana Baqir Agah, the prominent Arabic scholar at the Nawab’s court to whom I referred earlier, was also a disciple of Saiyid Qurbi and a friend and classmate of Saiyid Zawqi.<sup>87</sup> Another important fact that should be noted here is that it was Sa’adat Allah Khan, the founder of the rival Nawayat dynasty, who had originally invited the family from the Deccan to Vellore, and it was the Nawayat house who consistently gave their support to the hospice.<sup>88</sup> The Walajah Nawab’s success in bringing the Hazarat Makan into his religious network thus reflects his ability to harness one of his opponent’s most important religio-political resources to support his own power and prestige.

Although the Nawab himself was firmly attached to the relatively liberal and syncretic Qadiriyya and Chishtiyya orders, he attempted to link himself to all prominent orders, including those of militant Islamic groups. The best example of the latter is Saiyid Khwaja Rahmat Allah (1699-1781), a puritanical Naqshbandiyya Sufi from Kurnool, in the Deccan, “who could not tolerate anything against the explicit orders and commandments of Allāh and

---

<sup>84</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 190-191.

<sup>85</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 114, 153.

<sup>86</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 130-134, 147, 155.

<sup>87</sup> See more details about Maulana Baqir in Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 198-211; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 97, 176-177.

<sup>88</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 153.

his Apostle.”<sup>89</sup> It is reported that Khwaja Rahmat Allah denounced all popular Muslim practices that included indulgence and extravagance in their religious ceremonies. He also vehemently attacked the carrying of *Panjas*—symbolic hands of Imam Husain—during the Muharram procession of the Shia. His extremist ideas caused some of the population living in and around his hometown—both Shia and Sunni—to take up arms against him, forcing him to flee the region. Although he had rivals, he was, at the same time, widely venerated by many others, disciples and followers. Among them was a Karnatak jagirdar of Udayagiri, who invited him to settle in Nellore, in northern Karnatak. The village where his new khanaqah was located was renamed Rahmatabad in his honor. After he arrived, various local mystic masters and students wanted to become his disciples, one of whom was Saiyid Shah Ab al-Hasan Qurbi, the Qadiriyya master of Hazarat Makan, in Vellore. When Khwaja Rahmat Allah visited Madras, the Nawab did not fail to take the opportunity to seek the prayers and blessings of this Naqshbandiyya saint. Furthermore, some time after this master’s death, the Nawab ordered the construction of a huge mausoleum next to the mosque in Rahmatabad, where the Sufi’s dargah was situated.<sup>90</sup> The Nawab also gave especial patronage to a son-in-law and disciple of Rahmat Allah, Shaykh Makhdum Abd al-Haq Sawi. Shaikh Sawi was a celebrated mystical scholar of the period who was famous as a descendent of Yusuf Adil Shah, the founder of Bijapur. In Bijapur, he had studied Islamic mystical sciences and then made pilgrimages to Mecca, Medina, and various places in South Asia, before travelling to study with Rahmat Allah. Sharing the views of his master, he infused in his disciples a strong desire to purify Sunni Islam and resist the rise of Shiism in Karnatak. Large numbers of shaykhs and saiyyids in Madras and Vellore became his disciples, and he authored more than 100 works on the mystical sciences. He died some time in 1751. His body was first buried in Rahmatabad but later transferred to a cemetery in Mylapore (Madras). According to Susan Bayly, this was arranged by the Nawab following his own relocation to Madras. In 1789, the Nawab also constructed an attractive tomb over this Sufi’s grave to highlight their links.<sup>91</sup> The Nawab’s court was also known for its openness to all types of petty and less-renowned Sufis and faqirs. As Paterson describes, these people would always be received by the Nawab with the highest respect. The Nawab would seat them on the same carpet on which he sat and receive from them some enchanted cloths or consecrated cakes by touching them on his head. Many of them came to tell him their “idle dreams,” in which, in

---

<sup>89</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 100 (footnote).

<sup>90</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 99-103; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 180-181; Francis Robinson, *Atlas of the Islamic World Since 1500* (Facts on File, 1982), 118-119.

<sup>91</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*, 98-111; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 180.

the Nawab's own words, "no doubt they will always dream favorably for the Nabob of the Carnatic." But as "those are good people we must give charity ... none of them went back with empty hands."<sup>92</sup>

As discussed previously, the evidence reflects that Sufis from all orders—but particularly the Qadiriyya—were held in high regard in South India. By presenting himself as the patron and benefactor of both past and present Sufi saints, the Nawab, a recent migrant into the region, was probably able to integrate himself quickly into the local cultural landscape. As such, the Nawab seems to have used similar tactics as the Mughals, the Asafjahi rulers of Hyderabad, the Mysore sultans, and many other Indo-Islamic rulers of medieval and early modern times, who strategically linked themselves to various celebrated Sufis by claiming genealogical links, being their generous patron and/or spiritual disciples, frequenting their lodge, tomb shrines, and festivals, sponsoring their writings, and even composing books on Sufi saints and doctrines themselves. Many rulers, such as the Asafjahi rulers and Mysore's Tipu Sultan, also interred their passed-away fathers and close relatives on the ground of Sufi shrines.<sup>93</sup> However, the Nawab of Karnatak likely went further than many other rulers. He held in his palace the urs ceremony, which traditionally took place at the dargah of the dead saint or in a Sufi khanaqah.<sup>94</sup> He dressed up and wore the crown of the khilafat, prayed to the saint, preached, admitted various disciples into the orders, and claimed that he had the ability to perform karamat. Thus, it is clear that the Nawab viewed himself as a Sufi master and treated his palace as a Sufi lodge. So far, I cannot trace any contemporaneous ruler who engaged in Sufism in the same way or to the same extent as the Nawab. However, this is nothing new if one considers the earlier models of Iranian Safavid rulers—who had claimed they were the Sufis of the Safaviyya order—or the model of Emperor Akbar's Din-i Ilahi.<sup>95</sup> One can also link his activity to the contemporaneous model of the Farangi Mahallis, who played a crucial role at the Nawab's court. Large numbers of leading Farangi Mahallis claimed that they were the disciples of Qadiriyya and Chishtiyya saints, integrated many Sufi rituals into their school, and presented themselves as both ulama and Sufi masters.<sup>96</sup> An important supposition by Susan Bayly, on the overlapping and neatly analogous status of a Sufi and a ruler in early modern South India, is also probably relevant here. According to Bayly, in the South, Sufis were perceived no differently from a reigning

---

<sup>92</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Jul. 1773, 28.

<sup>93</sup> See further details and examples in Green, *Making Space*, 20-26; 33-64; 181-182; 197-198; 267-268; 278-287; Yazdani, "Haidar 'Ali and Tipu Sultan," 105.

<sup>94</sup> See how the urs ceremony was usually held in Sufi khanaqah in: Green, *Making Space*, 35, 58, 61.

<sup>95</sup> Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 92-93; Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 61.

<sup>96</sup> Robinson, *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, 58-59.

monarch. In works of literature, various saints were addressed as “king,” or *padshah* (emperor), creating and ruling a Muslim domain. The same term, *wilayat* (realm), was used to refer to both the spiritual domain of a Sufi and the political domain of a ruler. The dargah of a Sufi was referred to as his court and his seat of authority. The sufferings during the saint’s journey were portrayed as struggles during war of conquest, and his disciples represented his army. In Tamilnadu in particular, where Muslim states were founded much later than in the north, Sufis were widely portrayed as the forebears of “real” Muslim rulers.<sup>97</sup> In light of the Nawab’s efforts to link himself to both past and present Sufis and to represent himself as a Sufi, he may have been inspired by this prevailing concept of the Sufi-ruler, because it was a ready-made, easily-understood, and powerful form of rule that could help him gain wide acceptance and veneration from the local population. In addition to his personal taste, the Nawab’s desire to favor the Qadiriyya order above all others may be seen in light of local factors. While the Chishtiyya could link him to the Mughal court, his former master Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah of the Deccan, and his own ancestors in Awadh, and the Naqshbandiyya order could link him specifically to Emperor Aurangzeb, the Qadiriyya, with its Arab orientation, was the most popular order in South Indian society, particularly in Tamilnadu.

In addition, considering the legend of Saiyid Hadrat Nathar Wali that 900 people followed him to South India and the fact that an entourage of 600 followed the Farangi Mahalli Bahr al-Ulum into the Karnatak region, the Nawab’s effort to recruit talented people from northern India and beyond into Karnatak should also be brought into consideration here. Evidently, these religious figures possessed great ability to attract people. As earlier discussed, Green has proposed that Sufis saints were important helpmates for Muslim conquerors in linking the old politico-cultural centers to the new territories.<sup>98</sup> They could help create shared imagined religious boundaries of people from the two areas and shed the image of new terrains as far-flung and alien. In this light, the Sufis and their networks could well support the Nawab, just like the Mughal links discussed in Chapter Two, in encouraging the relocation of service people southwardly into the Karnatak region.

### **Shias and Hindus**

As discussed earlier, in the eighteenth century, Shia-Sunni conflict became endemic in many parts of South Asia. Some religious scholars whom the Nawab embraced into his patronage

---

<sup>97</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 182-184; Green also discuss the close links between saintly and kingly rituals in medieval and early modern South Asia. See: Green, *Making Space*, see: Green, *Making Space*, 20-26.

<sup>98</sup> Green, “Geography, Empire and Sainthood in the Eighteenth-Century Muslim Deccan,” 216, 220.

were directly involved. The Farangi Mahall master Bahr al-Ulum, for example, was forced to leave Lucknow because of threats from Shia extremists. Both of the Naqshbandiyya Sufis to whom the Nawab was attached—Khwaja Rahmat Allah and Shaykh Makhdum Abd al-Haq Sawi—worked to “purify” Sunni Islam and check Shiism in South India. A Shia littérateur in the South even seriously insulted Rahmat Allah after his death by referring to him as “a wicked dog.”<sup>99</sup> Despite being in the middle of Sunni-Shia tension, the Nawab of Karnatak chose to raise his court above such communal conflict. As such, he stood in sharp contrast to the Nishapuri rulers of Awadh, who openly sided with the Shia. The Nawab tried to demonstrate his tolerance of Shiism in various ways, inviting and patronizing scholars from both sides. As the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* describes, the ships he sent annually to Arabia were not only bound for Mecca, Medina, and other Sunni centers, but also Shia holy places in Najaf, Karbala, and Mashhad.<sup>100</sup> Other accounts mention his father, Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan, as having tolerated Shia believers, and Nawab Muhammad Ali as being the main patron of the Shia festival of Muharram in Madras. As the chronicle also narrates, the Nawab even pledged, from the year 1747, that he would annually erect one of the panjas—the symbolic hands used in the ceremony—himself in order to thank to Imam Husain. This was because the Nawab’s first, long-awaited son was born of Khadija Begam, who was a Shia Muslim. Moreover, he was born during a holy day in Muharram, following a prayer said by Khadija Begam’s uncle, Saiyid Ali Khan, to Imam Husain during the Muharram festival a year earlier.<sup>101</sup> Yet the tolerance of the Nawab for Shiism can also be seen in the light of necessity. Both the Nawab’s mother and his queen consort, as well as their families, were followers of Shia Islam. As already discussed, members of these two families had been the main supporters of his political ambitions even before he became the Nawab. Many Indo-Arab Nawayat elites were also Shia,<sup>102</sup> and it can be assumed that there were many other Indo-Shia warriors and administrators working for the Nawab or living in the region.<sup>103</sup>

With regard to Hinduism, the sources reveal that the Nawab was extremely careful to protect Hindu sacred places and believers, and he showed no sign of discrimination between Hindu populations and Muslims. Many accounts in the *Tuzak-i Walajahi* reflect this. For example, it reports that the Nawab once passed an ancient Hindu temple in Chidambaram and

<sup>99</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 180.

<sup>100</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 7-8; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 174.

<sup>102</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 174.

<sup>103</sup> According to Karen Leonard, while the Deccan Nizams were Turkic-Sunnis, a large numbers of Muslim nobles were Shia and their numbers rose towards the end of the eighteenth century. Many of them were from families once associated with the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda. The same may have occurred in the Karnatak court, considering the existence of many Indo-Muslim nobles who migrated from the Deccan into the Karnatak during that century. See: Leonard, “Hyderabad Political System and Its Participants,” 581.

discovered that the place was being used by a French army as a weapons store. He immediately ordered his troops to expel the French, and then “gave presents to the inhabitants, honored them, and made them feel happy.”<sup>104</sup> The *Ruznama* also records the Nawab’s orders to his Muslim military leaders to take care that all Hindu places of worship be respected, that the sepoys did not enter temples, and that Hindu festivals be organized as usual.<sup>105</sup> And it is not only in court literature, but in Paterson’s diary, too, that reports of the Nawab’s many generous acts towards the Hindus can be found. When the Nawab sent a force to invade Ramnad in 1772, for example, he ordered that a land contract (*cowle*) be given as a gift to the leader of Rameswaram Island, where was situated one of the most important Hindu pagodas. He also gave assurances to the local people that they could exercise their religion freely and enjoy former privileges, and that the killing of cows would be banned. Also, the Europeans, including his British allies, were not allowed to occupy their lands.<sup>106</sup> Similar promises not to let the Europeans enter their lands and kill bullocks were also given to the Hindu populations of Tanjore after its conquest.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, the *Ruznama* records that the Nawab granted an interview to a Hindu holy man, Sadhu from Tirupati, in the Chepauk Palace.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, according to Susan Bayly, the Nawab’s name appears as a benefactor in the records of various Hindu shrines throughout Karnatak. His generosity was extraordinary when compared to that of other Muslim rulers of the time; as such, he was remembered by many Hindu subjects in far more positive a light than were the Nawayat Nawabs and Mysore sultans. The records of the Tirupati temple, for example, mention the first Nawayat Nawab as someone who dramatically reduced the allowance of the temple to one-sixteenth of the amount that had been set by the former Hindu rajas, and Tipu Sultan was generally remembered as a Brahmin-killer and a despoiler of temples.<sup>109</sup>

Another good example of the Nawab’s approach to Hinduism can be seen in his acts during the Dasara, one of the biggest annual Hindu festivals. Previously, Hindu rulers and courts had played significant roles in this festival. For example, all Hindu rajas would take the opportunity to display publicly their wealth, royal magnificence, and strength of their arms, while all subordinate chiefs were required to be present to pay homage to their overlords, and gifts were exchanged between them.<sup>110</sup> With some exceptions (e.g. Emperor

---

<sup>104</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 244.

<sup>105</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 3 and 5 Oct. 1773.

<sup>106</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 36.

<sup>107</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 232-233.

<sup>108</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 68, *Ruznama*, 23 Feb. 1775.

<sup>109</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 165-182.

<sup>110</sup> Brittlebank, “Assertion,” 269.

Aurangzeb), the Muslim overlords usually allowed this event to be celebrated by their Hindu subordinates. As Brittlebank suggests, even the eighteenth-century Mysore rulers Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, who were known as Brahmin killers, allowed this festival's ceremonies to be performed by the captive Wodeyar rajas in order to prevent revolts by the people of Mysore. The fact that the rituals were allowed to be organized at the sultans' consent also signified their superiority over the Hindu rulers.<sup>111</sup> Probably having the same aims as the Mysore sultans, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan allowed the festival to be celebrated fully throughout Karnatak, and shortly after he had conquered Tanjore, used the occasion to publicly underscore his generosity towards the Hindus by announcing that he was allowing the Tanjore raja to perform all the public ceremonies of this festival, as was customary.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, some elements of the festival were even observed in the Nawab's palace in Madras. Deepavali—or the Ayudhaya Puja—the main day of the festival, was treated as a court holiday so all Hindus could fully participate in and celebrate their religious rites. Perhaps more importantly, the day before this main holiday, the Hindu officers and other Hindu elites in the region would come to the Nawab's court, offer nadhr to the Muslim ruler, and receive his blessing as part of the celebrations for their holy festival.<sup>113</sup>

The large number of Hindu servants at his court and the fact that the majority of the local population were Hindus are the simplest explanations for the Nawab's displays of respect and tolerance towards their religion. However, to these I would add a challenge that the Nawab was facing, namely the military expansion of the Marathas. From the time that Shivaji had founded the Maratha state, the Maratha rulers had used the idea that they were the upholders of dharma and the protectors of gods and Brahmins (from the intrusions of both Muslims and Europeans) as the principal means of legitimizing their territorial expansion.<sup>114</sup> There are signs that, in my opinion, could be read as the Nawab competing with the Marathas for the role of protector of Hinduism in Karnatak. In 1759, a Maratha army seized the famous Tirupati temple in northern Tamilnadu, and the Nawab-EIC alliance dispatched a force of 300 sepoy to retake the place. As is reported in an Arcot gazetteer from a later date, the sepoy army faced a significant problem when it neared the temple, because only 80 troops were "clean caste" Hindus and therefore, according to Hindu custom, only they were allowed to ascend the sacred hill on which the temple was situated. When they asked for reinforcements,

---

<sup>111</sup> Brittlebank, "Assertion," 270.

<sup>112</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 22 Sep. 1773.

<sup>113</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 16 Oct. 1773; bundle 68, 13-15 Oct., 4 Nov. 1774. The court also did not operate during the Sankurathi festival (pongal) holiday; see: bundle 68, *Ruznama*, 11 Jan. 1775.

<sup>114</sup> See the Maratha concepts of kingship in: Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 33, 48-49.

the EIC authorities repeated the mistake by sending more Muslim and low-caste Hindu sepoys to the place. Eventually, the Nawab-EIC joint force decided on a change of plan in order to avoid making a religious insult to the famous Indic shrine.<sup>115</sup> This suggests that the Nawab would not allow any blemish on his record as protector of Hindu temples, even if it meant sacrificing an immediate military advantage. Such is even more significant considering Susan Bayly's remark that this Tirupati temple was situated in a Poligar area and was usually visited by various groups of low-caste forest warriors who considered Brahmanical ideals of purity relatively unimportant.<sup>116</sup> As such, it is likely that the perception of Brahmanical purity by the Muslim Nawab and his British ally was unusual in this case. It is reasonable to assume that the Nawab's intention was to contrast his approach with the improper behavior of the Marathas, whose position in the Indic hierarchy was contested. The Marathas claimed that they were Kshatriya, but many of their contemporaries, both Hindu and Muslim, considered them low peasants of Shudra origin, and, as such, they should not have been allowed to ascend the sacred hill.

Another ideological contest between the Nawab and the Marathas occurred when civil war broke out in the Maratha state around 1773. Two Maratha leaders—Raganatrow and his nephew Narinrow—were in conflict, and this ended in the death of Narinrow. This was discussed in great detail at the Karnatak court and, presumably, the whole of South India during this period. The British secretary Paterson learned some parts of the story from the Nawab and others from Brahmin Venkatachalam; this revolved around how Raganatrow had deceitfully and cruelly murdered his nephew by conspiring with Mohamed Yusuf, Narinrow's chief bodyguard. As the event was vividly described by Venkatachalam, during the struggle that led to his death, Narinrow ran into the house where the sacred cows were kept and then to the Brahmin priests of the palace, seeking shelter. However, the conspirators followed him and killed both the cows and the Brahmins who had attempted to intercede for him. The Nawab then used this story as a means of blackening the reputation of the Maratha leader Raganatrow, saying that Brahmins—presumably from all over South India—were livid as a result of these murders and had declared that such a wicked act (by Raganatrow) had never happened in their caste before. They even declared that Raganatrow would live no longer than six months.<sup>117</sup> Whether and to what extent the story of Raganatrow corresponded with historical reality notwithstanding, the circulation of this anecdote in Karnatak certainly

---

<sup>115</sup> Fox, *North Arcot*, 73-74.

<sup>116</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 45, 167.

<sup>117</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 206-207; E/379/7, DGP, Jan. 1774, 196-197.

helped sharpen the Nawab's image as a follower of Hindu dharma and rule, and as "the protector of gods, brahmans, holy places and the cow."<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 48.



## Conclusion to Part II

Through my investigation into the Nawab's approach to the four pillars of Nawabi Karnatak—dynasty, sword, pen, and religion—I have discovered three mutually-related approaches to his process of state-formation, namely: 1) an upwardly-mobile dynasty; 2) the centralization of power; and 3) openness.

With regard to upward mobility, while presenting himself and his family as loyal servants of the Mughal Empire, the Nawab had no qualms about building up his own dynasty and creating an independent state. While Mughal posts and honorifics helped facilitate his family's claim to Karnatak, the waning of Mughal power and the relatively modest profile of the Walajahs forced the Nawab to use wide-ranging ideological resources from outside the imperial realm. In order to place his dynastic pedigree on a par with that of other contemporaneous state-builders, the Nawab turned outwards, to the Islamic world more widely, constructing or increasing links with the Saiyid families, legendary caliphs of the past, the Ottoman caliphate, the Central Asian Islamic centers, and the Iranian Safavid dynasty. The pursuit of ideological resources outside the declining Mughal Empire seems to have been a trend that was widespread among late-eighteenth-century rulers. However, one aspect that has never previously been mentioned is that the Karnatak Nawab began this outward movement, into the Arabian heartlands, at the beginning of the 1770s, and possibly even earlier, in the mid-1760s. It is probable that he was the pioneer of this trend that was, later, followed by others such as Nawab Asaf al-Daulah of Awadh (r.1775-1797) and Tipu Sultan of Mysore (r.1782-1799). Another important point to note is that the approaches the Karnatak Nawab took when constructing these links were not random and they were not only aimed at glorifying his dynastic history in an abstract sense; they also sought to increase his actual political power. The Nawab's links to Central Asia and Iran, as presented in his nasab, reflect his attempts to intensify group cohesion with the Mughal-Turanis and Indo-Iranis from the North and the Deccan, the two oldest and most important components of the Nawab's courtiers, especially militarily, from the earliest period of his reign. The claim of an Arab noble bloodline, on the other hand, resulted in intense local competition between the Walajahs—as the new ruling house—and the older Nawayat and Marakayyar elites. Beyond this ideological facet, the Nawab organized his family in a manner more akin to traditional royalty than did his predecessors. His wives and sons were categorized into a hierarchy in order to facilitate a clear line of succession. Marriage strategies to noble families—both

within and without Karnatak—and the absence of “downward” marriages by his daughters were also used to support his dynasty’s position.

Regarding the centralization of power into his hands, this is most clearly seen in the Nawab’s dynastic management. From the early 1760s, the Nawab eliminated the old Central Asian-Mughal legacies of shared sovereignty and the appanage system, which had been significant factors in the processes of decentralization or zamindarization. Through marriage strategies, the Nawab confined royal power to a small circle of his core family, formed of his nearest blood-relatives, and matrilineal links played a special role in shaping his selection. The Nawab deprived his siblings of military and economic resources, developed a harem for bringing up his children, and experimentally adopted a system of primogeniture. However, when the latter had the opposite effect to that intended, open succession was reasserted, to an extent, in order to increase the Nawab’s control over his heirs. His centralizing tendency can also be observed through changes in the pillars of the sword and the pen. In the first decade of the 1750s, the Nawab maintained the political system of Karnatak in the same way as had his forerunners. He used an almost all-inclusive policy to integrate the available groups of jamadars in the military markets into his army. He made great efforts to reach accommodation with almost all existing local chieftains in Karnatak, most prominently the nawayats and various Hindu Nayakas and Poligars, by bringing them into his service and letting them share the interests of the new regime, mainly through the traditional practices of fitna and the Mughal zamindari system. Although the Nawab survived the first decade, forming alliances based on fitna eventually proved very unreliable and did, many times, cause unexpected and destructive episodes for the Nawab, since local allies and subjects could deny, delay, or withdraw their cooperation at any time. In the early 1760s, the Nawab thus significantly changed his approach by permanently eliminating many local zamindar-type chieftains, as he also did to his most prominent male relatives; trustworthy servants, appointed from the center, were used as replacements to govern provincial domains. An important aspect of this change was the Nawab’s elevation of many petty Hindu chiefs with obscure profiles but seemingly high financial capabilities to replace the earlier, powerful and rebellious Hindu and Muslim zamindars as provincial governors. A comparison with the contemporaneous Mysore state can be made here. In their attempts to consolidate power, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan seem to have used a similar approach to the Nawab to eliminate the powerful but unruly zamindars in their domains. The sultan ordered that large territories governed by these local power-holders be auctioned off to new groups of petty warriors, most

of whom were Hindu. These newly-elevated rulers became the sultan's supporters in gathering revenue and eradicating the influence of the formerly independent rulers, thus greatly contributing to the sultan's success in centralization.<sup>1</sup> Although there were some Hindu "royal lineages" that the Nawab failed to eliminate during his reign, his efforts at power centralization were, in general, highly successful. All his brothers were deprived of their succession rights and of independent control of any region. For his servants, lifelong possession of a single office and the ability to pass a position from father to son were no longer possible, and the Nawab's ability to frequently move his officers was another good indication of how power lay in his hand. A contrasting situation in the Deccan may help demonstrate the Nawab's success. According to Leonard, in the process of state formation during the early eighteenth century, Nizam al-Mulk permitted jagir lands and administrative posts to be the family inheritance of numerous Mughal officers as part of an incentive to transfer their allegiance from the imperial center to his dynasty. As such, the Nizam contributed greatly to the zamindarization of the Mughal Empire. Yet, up to the late eighteenth century, large numbers of royals and nobles still maintained large jagirs and held their military and administrative positions on a hereditary basis.<sup>2</sup> Unlike in Karnatak and Mysore, the successors of Nizam al-Mulk failed to curb the fundamental decentralizing practices upon which their state had been founded.

Another noteworthy change in the Karnatak administration during the Nawab's lifetime was the transformation of the key requirement of supreme provincial governors from military valor to financial and other civil capabilities. This trend—shifting from sword-like to pen-like—was also reflected in the courtiers at the center. From the mid-1760s, the people who surrounded the Nawab were, mainly, no longer prominent warriors, as they had been at the beginning of his rule. The main individuals in his Privy Council—who had the trust of the Nawab and, consequently, significant executive power at court—were mainly people of the pen who had no military background. These changes are reminiscent of Ibn Khaldun's theory regarding a state's life-cycle, which describes the rise of the pen to replace the sword in the middle term. However, Ibn Khaldun's idea does not fit this case perfectly, since there is no reason to assume that the needs of the military in Karnatak had decreased during the second half of the eighteenth century, only within short time (of one to two generations) after dynastic establishment. The conflicts between the Nawab, various local and neighboring power holders, and various European agents on the Coast, as well as the Nawab's self-

---

<sup>1</sup> Stein, "State Formation and Economy Reconsidered," 401.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard, "Hyderabad Political System and Its Participants," 571, 575, 577, 579.

representation—which stress his military talent much more than his skill with the pen—are all evidence that the highly-militarized atmosphere of South India had not altered. But, as I have argued, the shift of emphasis from sword to pen within the circle of local Karnatak courtiers reflects the Nawab’s efforts and successes in monopolizing the role of the sword in Karnatak politics, with the assistance of his “new” military resource, the EIC. From the early 1750s until the mid-1760s, the EIC was the only one of the Nawab’s allies that had firmly provided him with the military assistance required. The European-style troops were very effective, demonstrated through their being the basis of the Nawab’s success in subjugating all his relatives and local rebels. His experiences over a decade and a half likely meant that the Nawab fully believed that the European military was the most important factor in maintaining his power. Hence, from the mid-1760s, the Nawab put most of his military investment in that direction. His approach was two-fold: 1) to establish a large central army, drilled in the European style and led by the EIC’s officers; and 2) to establish a Nawab-EIC joint army. Although the Nawab permanently maintained some traditional-style troops and his old swordsmen for their high prestige, the new European-style forces significantly reduced the jobs and role of the old sword groups within Nawabi Karnatak.

The third aspect was the Nawab’s openness, in the sense that, relatively speaking, he lacked restrictions in his worldview and had a strong desire to bring all elements—both old and new, “local” and “foreign”—that he considered useful to his power into his “micro-cosmos” centered on Chepauk Palace. Apart from the fact that the royal family were exclusively Muslim (both Sunni and Shia), there are no signs of religious discrimination in the Nawab’s recruitment. People from all sects—Muslims, Hindus, and Europeans—were given military and civil positions. His religious self-representations and networks of patronage reflected his strong latitudinarian standpoint and his wish to promote religious tolerance in his domain as part of his inclusive approach. Again, I would like to underline that the Nawab’s broad patronization not only aimed to cover as extensive a range of ideological resources and populations as possible, but each group was arguably targeted and had a specific purpose. One can understand his approach much better when the perspective of both the Mughal Empire and South India are factored in. For instance, acknowledgement by the caliphate and the sharifate in Arabia could underline his religious superiority over the Mughal imperial house and most other South Asian rulers, whose wish to be acknowledged had been denied or not yet granted. The Nawab’s patronage of Farangi Mahallis linked him to the Mughals and, at the same time, promoted a syncretic atmosphere involving the orthodox and

mystical branches of Islam in Karnatak. The Nawab's protection of Brahmins and Hindu temples can be viewed as the result of competition between him and local Hindu zamindars and the Marathas. The Nawab's particular attachment to the Qadiriyya Sufi order can be properly understood as the result of its popularity in local society and the Arabian orientation of Tamilnadu. Furthermore, the Nawab's self-representation as a Sufi saint and his court as a Sufi lodge should be understood within the South Indian framework of the Sufi-ruler, in addition to Sufism's general popularity in South Asia. Many of the examples also reveal how the Nawab, as both a newcomer and a Muslim sultan among Hindus, made a significant effort to position himself within local society. The evidence seems to argue against the idea that eighteenth-century South Asia as a whole was an age of increasing communal conflict and uncontained group struggles where it was no longer possible for a harmonious or syncretic atmosphere to grow, or even exist. This argument may be applicable to Awadh or the Deccan, as Cole, Kruijtzter, and others of their trend have suggested, but it is not the case for Karnatak under this Nawab. It also highlights how the label of the Nawabi Karnatak period as one of "Mohammadan government" by colonial scholars such as Arthur Fox—in contrast to the earlier "Hindu" period, with the basic implication that the Muslim rulers severely suppressed the local Hindu people—is rather misleading.<sup>3</sup> I also support the suggestion by Kinra that modern scholars should no longer treat the pre-modern social, religious, and linguistic identities of South Asia within a zero-sum framework, as though a Muslim ruler was "less Muslim" when they exhibited genuine tolerance and respect towards the non-Muslims in their realm, or as though a Hindu who learned Persian somehow became "less Hindu."<sup>4</sup> Nawabi Karnatak is a good example of how diverse cultural elements from different worlds could be brought together to work in pre-modern societies.

The Nawab's courage in investing significant financial resources and trust in new European military technology, as discussed earlier, is another very good indication of his openness and ability to adapt quickly to the rapidly-changing circumstances of the late eighteenth century. However, more illustrative examples can be observed through the rise and fall of the pen-groups at his court. In the earliest period, the Nawab chose to compromise with the Kayastha diwan of his father, who had been his rival, mainly due to the diwan's links with the lucrative network of northern Hindu scribal castes that dominated the Indo-Muslim courts throughout the empire in the first half of the eighteenth century. The rise of the South Indian Telegu Brahmins from the Madras dubashi community to replace the

---

<sup>3</sup> Fox, *North Arcot*, 117-118.

<sup>4</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 5.

northern migrants, during the 1760s, corresponded with the rise of the European companies as the dominant political and economic powers in the Coromandel Coast. The significant number of British political advisers and envoys at his court from the 1760s also clearly reflects the Nawab's attempts to understand and make further use of this new power in South Asia beyond the military aspect.

The trajectory of the Nawab's formation of his state shows remarkable similarities to early Mughal's imperial formation in Hindustan, which involved an inclusive political strategy under the umbrella of universal kingship. I would argue that the Nawab took the Mughal Empire as his model and dreamed of revitalizing the Mughal success story in Nawabi Karnatak. However, while the paradigm of the Mughal Empire seemed to work quite well in many aspects, the Nawab's embrace of the EIC, also caused some unexpected and costly consequences. For example, the issue of the Nawab's succession was, for a long time, complicated by EIC agents who would have preferred one of his sons rather than another. Also as evidence from the 1770s to the 1790s reveals, the role of the EIC in the military sphere was not confined to providing European-style mercenaries and modernizing his forces. Some aspects of Nawabi-EIC military cooperation were beyond the Nawab's control. As well, one may see confrontations in the ideas and practices of East and West in their encounters. For example, there was a "clash" between the primogeniture system preferred by the Europeans and the open style of succession generally practiced in the Mughal world. Also, the Europeans tried to impose their value of adherence to a written treaty onto the local South Asian context, where everything in the political world had always been relatively fluid, changeable, and (re) negotiable based on conditions at the time and the actual strength of the parties involved. The Nawab was forced by the EIC to stick to his eldest son as heir-apparent because the latter's name was written in the Mughal farman, the *sanad* of the Deccan Nizam, and the Treaty of Paris. However, it is also clear that the Nawab could adopt some European methods effectively in response to the British. For example, in 1760, the Nawab proposed signing a treaty with the EIC in order to stop the Company's interference in the disputes between him and his rebellious siblings and subjects, and to facilitate the movement of their military to support him in such matters. He also used a written will to oblige the British nation to respect his decision about his heir. Through observations regarding the changing British advisers at his court, one also see that the Nawab's relationship with the British was not confined to the EIC—he also dealt with the British king and government—and that he could play off rival factions among the British. As I have intimated, there are many other

important aspects of cooperation and conflict in the Nawab-British relationship to explore and discuss, and this is the main aim of Part III.



### PART III: Embracing the Europeans

I will start Part III, “Embracing the Europeans,” with a brief supposition regarding the Nawab’s self-representation: he probably wanted to draw the Europeans into the micro-cosmos he was creating. The Nawab’s official chronicle, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, contains a large section dedicated to Europeans, their world, and their relationship with the Nawab and his state. The account begins with an impressively accurate overview of world history since the Age of Discovery: Eurasian trade before 1483, scientific advances in Europe in the late fifteenth century, European states’ desire to find a sea route to Hindustan, the accidental discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, and so on. Then, it describes the Portuguese, Denmark (Danish), Walandaz (Dutch), French, and British, the five European nations who had trading posts in South Asia. For each of these, the following details are provided: the location and size of their country, an overview of their capital city, who was the king or aspects of their government, their military strength, and their trading activities and settlements in South Asia.<sup>1</sup> In the Nawab’s daily court record, the *Ruznama*, his meetings with individual Europeans—for various purposes and activities—are considered important events and so are recorded. It is noteworthy that, in the *Ruznama*, at the beginning of each day not only is the date (date, month, year) noted in the Islamic calendar (*hijri*) but that in the Western, Christian calendar is, too. The particular attention he paid to Europeans and the efforts he made to integrate them into his dynastic history and court records clearly highlight the fact that the Nawab felt that the Europeans had become a central, and crucial, part of his world. His provision of Western dates alongside Muslim ones in the *Ruznama* is especially significant in light of O’Hanlon’s argument regarding the relationship between the command of time and power in South Asia’s imperial traditions. According to her, one vital attribute of being an emperor, a great sultan, or a *chakravatin* (“King of the Universe,” in Sanskrit) was having command over time. In order to present themselves as commanding time, those who ruled frequently included dates that were recorded using more than one calendar, and even established new eras in their state documents.<sup>2</sup> The Nawab’s use of the Western calendar may be interpreted in this light, as evidence that he wished to present himself as commanding the European world. Similarly, it is likely that the information regarding Europe and the five European nations contained in his chronicle was meant to represent the Nawab’s profound comprehension of the West and their agents in South Asia; they were always in his sights and under his cognitive control. It is noteworthy that the Nawab’s efforts to control the

---

<sup>1</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part 1*, 85-109.

<sup>2</sup> O’Hanlon, “Contested Conjunctions,” 768.

Europeans, as reflected in his self-representation, are in stark contrast with the image of him often presented by modern historians, who see him as either a British puppet, passive client, or subordinate ally. As discussed in the introduction, modern scholars usually base such images on hindsight, via knowledge of the subsequent EIC domination over the Karnatak state, without providing detailed and comprehensive observations of the process as it unfolded and with little interest in the Nawab's agency. It is the central aim of Part III to re-investigate the relationship between the Nawab and the Europeans by concentrating on the Nawab's own perspective and his agency in shaping developments. On the European side, the British Company and the British nation will be the focus of attention, since they had the largest role in the Karnatak state. Subrahmanyam, one modern scholar who has occasionally touched upon the eighteenth-century Karnatak state, gives a brief overview of the Anglo-Nawab relationship in one of his works as follows: "Muhammad 'Ali's court had close relations with a number of European powers, [...]; these [European] individuals and the East India Company effectively managed over the course of several decades to reduce Muhammad 'Ali to a state of political and cultural dependence using both military and financial means."<sup>3</sup> Subrahmanyam's account is a good illustration of the main points on which modern scholars usually concentrate. Next to the word "dependence," three key terms frequently appear: "cultural," "military," and "financial(/economic)." Therefore, these three are good places from which to start this re-examination. For the sake of convenience, I will start, in Chapter Seven, with an investigation into Anglo-Nawabi financial or economic links, then continue in Chapters Eight and Nine with cultural and military engagements, respectively.

Chapter Seven, "Economic Encounters," differs significantly from previous discussions of the Anglo-Nawabi financial or economic relationship. On this issue, specialists on Karnatak's history—Gurney, Phillips, Ramaswami, and others—have traditionally focused on the Nawab's debts to the EIC and British individuals, seeing them either as the basis of British control over the Nawab or as a means by which the Nawab was able to make the British his allies. I shall not go over the debt issue once more, but will instead explore various other economic activities that reveal cooperation and competition between the Nawab and the British and other European nations. As seen in Chapter Five, the rise of prominent groups of financial officers in the Nawab's court, such as the Kayasthas and the Telegu Brahmin dubashes, was remarkably similar to the changing politico-economic circumstances

---

<sup>3</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "On Early Modern Historiography," in *The Cambridge World History: Volume 6, The Construction of a Global World, 1400-1800 CE, Part 2, Patterns of Change*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 426.

in the wider context of South India, particularly on the Coromandel Coast; as such, it can be assumed that there were close links between the Nawab's court and the regional mercantile world. Chapter Eight, "Cultural Encounters," aims to extend and deepen the debates of earlier studies regarding the Nawab's openness to Western culture(s). Gurney views this merely as having been the result of the ruler's curiosity and enjoyment of contemporaneous fashions, claiming that the Nawab was "no more a precursor of that extraordinary and attractive amalgam of English and Indian social habits that became more usual in the following century."<sup>4</sup> Ramaswami, on the other hand, rarely touches upon this facet, though it can be inferred that he likely considers it to have been a way in which the Nawab could make a good impression on his British allies. As he comments, the Nawab's commissioning of European-style portraits of himself as gifts was mainly "to placate influential Britons."<sup>5</sup> Phillips declares the Nawab was "a considerable anglophile" and implicitly suggests that the Nawab being open to "Anglo" elements was one main factor that allowed him to be all too readily exploited by the British.<sup>6</sup> Susan Bayly's work is one exception to this trend, as she argues that the adoption of European artistic styles should not be interpreted as a naive effort of the Nawab to impress his British friends. On the contrary, she argues, he used European painters and paintings as tools to represent himself as a "patron of the art" and as an "arbiter of taste and refinement" within his realm.<sup>7</sup> Natasha Eaton believes similarly, and who interprets the Nawab's adoption of European art as a political tool to display his power on the interregional stage.<sup>8</sup> The arguments of the latter two scholars will be discussed further in Chapter Eight. Here, I would like to underline their efforts to understand the Nawab's standpoint and perspective when interpreting his adoption of European culture. While both these scholars base their ideas on the Nawab's production of European-style portraits, I will extend the discussion to various other elements, related to both material culture and people. Chapter Nine, "Military Encounters," is a continuation of Chapter Four, and will it elaborate on the development of the Nawab's military after he successfully persuaded the EIC to establish the Nawab-EIC joint force. In Part II, while one could understand the Nawab's success in using the EIC's military as a stooge to help him subjugate his rebellious subjects, some examples of the Nawab's military difficulties were also highlighted. For example, he seemingly could not move his own Karnatak force unless was permitted by the Madras Presidency. My

---

<sup>4</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 339, 346.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 36.

<sup>7</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 170.

<sup>8</sup> Natasha Eaton, "The Art of Colonial Despotism: Portraits, Politics, and Empire in South India, 1750-1795," *Cultural Critique* 70 (2008): 73.

preliminary argument is that, while the Nawab's military cooperation with the EIC was the basis for his success in consolidating his power, it was also the beginning of it succumbing to that of the EIC. In other words, problems in the Nawab's military policy—and his attempts to fix them—should be the focus of discussions regarding British domination over Karnatak, not the “vicious circles of debts” that previous historians have usually sought to describe.

A historical concept that I will engage with in Part III as the main analytical tool with which to discuss the Nawab's embrace of European elements is the idea of “(in)commensurability” in East-West encounters. The notion of “incommensurability” emerged in the early 1960s, when Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend argued that the most fundamental problem in scientific exchanges between two different worldviews or systems is the rare possibility of exact translation. Later, the concept spread to other contexts, and it has been used in historical studies often since the late 1970s regarding cultural exchange, i.e. those times when agents from two or more politically and culturally different entities came into contact. The basic idea of “cultural incommensurability” is that it is hard for people from one cultural world to learn about and fully understand foreign customs and ideas; this may be due to factors including the impossibility of precise translations between different languages, or the pride or idleness of humans. And such cultural incommensurability has been a root cause of numerous conflicts between the agents of two worlds in various contexts—such as diplomatic and artistic exchanges, or warfare—that are evident in the historical record.<sup>9</sup> In studies of early modern South Asia, this concept has mainly been used in the context of East-West encounters. Bernard Cohn, for example, argues that seventeenth-century South Asians and Europeans, who had been raised in different social and political logics—which were themselves expressed in various symbolic and traditional languages—were not able to fully comprehend different systems of meaning beyond their own culture(s). As such, their diplomatic exchanges were doomed to fail.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, there are historians who have argued the opposite, believing that cultural commensurability did exist and that it was at the heart of early modern East-West interactions. The most recent champion of this view is Subrahmanyam, who has argued that the critical breakdowns that sometimes occurred during diplomatic exchanges were not due to a breakdown of communication or the inability of different parties to understand each other; instead, it was precisely the opposite: because they understood each other too well and intentionally generated conflict as a specific “form of

---

<sup>9</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 18.

communication” through means such as insulting their opponents or attempting to redefine the “rules of the game.”<sup>11</sup> More recently, Guido van Meersbergen has also elaborated on the concept of cultural commensurability in his study of diplomatic exchanges between two European Companies (the EIC and the VOC) and petty South Asian courts in the seventeenth century. According to him, not only could European agents understand the precise meanings of local diplomatic signs and rituals but they had the capacity to adjust to the host culture. The examples of mediation and compromise that occurred during their encounters were, almost without exception, provided by the Europeans’ willingness to be nominally incorporated into the South Asian culture in order to achieve their goals (mainly receiving trading privileges).<sup>12</sup> Van Meersbergen has made a significant contribution to the study of Euro-Indian encounters. However, in my opinion, his presentation of the Europeans as experts in cultural adaptation has, implicitly, created a counter-image of the South Asian elites as less flexible and less capable of understanding and adjusting to foreign systems than were their European counterparts. It is likely that Van Meersbergen has fallen into what Subrahmanyam refers to as a “trap that still besets many historians of early modern encounters,” that of accrediting initiatives in matters of cultural bridge-building mainly to European agents. As Subrahmanyam also stresses, “translations, in reality, are always a two-way process.”<sup>13</sup>

Part III seeks to complement and be a counterpoint to Van Meersbergen’s debates on Euro-Indian encounters in two main ways. First, while he focuses mainly on the fact that European agents were very good at understanding and highly adaptable to the South Asian world, my study of the Karnatak Nawab will show that their local counterparts were no less able and open to embrace and adapt foreign customs and technologies. Secondly, while Van Meersbergen focuses on why European envoys chose to compromise and adopt aspects of local culture, I will highlight the local perspective by tracing the motives and approach of the Karnatak Nawab in his enthusiastic attempts to enter the European world and embrace various European elements. In fact, with very few exceptions, scholars of Karnatak have but rarely analyzed the Nawab’s perspectives on each of the European elements that he embraced, with the exception of some simplistic assumptions about him gaining military and financial support or satisfying his own curiosity.

---

<sup>11</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 7, 16, 20, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Guido van Meersbergen, “Ethnography and Encounter: Dutch and English Approaches to Cross-Cultural Contact in Seventeenth-Century South Asia” (Doctoral Dissertation; University College London, The United Kingdom, 2015), 36-38, 141, 145, 172, 197-199, 207.

<sup>13</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 30.



## Chapter 7: Economic Encounters

This chapter argues that the Nawab was one of the most active economic agents on the Coromandel Coast. More importantly, he used trading channels not only to increase his own wealth but also deployed them as tools for political ends. I will focus particularly on how the Nawab managed to use his relationship with the EIC to gain economic advantages while, at the same time, using various mercantile approaches to resist that Company's domination over his state. I will begin the discussion with some general views on the relationship between early modern rulers and trade that may, at least partly, be responsible for scholars' lack of interest in the Nawab's trading career up to now. Then, a brief overview of the late-eighteenth-century Coromandel markets will be provided, after which the most important economic activities of the Nawab will be discussed and some key observations on the Nawab and trade made.

### 7.1 Rulers and Trade

Scholars who have studied the economy of the Coromandel Coast in the second half of the eighteenth century have reached a consensus that, during this period, the region experienced only limited economic growth compared to other parts of the subcontinent as a result of various internal and external factors. However, throughout this period of comparative economic decline, in various businesses competition in trade persisted.<sup>1</sup> From the 1750s, British merchants, both the Company and private traders, dominated trade from the Coromandel Coast to Europe and other parts of South Asia. Later, they also moved into smaller-scale port-to-port trading activities within the Coast. Their trade moved from, originally, textiles into many other types of commerce that had, in previous centuries, been dominated by South Indian merchant communities such as the Balijas, Komaties, Chetties, and Chulias. By the late eighteenth century, only one small group, the Chulias—a caste of Tamil Muslim merchants—continued to own big ships and ply the trade-route to South East Asia. Other local mercantile castes declined and eventually stopped trading altogether.<sup>2</sup> The few exceptions were the various individual merchants who had long been attached to European companies as either “chief merchants” or inferior trading partners.<sup>3</sup> However, even these individuals had to withstand strong competition from new groups of local South Asians

---

<sup>1</sup> Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India,” 19-40; David Washbrook, *Some Notes on Market Relations and the Development of the Economy in South India, c. 1750-1850* (Leiden: s.n., 1981), 1-5; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 96; Phillips, “A Successor to the Moguls,” 364-389; see also: Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*; Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*.

<sup>2</sup> Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India,” 26, 32, 37-40.

<sup>3</sup> Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 60-61, 75.

from other castes or communities who were the direct employees of the Europeans companies and who rose to replace them, such as the aforementioned Brahmin dubashes, and a new type of Company broker known as *gumashtas*.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the other European companies and private traders on the Coast, three nations require brief overviews: the Dutch, the French, and the Danish. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch VOC had been one of the largest players in the Coromandel mercantile world, especially in the textile trade, along with the EIC and various local merchants. But the VOC's situation significantly changed in the eighteenth century and, as is widely believed by modern historians, went into relative decline. One major factor in this was the rather unwise decision to move its headquarters from Pulicat, in northern Karnatak, to Negapatnam, in the south, in 1690, after which the Dutch quickly lost their competitiveness in many northern Coromandel markets to the British. A second was the rise of the French CIO in Pondicherry as a new economic and political competitor in the area in the early eighteenth century. Some historians, such as Els Jacobs, Sinnappah Arasaratnam, and Om Prakash have suggested that, while the Dutch had lost their northern markets, they could still have had a share of the trade along the Coast by exploring new markets in the south. In fact, as shall be seen in the examples below, the VOC continued to actively participate in the pearl trade and some textile markets in the far south during 1770s-1790s, as both a competitor of the Karnatak Nawab and his collaborator. Yet, as all historians agree, the Dutch, like many others, found it increasingly difficult to resist the growing British domination, and the VOC had to abandon its Negapatnam headquarters in 1781 as a result of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784). After this, they operated their Coromandel trade from a factory in Ceylon, with only limited success.<sup>5</sup>

The French Company only seriously started trading in the Coromandel Coast as late as 1699 after firmly establishing its headquarters in Pondicherry. But it became increasingly successful and achieved impressive success on the Coast in the 1730s and 1740s, both politically and economically. However, worldwide Anglo-French hostilities led to a number of wars between the two Companies on the Coromandel Coast from the mid-1740s until 1763—known as the Three Carnatic Wars—which were complicatedly intertwined with local politics and the Karnatak state, as discussed in Part I. After the 1763 Treaty of Paris, the EIC,

---

<sup>4</sup> Neild-Basu, "The Dubashes of Madras," 23. The role of the *gumashtas* will be discussed later in the chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "The Dutch East India Company and Its Coromandel Trade 1700-1740," *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 123, 3 (1967): 325-328, 333, 337, 342, 346; Els M. Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia: The Trade of the Dutch East India Company during the Eighteenth Century* (CNWS Publications, 2006), 121, 133, 138, 144-145; Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 221-225, 297-300.

who had gained the upper hand, placed such great restrictions on French trade that the CIO was unable to grow its commerce back to pre-1749 levels. Soon after, the CIO went bankrupt, and in 1769 all activity ceased. The French Company attempted to re-establish trade in the region once again in 1785, but soon withdrew. However, from the 1770s until the end of the eighteenth century, many private French traders continued to play active roles in the Coromandel markets. As suggested by Arvind Sinha, they could survive in this cut-throat mercantile world, which was being increasingly dominated by the British, mainly by becoming subordinate business partners or financiers of various British traders and EIC servants who themselves traded in a private capacity. It is very interesting that, amidst the global hostilities between the two European nations and despite the EIC's attempts to prevent them, private Anglo-French trading cooperation was extensive. Furthermore, the French traders' situation was similar to that of other local South Asian merchants; those who survived in the Coromandel markets were mainly the subordinate collaborators of the EIC, British private traders, or both.<sup>6</sup>

As for the Danish Company, it had been trading in the Coast ever since the establishment of its fort and factory at Tranquebar in 1620. Its trade was relatively small and sporadic, especially in the eighteenth century, yet, as Arasaratnam suggests, whenever it invested in textiles for the European market, this was significant enough to make an impact on the prices and supply of their competitors. As its fort was located close to Negapatnam, its trade generally affected the Dutch in the southern markets rather than the EIC in Madras.<sup>7</sup> As well as textile exports, the Danish seem to have been involved in importing European military technology to South Asia; as will be seen, they were a key provider of European firearms to the Nawab of Karnatak.

An important key I would like to make here is that scholars of eighteenth-century Coromandel trade have mainly focused on relations between British traders and local South Asian mercantile groups and/or other Europeans. As such, they have almost completely ignored the role of local rulers, including Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, in trade. By "trade" I do not mean forms of state monopoly of various goods, which is more a facet of political power than a commercial or mercantile approach.<sup>8</sup> This lack of attention to the Nawab's

---

<sup>6</sup> Sinha, *The Politics of Trade*, 20, 55, 61, 95, 119, 215-216; Arasaratnam, "The Dutch East India Company and Its Coromandel Trade," 330-331, 346; Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, 252-260, 307-309.

<sup>7</sup> Arasaratnam, "The Dutch East India Company and Its Coromandel Trade," 331; Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, 260-261, 309-313.

<sup>8</sup> A number of historians, such as Subrahmanyam, argue that the rulers of pre-modern South Asia did participate in trade, and often give the examples of the Mughal emperors Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, who sent substantial trading fleets to promote commerce between Surat and

commercial career in modern studies may be based on the assumption, widespread among scholars, that rulers in pre-modern societies did not participate in trade.<sup>9</sup> For South Asia, as Marshall writes, merchants had a clearly subordinate place in the ideal hierarchy of Mughal Empire.<sup>10</sup> According to Phillips, eighteenth-century Indian states “lived and died” on their capacity to collect the land tax, which was the most important source of revenue for the government.<sup>11</sup> This is probably based on the normative image of pre-modern rulers as seen in various historical texts; Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah*, for example, condemns the ruler who wants to participate in trade as committing “a great error” and causing significant harm to his subjects. According to him, trading competition between a ruler’s subjects exhausts their financial resources, and so, if a rich ruler were to become their competitor, scarcely a general trader would be able to make a living.<sup>12</sup> In South Asia, two poetic verses ascribed to a sixteenth century Vijayanagara ruler read: “A king should govern his ports so as to increase their trade by encouraging the import [of goods]” and, “[ a king should] acquire the friendship of merchants of distant islands [...], by granting them villages, spacious houses in the capital, frequent audiences, presents, and good profits.”<sup>13</sup> These verses are comparable to the eighteenth-century chronicle of the Karnatak court, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, in their description of the obligations of rulers regarding trade. In these indigenous sources, a ruler was expected to be a patron of trade but never a trader or money-seeker himself.<sup>14</sup>

As such, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Christopher Bayly, Kanakalatha Mukund, and various other scholars have developed the concept of “portfolio capitalists” (or “merchant capitalists,” in the case of Mukund) to challenge this dichotomy between “political” and “merchant.” This term refers to a special type of South Asian mercantile intermediary who quickly rose to prominence during the first half of the seventeenth century. These merchants dominated economics and politics across South Asia, including in the Coromandel Coast, for many decades, but disappeared before the end of the seventeenth century because they were unable to adapt to the changes brought about by the Mughal expansion southward. Importantly, these people derived their power from “a variety of portfolios”; an individual could, simultaneously, be a large-scale trader inland and overseas of various products, a

---

the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. However, such “trade” always involved forms of state monopoly; they did not participate in markets and compete as merchants. In Subrahmanyam’s own words: “We normally encounter mentions of the trade [of the rulers] in connection with the existence of monopsonistic practices.” See Subrahmanyam, “Iranians Abroad,” 356-357.

<sup>9</sup> Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall, “Presidential Address,” 7.

<sup>11</sup> Phillips, “A Successor to the Moguls,” 367.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, II: 93-94.

<sup>13</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 343-344.

<sup>14</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 12, 14-15.

revenue farmer, a banker, and a broker for several European companies, as well as a member of the political elite such as a governor, a warrior, or diplomat for one or several local courts. Their presence challenges previously-held assumptions that the political elites of pre-modern India did not directly participate in trade and that the professional merchant castes did not have direct access to political or military power. Occupying the in-between position between the two worlds—politics and trade—a portfolio capitalist used his access to one sphere to further his ventures in another on a substantial scale.<sup>15</sup> However, in all the examples given by scholars thus far, the seventeenth-century portfolio capitalists were initially traders, with roots in the mercantile world, who later tried to gain access to the political realm to benefit their commerce. Although they subsequently had successful political careers, trade and wealth remained their principal activity and priority; they were not, first and foremost, rulers or chiefs who then ventured into trade while keeping political power as the priority.

In the works of Rajayyan and Phillips on Nawabi Karnatak, the main sources of governmental income are presented as land rents, agrarian taxes, duties on import-export goods, tribute from subordinate chiefs, and other fees. Rajayyan mentions that the state derived additional income from its monopoly on various products, such as arrack, bricks, tiles and other building materials, pearls, and salt. But no further link is made between the court and the mercantile world.<sup>16</sup> In other literature on Coromandel trade, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan is referred to only as a local ruler who tried, mostly in vain, to protect his merchants, people, and rural society from the oppression of European entrepreneurs. At other times, he is portrayed as the inferior political collaborator of the EIC who was forced against his will to pressurize his own officials to facilitate Company commerce. In one such example, highlighted by Arasaratnam, when a group of weavers were oppressed by a new EIC textile regulation, they fled to other districts under the Nawab's control. The EIC then requested that the Nawab order his local governors to seize the weavers. The Nawab here appears as “a benign ruler” who attempted to protect the weavers by investigating the cause of their grievance. However, the EIC, annoyed at the Nawab's display of independence, demanded that he order the weavers to return to work immediately.<sup>17</sup> This example presents the Nawab as a normative ruler, offering protection to his subjects from apparent injustices. Parthasarathi's work has also discussed the Nawab's involvement in the textile trade, yet the

---

<sup>15</sup> For further definitions and examples of “portfolio capitalists” or “merchant capitalists,” see: Subrahmanyam and Bayly, “Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India,” 401-424; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 298-299, 302-304, 307-309, 314-315, 323-324, 327, 342; Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 60-67.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips, “A Successor to the Moguls,” 367; Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 33-34.

<sup>17</sup> Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India,” 28-30, 35-36, 40.

author explicitly views the Nawab, in his position as ruler, as being in opposition to the merchants. He sees the conflict between the Nawab and the EIC in the Coromandel textile trade through a purely political framework, as a clash demonstrating the incompatibility of “South Indian statecraft” and “English political practices.” To illustrate this further, Parthasarathi argues that, in pre-colonial South India, the concept of the moral order that kings needed to uphold set strict limits on their use of force and coercion against textile weavers. The Company and, later, the colonial state, coming from a different political world, did not share this moral universe.<sup>18</sup>

In the articles by Arasaratnam and Neild-Basu, the authors note that, during the second half of the eighteenth century, some commercial activities in the Coromandel Coast increased. These commercial opportunities, which included the textile trade in piece-goods, land-revenue farming (especially in the EIC’s acquired territories), rice trade, and investment in land and houses in the expanding city of Madras, created fierce competition between British traders and South Asian merchants.<sup>19</sup> As this chapter will show, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan actively participated in all of the aforementioned economic ventures (and many others, such as pearl diving) as an investor, in contrast to the normative character of the pre-modern ruler. For example, Paterson, who witnessed the Nawab’s business activities from close quarters for several years, wrote: “So attentive is the Nabob to everything that produces money”; and “he [the Nawab] would reap every advantage of the merchant, while he conceived such a cobweb covering would save the dignity of the Prince.”<sup>20</sup> Paul Benfield, one of the biggest British investors in Madras and someone who frequently did business with the Nawab, also noted the latter’s acute interest in trade: “altho the Nabob never lose sight of his profits as a merchant, he so far maintained the dignity of the prince, as to wish to make it appear that his views were not for advantage.”<sup>21</sup> Such observations by Europeans demonstrate that the Nawab moved away from traditional societal expectations to play an enthusiastic and important role in regional commerce. His trade dealings seem to have met with some success, as they caused significant problems for his competitors. The rest of this chapter will examine the tactics used by the Nawab to protect and advance his trade interests and how he defeated his competitors using advantages he enjoyed from the multiple positions he held: as ruler of Karnatak, as a local merchant, and particularly as the “old and special” friend of the British Company and nation.

---

<sup>18</sup> Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 5-6, 129-130.

<sup>19</sup> Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India,” 23-26; Neild-Basu, “The Dubashes of Madras,” 9.

<sup>20</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 150; E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 116.

<sup>21</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 117.

## 7.2 The Nawab as Merchant: Textiles, Rice, and Pearls

### Textile Trade

From the Sangam period, the Coromandel region had been famous as a producer and supplier of various types of textile. In the second half of the eighteenth century, by expanding its political influence the EIC managed to wipe out almost all of its competitors, both South Asian and European, to become the biggest textile investor on the Coast. The EIC focused on acquiring the finest-quality items for discerning European markets.<sup>22</sup>

In order to acquire such goods, investors would usually enter into contractual agreements with weavers in the villages that dotted the region and advance them part of the money for their products. For centuries, South Asian middlemen or brokers had gone into these weaving villages to sign contracts with the weavers and would, later, also deliver the finished cloth to larger South Asian exporters or the European companies who were their business partners or employers.<sup>23</sup> By the second half of the eighteenth century, the EIC's strength and political clout allowed it, as the biggest investor, to introduce new approaches to this traditional industry. One such change that the British attempted to make was to reduce costs through bypassing the traditional middlemen and making direct contact with the weavers or head weaver of the village. To replace the traditional brokers, a group of indigenous agents were employed as Company servants, known as *gumashtas*, to make financial advances to the weavers and supervise the looms. Significantly, this resulted in the rise of a new group of South Asian collaborators at the expense of the local merchant castes who had, for centuries, dominated the industry.<sup>24</sup>

However, this change did not have the desired effect and the Company encountered various problems. For one thing, the weavers complained that they preferred to deal with the middlemen because they were generally sympathetic to their needs, unlike the *gumashtas* and other Company officers. Working under strenuous conditions, the weavers failed to meet production deadlines and the textiles they produced were not of the desired quality.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the Company suffered from covert operations that were launched against them by the middlemen and brokers who had been put out of work.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the Company's

---

<sup>22</sup> Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," 27-29. For the development of the Coromandel textile trade from the Middle Ages to 1750, see: Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 15, 27, 20, 58, 72, 103-143; Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 5-8.

<sup>23</sup> Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," 31-32.

<sup>24</sup> Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," 29-33.

<sup>25</sup> Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," 34-35.

<sup>26</sup> Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," 31.

own financial problems often made it impossible to advance money to large numbers of weavers. As such, in some regions, the EIC had to revert to relying on the middlemen. By that time, however, very few South Asian merchants were still rich enough to provide any real competition for private British entrepreneurs.<sup>27</sup>

The EIC not only exported Indian textiles but also sought to import European wool, mainly broadcloth, from the last quarter of the seventeenth century in the hope that its sale to Indian markets would help reduce the export of bullion required to pay for the Indian textiles. The initial results were very disappointing and the Madras Presidency was under constant pressure from the Court of Directors in London to increase sales. Trying to solve the problem, for a short period the EIC forced local merchants to accept broadcloth as part payment for their textiles; the Indians accepted this unwillingly at invoice value. Demand for and the price of broadcloth improved slightly in the eighteenth century after the region came under Mughal rule. In order to fully exploit the slow but steadily rising demand for the product, the Madras merchants sought to retain a monopoly over broadcloth, thereby ensuring that too many merchants did not flood the market with the commodity and thus cause the price to crash.<sup>28</sup> During the mid-eighteenth century, the Court of Directors again ordered Madras to increase sales of broadcloth.

Amidst this competition in the lucrative textile trade between the Company, traditional South Asian merchants, and private British traders, the Nawab tried every means possible to enter it. Considering that he came from a family of religious scholars, soldiers, landed aristocrats, and administrators in Hindustan and the Deccan, the Nawab must have been an amateur in the industry compared to the EIC, other European traders, and, even more so, other Indian merchant castes who had been in the trade for centuries. He nevertheless fought to establish his presence in the textile trade and was successful in so doing.

The earliest evidence of the Nawab's efforts to enter the textile trade comes from the mid-1760s, when he made a "friendly" offer to the Company to help increase sales by buying broadcloth in large quantities—up to the value of 30,000 pagodas or 100,000 rupees annually—in addition to providing the money required to produce uniforms for the sepoy of the Nawab-EIC joint army.<sup>29</sup> Around the same time, the Nawab made a foray into the Company's textile exports to Europe. In 1768, when he temporarily acquired the district of

---

<sup>27</sup> Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," 38.

<sup>28</sup> Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 135-137.

<sup>29</sup> IOR, E/4/862, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 21 Nov. 1764, 1093-1094; E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 4 Jan. 1765, 11; P/240/30, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 4 Jul. 1770, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 6 Jul. 1770, 635, 642.

Salem from Mysore, well aware that the cloth produced there was in high demand by the Company, he promptly wrote to the EIC offering to be its supplier. As such, he wanted to play the role of traditional Indian middlemen (or broker) and profit financially from the endeavor.<sup>30</sup> The EIC's Directors were delighted with the Nawab's proposal, believing that the support of this regional ruler would help facilitate their business. In contrast, the Madras Presidency, which knew the Nawab better and had a keener sense of his business acumen, was skeptical. It tried its best to withhold any promise of a joint business venture with the Nawab and, when it became inevitable, accepted the Nawab's offers only cautiously.

Regarding broadcloth from Europe, the Presidency was worried that the Nawab's real intention was to buy at wholesale prices and then resell at a profit in the South Asian markets. As the quantity of cloth that the Nawab proposed buying was not the total amount that the Madras factory received from Britain annually, if the Nawab's proposal were accepted then he would have become the Company's competitor in selling.<sup>31</sup> Aware of the Company's concern, and in an attempt to show that he had no intention of jeopardizing the Company's business, the Nawab offered to purchase the commodity at the same price that the Company sold it to other merchants. However, he did not promise or make clear that he would not resell it. The pretext the Nawab used to make the purchase was that he wanted to clothe all his private sepoys in broadcloth and hoped that other princes across India would follow his example in using British cloth for their troops. This, he said, was his expression of gratitude to the British nation.<sup>32</sup> From this diplomatic correspondence, it is evident that the Nawab regarded various South Asian courts as prospective markets for broadcloth. Although the Nawab's proposal was rejected time and again by the Madras Presidency, the Nawab persisted for many years, and the Company ultimately acquiesced in 1772. But, by this time, the Nawab's wars (with Tanjore), his debts, and other business dealings rendered such an investment unlikely.<sup>33</sup>

As for the Nawab's request to become a supplier of the Indian textiles exported to Europe, the Madras Presidency consented, albeit with conditions that he be a broker who provided goods to the Company without receiving an advance and that he shoulder all the risks during this process. If the Nawab consented, the Company would agree to purchase as

---

<sup>30</sup> IOR, P/240/26, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 11 Apr. 1768, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 28 Apr. 1768, 343, 350.

<sup>31</sup> IOR, E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 25 Mar. 1768, 91; P/240/30, MPP, Governor of Madras to Nawab, 9 Jul. 1770, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 6 Jul. 1770, 643-645.

<sup>32</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Apr. 1772, 178.

<sup>33</sup> IOR, E/4/865, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 25 Mar. 1772, 561.

many as 20,000 pieces of cloth from him at the price it paid to other suppliers.<sup>34</sup> The Company's proposition did not appeal to the Nawab, and even in the 1770s the two parties failed to reach a consensus on the issue. The Nawab nevertheless continued to pursue his attempts relentlessly, and even sent a large quantity of fine textiles that he had procured from weavers to the Directors in London as a present and sample in order to express his sincerity in helping increase the EIC's investments.<sup>35</sup>

While the two parties did not manage to agree a trading partnership through the whole of the 1770s, the Madras Presidency constantly had issues with the Nawab over the Company's textile investments in various areas under his jurisdiction. Some of these conflicts between the Nawab and the Company are worth discussing here.

In July 1772, the Nawab complained to a representative of King George III who was visiting his court that he was unable to buy even a piece of cotton for his own use and was forced to make his servants buy it, pretending that it was for themselves. This was because, if it were known to be his order, merchants working with the Company would complain to the Madras Presidency, accusing the Nawab of interfering with the weavers and voiding their contracts.<sup>36</sup> This account highlights that the brokers of the Company had, by this time, sensed the danger of the Nawab becoming a competitor in their industry.

In 1777, the Madras Presidency sent to the Nawab, complaining of many impediments to its investment in Nellore province and requesting that he order his amildars to put things right. Although the Nawab promised to remove these obstacles, no action was taken and the British were forced to withdraw their investments. After repeated reminders sent by the Company asking the Nawab to intervene on its behalf, an investigation was undertaken. The Nawab concluded that the cause of the conflict was the Company's gumashta, who had upset the weavers by paying them far less than the agreed price. He pointed out to the Company that, since the weavers were so distressed they were contemplating fleeing Nellore, it was only owing to his and the local governor's intervention that a reconciliation was reached between the two parties.<sup>37</sup>

A year later, the Madras Presidency corresponded with the Nawab about another, similar occurrence in Trivady (Tiruvadi). The weavers had once again fled the Company's

---

<sup>34</sup> IOR, P/240/26, MPP, Governor of Madras to Nawab (no date), enclosed in Madras Consultation, 28 Apr. 1768, 353-354.

<sup>35</sup> IOR, E/4/865, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 10 Apr. 1771, 233.

<sup>36</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Jul. 1772, 213.

<sup>37</sup> IOR, P/240/43, MPP, Governor of Madras to Nawab, 26 May 1777, enclosed in Madras Consultation, May 1777, 355-356; Nawab to Governor of Madras, 7 Jun. 1777, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 13 Jun. 1777, 460-461.

territory and sought refuge in districts under the Nawab's jurisdiction. The local administrators, despite receiving orders from the Nawab to remedy the situation, did not act upon them.<sup>38</sup> After a long period of waiting, the Company received an answer from the Nawab that once again implicated the Company's own dubashes for paying the weavers less than the customary rate. One hundred weaver families, having lost faith that they would receive justice from the Company, had decided to leave their villages. Some moved to other districts under the Nawab's control, but many others went to the French territory of Pondicherry. The Nawab proposed that the Company's dubashes and his local officers be sent together to negotiate the return of the weavers, and he promised to use all his influence to this end.<sup>39</sup> An important point to note is that, despite the many assurances from the Nawab that he would resolve the situation, the Madras Presidency consistently alleged that he and his servants were consciously working against the interests of the Company.<sup>40</sup> The Nawab's standard reply when questioned about his intentions was that his soft policies were aimed at preventing the weavers from fleeing to the protection of "our enemies," meaning the French.<sup>41</sup> He proclaimed that his people had made every effort to persuade the weavers to return but they had refused, accusing the Company's representatives of heavily abusing them.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the Nawab's claim, the Presidency, as reflected in its correspondence, firmly believed that the ruler and his administrators had intentionally delayed and complicated Company business.<sup>43</sup>

There are other examples of such conflict. In 1786, the Madras Governor complained to the Nawab that his amildars at Trivady had ordered local officials not to pass any of the Company's threads to a weaving village.<sup>44</sup> In 1789, the EIC's native brokers in Arni complained that some weavers in that district had been prevented from working for the Company by the heads of that caste. Although these head weavers were in debt to the Company and their ancestors had been employed by it since the British first came to the Coromandel Coast, they were now under the protection of the Nawab's amildars. For these Company brokers, it was plain that it was the Nawab and his subjects who were behind the misconduct of these head weavers.<sup>45</sup> In 1792-1793, the Madras Presidency also made numerous appeals to the Nawab over the troubles that the Company's representatives were

---

<sup>38</sup> IOR, P/240/45, MPP, Madras Consultation, Apr. 1778, 481-482, 529, 531-532.

<sup>39</sup> IOR, P/240/45, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 5 May 1778, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 8 May 1778, 558-561.

<sup>40</sup> IOR, P/240/45, MPP, Governor of Madras to Nawab, 13 May 1778, enclosed in Madras Consultation, May 1778, 571-574.

<sup>41</sup> IOR, P/240/45, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 22 May 1778, enclosed in Madras Consultation, May 1778, 636-637.

<sup>42</sup> IOR, P/240/46, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 17 Jun. 1778, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 19 Jun. 1778, 768-771.

<sup>43</sup> IOR, P/240/46, MPP, Governor of Madras to Nawab (no date), enclosed in Madras Consultation, 26 Jun. 1778, 791-792.

<sup>44</sup> IOR, P/240/63, MPP, Madras Consultation, Jun. 1786, 817-818.

<sup>45</sup> IOR, P/241/10, MPP, Madras Consultation, 14 Aug. 1789, 2415-2416, 1 Sep. 1789, 2517.

facing in various textile-manufacturing areas; their activities were being impeded or delayed by local officials imposing taxes and duties.<sup>46</sup> This was unusual because their agreement with the Nawab had exempted one another from duties on all goods passing through their territories.<sup>47</sup> In some cases, the loom taxes—the tax payable by weavers in the Nawab’s districts to his court—were set at higher rates than usual.<sup>48</sup> As always, the Nawab argued that he had displayed “his sincerity” by insisting that he and his principal servants never ordered subordinate officers to interfere with Company investment and promptly ordered his servants to investigate these allegations. Such issues between the Company and the Nawab were usually resolved, but not without delays.<sup>49</sup>

At first glance, the Nawab’s investigations into the Company’s complaints may appear to be reasonable attempts by the ruler of the state to protect his subjects from abuse and unfairness. But the constant doubts and accusations of the Company’s agents, both British and indigenous, about the Nawab’s intention to delay and hinder Company business should not be underestimated because they knew the local situation and the Nawab relatively well. Yet if it really was the Nawab’s intention to cause such problems, why did he risk conflict with the EIC? It could not have been the Nawab’s objective to extract more money from them in the form of taxes because he did not tax Company trade. Instead, it seems to have been purposefully done to cause the Company financial harm. As the Company noted, “any delay in passing their goods may prove a great injury to their investment.”<sup>50</sup> I would argue that the Nawab had a strong hidden business agenda here. In causing such trouble to the Company’s trade, the Nawab tried, time and again, to convince the EIC that the solution to all its problems was to let him mediate its business by appointing him its cloth supplier.

This assumption is supported by the Nawab’s correspondence with the Company following a period of hostility in 1778. Here, the Nawab once again offered his services as the Company’s broker in piece goods for the entire Arcot region so as to prevent future losses. His letter reads:

My dear Sir! Should these weavers desert again, but instead of taking protection in the countries belonging to me, go to any others from whence they cannot be

---

<sup>46</sup> IOR, P/241/31, MPP, Madras Consultation, 10 Feb. 1792, 555; P/241/35, MPP, Madras Consultation, 9 Nov. 1792, 3163-3165; P/241/43, MPP, Madras Consultations, 29 Nov. 1793, 3967, Dec. 1793, 4169-4170.

<sup>47</sup> IOR, P/241/34, MPP, Madras Consultation, 14 Sep. 1792, 2655, 9 Oct. 1792, 2867-2868.

<sup>48</sup> IOR, P/241/35, MPP, Madras Consultation, 9 Nov. 1792, 3167.

<sup>49</sup> IOR, P/241/34, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 13 Sep 1792, enclosed in Madras Consultation, Oct. 1792, 2933; P/241/43, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 26 Dec. 1793, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 27 Dec. 1793, 4211-4222.

<sup>50</sup> IOR, P/241/34, MPP, Madras Consultation, 9 Oct. 1792, 2866-2867.

brought back, the Company's investment will be greatly affected by it, [...] From this principle [...] I beg leave to propose you that I shall undertake to manage the investment of the Company carried on in the districts belonging to Arcot, at a more advantageous rate, than they now procure their goods at [...]<sup>51</sup>

And again, the Madras Presidency refused the Nawab's offer, on the pretext that it had been using its own servants (Company's chief merchants, dubashes, gumashtas, brokers, etc.) to carry out its business since the earliest times. It argued that its servants were well-versed in the existing rules and if the system that was in place was altered then the outcome could have damaging consequences for their trade.<sup>52</sup>

The Nawab was continuously snubbed by the EIC but, quite evidently, being an agent of the Company was not the only channel through which to engage in this trade and the EIC's refusal did not prevent him from becoming a textile investor. In 1781, the Nawab mentioned to the EIC that he had been trading "bullion for cloths" with the Dutch in the southern town of Tirunelveli, which had brought him "great benefits."<sup>53</sup> Although there is no evidence of when that trade began or what its value was, it can be assumed that it was lucrative because it continued into the 1790s. In 1794, when the EIC was planning to expand its textile investment into that southern region, the Nawab apparently tried everything he could to prevent it from doing so. The British protested, claiming that the Nawab supported and protected the VOC's textile trade there when he should have been working in the interests of his staunchest ally, the EIC. Although, eventually, the Nawab could not prevent the EIC's expansion in the Tirunelveli cloth trade, the Nawab's officials ensured that the British could not conduct their trade hassle-free.<sup>54</sup> And, in April 1795, the Nawab was able to force the EIC into agreements that, to some extent, limited the EIC's influence in this southern market. For example, the Company agreed to pay a loom tax and the number of looms that produced cloth for it was clearly set down; it was accepted that all weavers were under the Nawab's full authority and dependent on his people for both money and grain, and these weavers also needed to cultivate land and pay general taxes to his court. Moreover, the Nawab could now

---

<sup>51</sup> IOR, P/240/46, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 17 Jun. 1778, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 19 Jun. 1778, 768-770.

<sup>52</sup> IOR, P/240/46, MPP, Governor of Madras to Nawab (no date), enclosed in Madras Consultation, 26 Jun. 1778, 792-793.

<sup>53</sup> *CPC*, VI, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 29 Sep. 1781, 90.

<sup>54</sup> IOR, P/241/45, MPP, Governor of Madras to Nawab, 8 Feb. 1794, enclosed in Madras Consultation, Feb. 1794, 336-337; Nawab to Governor of Madras, 15 Feb. 1794, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 21 Feb 1794, 604-606; P/241/47, MPP, Madras Consultation, 25 Jul. 1794, 2087-2094; P/241/55, MPP, Madras Consultation, 24 Mar. 1795, 1545-1548.

ask the Company's factory, in Tirunelveli, to furnish him with as many piece goods produced there as he wished.<sup>55</sup>

As well as his trade with the VOC, there is evidence that the Nawab sold textiles to many Arabian port-cities. In his attempts to supply these markets, there was a fierce dispute between the Nawab and the EIC over the employment of weavers and the acquisition of textiles in Karnatak. In late 1792, the Company accused the Nawab of influencing weavers in the district of Arni who had been working for it. According to an EIC report, the Nawab had instructed his servants to advance money to weavers in villages under his jurisdiction in order to procure muslin cloths worth 6,000 pagodas, which were to be sent on a ship of his that was heading to Mocha, a port city on the Yemeni coast. The Nawab's order threatened to deprive the Company of 193 looms out of a total of 348 and thereby severely reduce its supply. Around the same time, there was a report from Nellore that the Nawab had placed a similar order for cloth worth 6,000 pagodas. In the latter case, the Nawab's sepoys were even stationed in the region to prevent the weavers from working for either the Company or other merchants.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, the Company's resident in Cuddalore complained about the Nawab's interference with its weavers in Warriorpollam (Udaiyarpalayam). According to the Company's brokers, from time immemorial the weavers of that place had supplied cloth for Company trade and, such was their investment in textile production that, at the time, they had advanced nearly 10,000 pagodas to the weavers of Warriorpollam. These weavers were claiming that the Nawab's amildar had compelled them to weave cloths for the Nawab and to sign contracts that included a fine of 1,200 pagodas if any of them were found to be weaving for other merchants.<sup>57</sup> The Nawab countered these arguments by saying that it was customary for him to place annual orders for different varieties of cloth in various districts for the use of his court and for charity related to the Hajj pilgrimage. He argued that his orders could be completed in a short period of time and would be no threat to the Company's business. The Nawab also claimed that the weavers in the districts where disturbances had occurred had been weaving and selling cloth to merchants throughout the country and not merely to the Company. He therefore claimed that he was surprised that his routine commands had caused complaints.<sup>58</sup> It would appear that, although the Nawab declared that textiles valued at 12,000 pagodas were sent to Arabia annually as charity, this claim is questionable. Mocha had been a market for Coromandel products since the late sixteenth century at least, as we know that

---

<sup>55</sup> IOR, P/241/56, MPP, Madras Consultation, 28 Apr. 1795, 2111-2115.

<sup>56</sup> IOR, P/241/35, MPP, Madras Consultation, 23 Nov. 1792, 3297-3300.

<sup>57</sup> IOR, P/241/34, MPP, Madras Consultation, 9 Oct. 1792, 2863-2864.

<sup>58</sup> IOR, P/241/35, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 7 Dec. 1792, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 11 Dec. 1792, 3488-3490.

ships were sent from Masulipatnam to that port under the patronage of the Golconda sultans, laden with pilgrims, rice, and textiles.<sup>59</sup> The Walajahi court chronicle also provides evidence of the highly profitable trade that had been undertaken by the Nawab's grandfather with the Arabian port of Jiddah during the Hajj:

[T]he goods were unloaded at the port of Surat, where he [the Nawab's grandfather, Muhammad Anwar Khan] invested the trust money of three lakhs [granted from the Mughal imperial Treasury], in various kinds of merchandise with a view to make more money and this to multiply the stock of blessings. Then he embarked on a ship and landed at the port of Jiddah, where all the bags were opened and the commodities offered for sale to the pilgrims. As piously desired by him, he realized large profit by the grace of Allah. He made nine lakhs of rupees including the capital and the profit. Then he distributed the amount among the great men and the gentle of holy Makka [Mecca] and got receipts.<sup>60</sup>

From a combination of sources, it can be assumed that the large quantity of textiles, as well as other products, that the Nawab sent on pilgrim ships to Mecca and other ports on the Arabian Peninsula each year were likely to have been for sale in those markets as well, although the profits were eventually spent on charity. The trade also seemed to have been very lucrative, as, many decades earlier, the Nawab's grandfather was able to make profits reaching 200 percent.

We also know that the Nawab attempted to send ships to Manila, another traditional market for Indian textile traders—both South Asian and European—from the early seventeenth century.<sup>61</sup> In 1769, the EIC mentioned a private freight ship that had been sent from Madras to Manila under the Nawab's pass and colors. However, this was not a successful venture as the Nawab later requested British intervention to help deal with the Spanish (which the EIC politely declined). In 1774, presumably as a show of goodwill, the Nawab sent textiles to the Spanish Governor of Manila as a present, through Varswa, a private trader, who is referred to in the EIC records as a “shipping merchant.”<sup>62</sup> This suggests that the Nawab may have wanted to expand his textile trade to Manila and was able to secure

---

<sup>59</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 318.

<sup>60</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, I, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 99, 116, 130; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 78-79.

<sup>62</sup> IOR, E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 17 Mar. 1769, 507; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 8, 11 and 16 Jul. 1774.

the assistance of established overseas private merchants for the purpose. Yet, the evidence reveals the Nawab's foreign commercial interests and engagements ended there.

To return to the conflicts between the Nawab and the EIC in the early 1790s, the Company thought it best to prevent the Nawab from entering the textile trade. It promised to supply the Nawab with the textiles he needed from the Company's warehouse at the best possible price so long as he abstained from any involvement with the weavers; this was to ensure that all the looms in the "Arni Payaket" remained "as they [had] hitherto done," under the sole control of the Company. In the EIC's consultations, it appears that the British were not worried about the value of the Nawab's investment in the textile business. However, what was a significant cause for concern was its long-term consequences. For if the Nawab continued his policy it would put a strain on the relationship between the Company and the weavers in the area, who had worked for the British for many years and considered themselves dependents of the Company. With the interference and authority of the Nawab's representatives, the weavers could be released from their dependency, and, if that happened, there would be no certainty of their service for the Company in the future.<sup>63</sup> This discussion within EIC circles clearly indicates that both the Nawab and the Company were vying for the loyalty and service of the weavers—something that they sought to secure through either extortionary or contractual means—and attempting to prevent them from entering the employment of the other party.

The Company's proposal (for the ruler to receive textiles from the Company's own warehouse) was firmly rejected by the Nawab, who then reverted to the approach he had employed for over three decades: he offered to be the middleman between the weavers and the Company. Displaying his eagerness to take up the role of agent, he asked the Company to send him a sample of the cloth required so that he could order its manufacture in his country and dispatch the finished product to the Company. If the Company agreed, he could deliver it as many as three times a year without any trouble for its servants.<sup>64</sup> This again confirms that the Nawab's ultimate goal was to enter the textile trade and become the broker of the Company in his own territory.

---

<sup>63</sup> IOR, P/241/35, MPP, Madras Consultation, 23 Nov. 1792, 3297-3299.

<sup>64</sup> IOR, P/241/35, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 7 Dec. 1792, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 11 Dec. 1792, 3490-3491.

## The Rice Trade

According to the Arcot gazetteer by Fox, it was customary in Karnatak, as in other parts of Hindustan, for governments to tax cultivators in kind, and only a small portion of the produce would remain in the hands of the producer.<sup>65</sup> Collectors of taxes were either court officials or revenue farmers in cases where the land had been rented out. The authorities then chose to either collect the produce as tax or permit the cultivator to sell part of the produce for cash, which was then paid as tax. Under this system, traders who wanted to invest in the rice trade in Karnatak could acquire the produce by farming the lands either from the Nawab's court or the EIC, or by buying grains directly from the cultivators.<sup>66</sup> They could also import rice from other regions, such as Bengal. According to Arasaratnam, the price of grain in South Asia rose at times of scarcity that were caused by frequent droughts and wars; such was the case in the second half of the eighteenth century. This allowed the grain trade to become a very profitable and rapidly-expanding business. The participants were mainly employees of the English, Dutch, French, and Danish trading companies (on their private ventures), European private traders, and South Asian investors.<sup>67</sup>

Again, modern scholars have thus far failed to observe that the Nawab was one of the largest entrepreneurs in this business. According to Paterson, "the Nabob [was] the great rice and paddy merchant of all his country."<sup>68</sup> The Nawab received grain from those lands under the control of the central government mainly through the land-tax system. In addition, he also rented out many tracts of agricultural land from "the Jagirs" that he had granted to the EIC.<sup>69</sup> It is thus not surprising that, owing to his rights as ruler and a renter of the lands, the Nawab managed to take possession of a large percentage of the grain produced in Karnatak. Furthermore, as the diary of Paterson and the EIC's records show, it was the Nawab's usual practice to buy up rice from his subjects at the lowest price during the harvest season; this was then stockpiled in the Nawab's forts and sold when demand rose, "by which he ma[de] immense profits in all the times of the greatest scarcity."<sup>70</sup> The key markets for the Nawab appear to have been the local one in Karnatak, the British enclaves, the military camps of

---

<sup>65</sup> According to the gazetteer, the usual proportion that the cultivators would receive was four-five out of ten but, in practice, it was usually one-three out of ten. Fox, *North Arcot*, 119.

<sup>66</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Jul. 1772, 214.

<sup>67</sup> Arasaratnam, "Trade and Political Dominion in South India," 37; Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, III: 229-230. For a good introduction to the rice trade in this area, see: Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "The Rice Trade in Eastern India 1650-1740," *Modern Asian Studies* 22 (1988): 531-549; Tsukasa Mizushima, *Nattar and the Socio-Economic Change in South India in the 18th-19th Centuries* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1986), 269-327.

<sup>68</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, May 1774, 115.

<sup>69</sup> See the discussion on "the Jagir lands" in 7.3.

<sup>70</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, May 1774, 115. See also Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Feb. 1771, 170; P/240/24, MPP, Madras Consultation, 15 Dec. 1766, 630.

both the Nawab and the EIC, and, in times of scarcity, the neighboring kingdoms of Mysore, and the Deccan.<sup>71</sup>

Participating in this market brought the Nawab into conflict with the EIC's servants (working in their private capacity) and with private traders, both of whom were also working hard to profit from this business. The following examples reveal how the Nawab attempted to thwart his competitors. In 1771-1772, the Nawab reported to a representative of King George III who was visiting his court two cases of Company corruption and abuse, both of which related to the rice trade. In the first case, according to the Nawab, the Madras Governor, Josias Du Pré, had ordered 75,000 to 100,000 bags of two-mound rice be sent from Bengal to Karnatak under the supposition that the whole region would soon be overrun by a Maratha invasion and the price of paddy would then dramatically increase. If that had happened, the servants of the Company who were involved would have made immense fortunes at the expense of the native population of Karnatak. However, the Maratha invasion did not materialize. Forced to dispense all the rice purchased from Bengal on the Company account, the Madras Presidency decided to coerce indigenous laborers employed in the Company's service to buy the rice at market price, and also paid them with rice instead of cash, causing them great suffering.<sup>72</sup> In the second example, some Company officers bought paddy from the inhabitants at an arbitrarily-set low price, but sold them at extraordinarily high rates. They also forbade other rice merchants from contracting sales when their grain was on the market. The inhabitants who resisted this order were flogged in public.<sup>73</sup>

These allegations may be taken at face value as representing the Nawab's attempts to protect the local population. But from a commercial standpoint, I would argue that one can interpret them as part of the Nawab's attempts to complicate matters for his main competitor in the rice trade, the EIC's servants. Keenly aware of the conflict between the British crown and the Company at this time, the Nawab was certain that charges of corruption and despotism against the Company's agents would further deepen the rift between the two parties. How and why the EIC and the British government became rivals in this period will be discussed in the next chapter. For now, it is possible to see how the Nawab sought to work the situation to his advantage by playing them off against each other. The following examples will further illustrate the Nawab's business acumen and strengthen my argument that the Nawab was a seasoned entrepreneur.

---

<sup>71</sup> Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 108.

<sup>72</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Feb. 1773, 181.

<sup>73</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Aug. 1772, 236.

The first example is from 1774, when Karnatak was experiencing a period of acute scarcity that resulted in a sharp rise in the price of provisions and meant that tensions soon broke out between the Nawab and the EIC over the issue of rice distribution. The Company had repeatedly requested the Nawab supply some rice from his lands to its people within the Madras Presidency. However, the Nawab did not wish to do so, claiming that harvests had failed throughout the country and stating that, if he helped the Company, his own people would starve. However, the Madras Presidency believed this was an excuse for the Nawab to sell his rice for the highest profit. In fact, the Nawab admitted as much to his secretary, Paterson. According to the Nawab, it was far more lucrative for him to sell his grains as a merchant at market price at opportune times rather than sell them to the Company at a fixed price. As for the subjects of the Company, the Nawab reasoned that they could buy rice whenever they wanted, from cultivators or local merchants in Karnatak, at market price.<sup>74</sup>

The second example is a dispute between the Nawab and Paul Benfield—the previously-mentioned famous British private investor in Madras and a principal creditor of the Nawab—that arose during the famine of 1774. As part of an agreement to pay his debt to Benfield, the Nawab had mortgaged to him a portion of that year’s revenues from Tanjore.<sup>75</sup> The initial settlement was that the Nawab would pay Benfield in the form of grain produced in the region because he could not afford payment in cash. The quantity of grain that was owed was fixed on the basis of the market price of the day. Subsequently, however, when the prospect of famine became apparent and everyone saw the possibility of a rise in the price of grain, the Nawab sought to keep the paddy for himself and offered to pay Benfield by other means, which severely soured relations between Benfield and the Nawab. To get a sense of the extent to which the price had risen and consequently appraise how much the Nawab stood to gain by going back on his promise, the price of the quantity of rice owed to Benfield had risen by over 40,000 pagodas, and was set to rise still further.<sup>76</sup> This illustrates the enormous profits that could be made in the grain trade, which caused intense competition between all parties.

## **Pearl Diving**

At least from the Sangam period, many coastal villages in the southernmost part of the Coromandel region, around the port-town of Tuticorin and the banks of the Gulf of Mannar

---

<sup>74</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 115; P/240/37, MPP, Madras Consultation, 3 Jun. 1774, 361.

<sup>75</sup> Tanjore temporarily came into the Nawab’s possession in the years 1773-1776.

<sup>76</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 117-121.

down to the coastal areas in the north-west of Ceylon, were centers of pearl diving. The professional divers belonged to a caste of native inhabitants called “Paravas” and they engaged in pearl diving from small canoe-like boats called “tonie.” The boat owners or investors who furnished the divers with tonies were usually South Indian Muslim merchants. Customarily, the harvest from this activity was divided into three unequal portions: one part for the diver, one part for the government as tax in kind, and the rest for the boat owners. During each pearl diving season, the areas were flooded with merchants who would buy pearls from anyone who had some. One important market where Karnatak pearls were resold for high profits was Bengal.<sup>77</sup>

From medieval times, taxes on pearl diving was a contentious issue for many rulers, particularly the rajas of Chola mandalam, Trichinopoly, Madurai, Ramnad, and the raja of Kandy, in Ceylon. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the two most prominent competitors in this business, not only as regards taxes but also investing as entrepreneurs, were the Nawab of Karnatak and the Dutch VOC. The Nawab claimed his right to the pearl diving taxes since he was the overlord of all the aforementioned South Indian rulers who had had the rights over them. On the other hand, the VOC was the *de facto* ruler of the port towns of Negapatnam and Tuticorin and also claimed the right to fish in the Gulf of Mannar because it controlled Ceylon (and had done since 1640). In reality, however, the Dutch had been investing in the business and competing with local Indian merchants long before the reign of Muhammad Ali Khan. As well as claiming the portion of the raja of Kandy in the industry, they had rented the rights to fish from rulers of Ramnad and paid them part of the harvest in return. By the mid-eighteenth century, the VOC was the chief player in this regional industry. However, in the late 1760s, the Nawab gained control over the southern regions of Tirunelveli, Madurai, and Ramnad for the first time. As a consequence, armed clashes over pearl diving broke out between the Nawab and the VOC.<sup>78</sup>

Around 1767-1768, a group of armed men, led by a Hindu servant of the Nawab in Tuticorin, interrupted Dutch activity in the region on the grounds that the Nawab’s court was entitled to a greater share in the trade. This act of aggression forced the VOC, in September 1770, to send an envoy to open negotiations with the Nawab in his position as the new overlord of the pearl diving areas. According to the VOC report, the Nawab demanded a

---

<sup>77</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/9, DGP, Jul. 1774, 22-23; Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 109; More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras*, 14-15; Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 15, 49.

<sup>78</sup> NA, VOC 3292, Mission to Arcot by Pieter Sluysken, Sep.-Dec. 1770, [ff.] 714r-715v, 718r-720v; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Feb. 1773, 186-187; E/379/9, DGP, Jul. 1774, 22-23; IOR, Mss Eur E56, JB, Nawab to Buchanan, 5 Dec. 1788, 56.

larger number of tonies and divers for his court (in addition to the usual rights of other local Poligars) and a share in all the large pearls procured by any party. These demands, the Nawab claimed, were in accordance with the customs established in 1480 by the raja of Madurai and the people of Colombo (Ceylon).<sup>79</sup> After this first meeting, both sides exchanged emissaries several times more during 1770-1773, but they failed to reach a consensus. According to the Nawab, the Dutch offered less than what was rightfully his, while the Dutch, on the other hand, believed that the Nawab sought more than he was entitled to.<sup>80</sup> Owing to the lack of agreement between the two parties, disputes often broke out at diving sites, interrupting the harvest of pearls.

I would like to focus here on an important strategy used by the Nawab in his conflict with the Dutch: his frequent attempts to use his special friendship with the British Company and government to threaten them. This can be seen in his instruction to his ambassador Muhammad Abrahah Khan, who was sent to the VOC in Negapatnam in July 1773: “to talk to them [the Dutch] in such a manner as to shew the protection given to the Nabob by the King of England and of the friendly escort given his servant on the present occasion.”<sup>81</sup> Before the envoy was dispatched from Madras, the Nawab ensured that his ambassador received full honors from the EIC, including a thirteen-gun salute, to show the Dutch that the British supported the mission.<sup>82</sup> When the conflict worsened in 1774, the Nawab wanted his British secretary Paterson to inform the British government that, if they ever wanted rid Ceylon of Dutch rule and place him in control of Kandy, he would finance the expedition and grant the British the same privileges that the Dutch enjoyed on the island.<sup>83</sup> Later, in 1781, when the British and the Dutch were at war in Europe and the tensions between them were being played out in India, the Nawab wrote to the EIC requesting that it broker an agreement with the Dutch over the pearl diving in his favor in the event that the British won the war.<sup>84</sup> Despite repeatedly stating that he enjoyed British protection and making such requests for British help, both the Nawab and the Dutch were aware that the British would not readily become involved in their quarrel as the two European nations would not risk yet more conflict simply to secure the Nawab’s interests. However, the Nawab’s actions certainly

---

<sup>79</sup> NA, VOC 3292, Mission to Arcot by Pieter Sluijsken, Sep.- Dec. 1770, [ff.] 705-738; IOR, Mss Eur E56, JB, Buchanan to VOC Governor of Colombo, 22 Mar. 1788, 4-5; 4 Apr. 1788, 8.

<sup>80</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Apr. 1772, 180; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 22, 26 Jun, 24, 26 Jul. 1773.

<sup>81</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Feb. 1773, 186-187; E/379/6, Jul. 1773, 16.

<sup>82</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 63.

<sup>83</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/9, DGP, Oct. 1774, 188-189.

<sup>84</sup> *CPC*, VI, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 29 Sep. 1781, 90-91.

prevented the VOC from employing overly-aggressive policies towards Karnatak, as doing so would risk the British becoming involved.

After the mid-1770s, it is unclear which direction the negotiations between the VOC and the Nawab took, but the conflict appears to have raged on into the 1780s. In 1787-1788, the Nawab appointed two experienced private British commercial agents, James Dott and James Buchanan (one after the other), as his representatives with plenipotentiary powers to negotiate treaties with the VOC. In July 1788, a treaty was concluded in which it was agreed that the profits would be divided between the two parties, although this failed to put an end to the conflict.<sup>85</sup> In November 1789, it was reported that the pearls in Tuticorin could not be harvested since the Dutch had been attempting to convert local divers from Catholicism to Protestantism, causing many Paravas to flee the area. In December 1789, the Nawab complained to the VOC that it had been preventing his officers from participating in a joint examination of the fishing banks. In January 1790, the frustrated Nawab accused the VOC of dishonesty, because the VOC's chief in Mannar had supposedly informed his people that the pearls were not ripe enough, but he later found out that, two months prior to the chief's claim, the Dutch had harvested the pearls and then put the empty oysters back into the sea to prevent detection.<sup>86</sup>

Eventually, in March 1790, the Nawab received a report that pearl diving in Mannar might be able to proceed as planned. However, he struggled to find funds for the venture and neither Itibar Khan (his governor of Tirunelveli) nor his tributary, the Poligar of Ramnad, could support him financially. Nevertheless, the Nawab would continue to invest in the business by borrowing money from the aforementioned James Buchanan, who provided the Nawab with the much-needed sum of 100,000 pagodas.<sup>87</sup> A point particularly worth noting here is that, although the Nawab had earned a notorious reputation for amassing debts with the EIC and private creditors, experienced British commercial agents like Buchanan and many of his compatriots saw the Nawab as credit-worthy even as late as the early 1790s and eagerly lent him money to run his financial operations.

---

<sup>85</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E56, JB, VOC representatives in Colombo to Buchanan, 3 Apr. 1788, 6-7; Treaty between the Nawab and the VOC in Colombo, 8 Jul. 1788, 19-22.

<sup>86</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E56, JB, Buchanan to Nawab, 25 Nov. 1789, 133-134; Buchanan to the VOC chief in Tuticorin, 134-135; Nawab to VOC Governor of Colombo, 15 Dec. 1789, 138; Buchanan to VOC Governor of Colombo, 18 Jan. 1790, 143.

<sup>87</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E56, JB, Buchanan to Nawab, 18 Feb. 1790, 147, 10 Mar. 1790, 156.

### 7.3 The Nawab as a Revenue Farmer

Land revenue farming was a form of financial management. A landlord would farm out or rent out his land to other investors at a negotiated price that was paid in advance. The renter was granted the right or license to reap the benefits of the land (such as taxes from the inhabitants) for a certain period of time. The value at which the land was farmed out was usually lower than the real value of what could be generated from the land in the rental period, so the farmer was usually able to enjoy the profits in exchange for his labor in managing revenue collection and shouldering all the production risks. The traditional view, which is seen in British records from the period, presents revenue-farming as an exploitative system that impaired agricultural production. This indirect form of revenue collection was introduced by local rulers who were desperately attempting to collect higher taxes so they could respond to potential economic crises and political instability in the region. More recent scholars, such as Wink, have argued that revenue farming was not necessarily harmful; instead, it was a means by which rulers attempted to promote the restoration and expansion of the land under cultivation. It could also help reduce the fluctuation of a court's income from the arrears of tributary chiefs and thus improve a dominion's political stability.<sup>88</sup> Revenue farming was dispirited by the Mughal court for much of the seventeenth century, but it was occasionally introduced in some areas in an attempt to recover rural prosperity. In the Deccan sultanates and the Maratha Confederacy, on the other hand, revenue farming was widespread. In eastern Tamilnadu, too, revenue farming emerged as a popular form of taxation among the landed aristocrats from the seventeenth century onwards. The farmers were primarily from the local merchant castes—Balijas, Beri Chettis, and Komatis—and the practice was later continued by the Mughal officers who conquered the region.<sup>89</sup> By the second half of the eighteenth century, revenue-farming had become a very competitive business for investors all over South India. As Neild-Basu observes, while trade was a means of supplementing the official salaries of EIC servants, “the real sources of wealth for ambitious Europeans and Indians now lay in other directions, most notably in revenue farming in the Company's new territories [...]”<sup>90</sup> According to Arasaratnam, the amount and value of farmed land considerably increased in Karnatak during the Nawab's reign. Before 1750, a dozen farms rented out in the region ranged in value from 100 pagodas to 7,000 pagodas, but later the revenue farm of the Poonamallee country (part of “the EIC's Jagirs”) alone was worth 55,000

---

<sup>88</sup> André Wink, “Maratha Revenue Farming,” *Modern Asian Studies* 17, 4 (1983): 591-595, 602.

<sup>89</sup> Wink, “Maratha Revenue Farming,” 599; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 330; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 97; Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 263.

<sup>90</sup> Neild-Basu, “The Dubashes of Madras,” 9.

pagodas. Before 1750, the merchant castes were the only communities with the capital to invest in these farms. Later, however, many other people entered this business, including European private traders and members of the Brahmin scribal castes who had accumulated their capital serving European companies, private European merchants, or Muslim courts.<sup>91</sup>

### **Renting “the Company’s Jagirs”**

Before the mid-eighteenth century, the EIC’s territory in Tamilnadu was limited to a small area around Fort St. George in Madras and several factories in nearby port towns. In the years 1749, 1756, and 1763, the EIC requested that Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan grant it many tracts of land and villages as compensation for its military assistance. These lands were adjacent to Madras and are collectively referred to in the EIC’s documents as “the Company’s Jagirs.”<sup>92</sup> The whole area of the Company’s Jagirs consisted of most of present-day Chingleput District. Poonamallee, to the west of Madras, seems to have been the most valuable part, and was sometimes regarded as a tract of land separate from the rest of the Jagirs. The total value of the EIC’s land was very high because it was productive agrarian land in close proximity to the new regional center of Madras. However, its exact value is difficult to estimate because the approximations of contemporaries vary. According to Thomas Pelling, a free-merchant, it yielded an annual income of 1,000,000 pagodas, while Sunku Rama, a dubash of Robert Orme, estimated its yield to be 2,000,000 rupees (or around 700,000 pagodas).<sup>93</sup> Immediately after these lands were granted, in order to earn interest from them, the Madras Presidency chose to divide them into sections and sell the rights to collect the land revenue to the highest bidders in a public auction. A condition for renting the Company’s Jagirs, one which had been specified by the Nawab before these lands were granted to the British, was that the Nawab would have the right to veto individuals who were to become the farmers or renters of them. This meant that the names of the chosen bidders were submitted by the Madras Presidency to the Nawab’s representative to receive his approval. The agent appointed by the Nawab to preside over the matter was the Brahmin Guntur Venkatachalam, a former dubash who was connected to some EIC officers, as mentioned previously in Chapter Five.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India,” 26.

<sup>92</sup> Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, X: 32-42; Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 431; IOR, P/240/9, MPP, Fort St David Consultation, 17 Dec. 1750, no page.

<sup>93</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 435, 567.

<sup>94</sup> IOR, P/240/21, MPP, Madras Consultation, 1 Dec. 1763, 461.

The table below shows part of the expected land revenues of the Madras Presidency from November 1778 to November 1779. The first two rows in the list show the rental values of Poonamallee and the other lands of the Company's Jagirs, granted by the Nawab.<sup>95</sup>

<b>Land farmed out</b>	<b>The value</b>
Fort St. George Poonamallee (rented by the Nawab)	44,350 Pagodas
Fort St. George Jaghire (rented by the Nawab)	324,000 Pagodas
Masulipatnam farms	124,906 Pagodas
Masulipatnam Jamabundy for circars	620,674 Pagodas

As this table shows, the Nawab was the tenant of the entire Company's Jagirs in 1778. In fact, the involvement of the Nawab in business related to the Company's Jagirs had begun in the 1760s. In 1763, when the Company rented out the Jagirs for the first time, the Nawab's representative had objected to the tenant appointments of the two highest bidders. After various discussions between the Nawab and the Madras Governor, the names of the two individuals were eventually excluded from the bidding.<sup>96</sup> Then, the Nawab made his next move, requesting that the Company rent the Jagirs out directly to himself, promising to pay rent equal in value to the annual revenue of the lands recorded in the sanads—the formal bills of grant submitted to the EIC. The Madras Presidency refused his offer on the grounds that it was under the strict orders of the Court of Directors to auction revenue farming rights to the highest bidder.<sup>97</sup> In response, the Nawab did not dispute the decision but cleverly changed tactics. In 1764-1765, the highest bidder in the public auction, who was awarded farming contracts for most of the Company's Jagirs, turned out to be the Nawab's own representative, Guntur Venkatachalam, while the Nawab would be his guarantor for the whole rental tenure, which itself was extended from one to three years. It was said that he offered a rent of 50,000 rupees, which was hard for the British to turn down because it was more than its market value. In 1765, when Venkatachalam had to leave Madras for Bengal to resume his position as dubash to Robert Clive, the Nawab's most trusted general, Muhammad Najib Khan, was named as the replacement tenant in the contract. When a request was later made to extend the period of tenancy from three to seven years, the Madras Presidency consented because the Nawab agreed to be the guarantor for Muhammad Najib Khan for the whole period.<sup>98</sup> A

<sup>95</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, III: 142.

<sup>96</sup> IOR, P/240/21, MPP, Madras Consultation, 1 Dec. 1763, 463.

<sup>97</sup> IOR, P/251/49, MP, MMSC, 15 Nov. 1763, no page.

<sup>98</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 51.

report from Madras from 1765 reveals why its officers did not contest this arrangement in which the Nawab's appointees became its chief tenants: other tenants of the Company's Jagirs had failed to keep up with their rental payments, something that was often due to the fact that the revenue farming rights were often purchased at a price that was far higher than the yield of the land. The Madras Presidency suspected that Guntur Venkatachalam had intentionally inflated the land yield estimates to oust other competitors from the market.<sup>99</sup>

The evidence indicates that the Nawab was behind these arrangements. In the first few years after he granted these territories to the EIC, as the nominal renter the Nawab succeeded in influencing this branch of the Company's investment and brought control of the lands back into his own hands, at least partly. This situation was a cause for concern for the Court of Directors in London. They were more than certain that the Nawab had rigged the auction, though he was not officially present as a bidder. They accused their servants in Madras of accepting bribes and falling under the Nawab's influence, and became concerned that the Nawab's meddling in EIC territories would cause future conflict between the Company and his court. In 1765-1768, the Directors repeatedly sent orders to Madras telling them to reduce the rental tenure and then evaluate the performance of the tenants. They also asked the Presidency to make an enquiry into the actual revenues of these lands to prevent overestimation by the Nawab.<sup>100</sup> This final order also suggests that the main reason the Company chose to farm these lands out to native people was their inexperience and lack of knowledge about the region in this early period of territorial acquisition. Yet they desired that, in the near future, the Jagirs would be entrusted to the management of their own servants, and in 1768, as the first contract neared its conclusion, the Directors were concerned that the leases might again fall into the hands of dependents of the Nawab for a lengthy period of time. In 1771, therefore, it was decided that the next renting contract (cowle) would be awarded annually.<sup>101</sup> However, over the course of the subsequent half-decade, the Directors again complained to Madras that the situation had not improved. They wrote that, if the Nawab continued to rent the majority of the Jagir lands surrounding Madras, "it almost enables him to shut us [the British] up within the walls of Madras, and even to prevent us from obtaining a proper supply of provisions for our settlement."<sup>102</sup> This time, in 1775, the Directors gave strict orders that the Nawab should only be allowed to continue renting the

---

<sup>99</sup> IOR, E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 4 Jan. 1765, 31.

<sup>100</sup> IOR, P/240/22, MPP, Madras Consultation, 1764, 553; E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 26 Apr. 1765, 145-148, 24 Dec. 1765, 251-254; E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 4 Mar. 1767, 514-515.

<sup>101</sup> IOR, E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 25 Mar. 1768, 155-157; E/4/865, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 10 Apr. 1771, 246.

<sup>102</sup> IOR, E/4/866, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, (no date) 1775, 391-392.

Company's Jagirs if the contracts were for no longer than a year, and that the Company should be at liberty to explore the country and to ascertain the real produce and revenues of its lands. But even with this arrangement, four years later, in 1779, London again expressed its displeasure to the Madras Presidency that the Nawab continued to be awarded contracts for longer periods.<sup>103</sup>

Despite repeated opposition from the London Directors and some members of the Madras Council, the Nawab was still able to use his influence with the Madras Presidency to essentially become, and remain, the sole tenant of its lands, either himself or through his representatives, until at least 1780.<sup>104</sup> The Madras Presidency resorted to using the same explanation every time it was questioned by the Directors, arguing that it was inclined to accept the Nawab's tenancy because he was always the highest bidder, sometimes offering as much as ten percent more than the other bidders and that he paid in ready money. Furthermore, the rents were paid regularly.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, the Madras Presidency was inclined to award the Nawab long-term contracts instead of annual ones due to practical concerns; as the Nawab explained to the British in 1773, only with a long-term contract was a renter able to invest large amounts of money to improve the conditions of the land, repair irrigation system, or pay advances to the cultivators. If such improvements were carried out, the productivity of the land would improve and, as a consequence, future rents would rise.<sup>106</sup> In the early 1780s, the Nawab went so far as to request that the Madras Presidency grant him a 20-year tenancy.<sup>107</sup> But it was impossible for the EIC to consent to such a proposal at the time because the EIC's senior officers in London and the British government were both very concerned about the Nawab's freehand in the tenancy allotments in the Company's Jagirs and his financial problems. These will be discussed further in Chapter Nine.

Another important point worth observing is that from the late 1760s until the 1770s the Company's servants had encountered problems surveying the land and assessing local land revenues. One Company officer, Robert Kelly, recorded that he had determined to conduct a proper survey of the country since 1770 but the plan was never carried out because of the Nawab's interference. It was not until 1779 that a select committee was appointed to survey Karnatak.<sup>108</sup> Judging from this evidence and the tone of a Directors' letter from 1779,

---

<sup>103</sup> IOR, E/4/868, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 16 Jun. 1779, 459-461.

<sup>104</sup> Phillips, "A Successor to the Moguls," 376.

<sup>105</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Aug. 1772, 240-241; P/240/24, MPP, Madras Consultation, 1766, 161.

<sup>106</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 135-136.

<sup>107</sup> IOR, P/240/50, MPP, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 22 Mar. 1780, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 25 Mar. 1780, no page.

<sup>108</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, III: 172-173.

the Nawab seems to have been playing a crucial role in preventing the British from gaining better knowledge of the country. Presumably, the Nawab hoped that the Company would remain dependent on him and his people in managing its Jagir lands.

By ensuring that he became the renter of the EIC's lands despite having to pay larger sums of money in order to do so, and by repeatedly impeding the Company's efforts to survey its own lands, it seems that the Nawab's actions were not driven by financial profit alone but political interests, too. The question that remains is: how did the economic system of revenue-farming impact the political sphere? As several scholars have suggested, revenue farming was used, in various ways, by many South Asian rulers as a principle political tool to further their territorial ambitions.

One prominent example, highlighted by Satya Gupta, is the case of Raja Jai Singh, a Mughal warrior of Rajput origin who, in the early eighteenth century, used revenue farming as a peaceful way of gaining possession of some imperial lands adjacent to his watan-jagir in Rajasthan. He first managed to acquire these lands as jagirs from the Mughal emperor, then farmed them out to lesser Rajputs from various clans that were connected to him. Through the management of these renters, direct Rajput rule and political influence were developed in that society. Later, when other Mughal jagirdars, from outside the Rajput circles, tried to collect their own revenues in this region, they found their agents stalled and harassed by Rajput officers and farmers. Then, when the power of the Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar weakened, Raja Jai Singh simply assumed full control over these jagirs, turning them into his hereditary properties (watan-jagirs). With this annexation, it was the first time since Akbar had conquered eastern Rajasthan in the 1560s that the Mughals had lost control over the lands and revenue of the region.<sup>109</sup> Stein suggests that the Nawab's neighbor, Hyder Ali of Mysore, also used revenue farming as a tool to centralize his power when he wanted to eliminate the influence of unruly local chieftains, many of whom had had control of rural resources in peninsular India since the Vijayanagara period. The sultan ordered a large proportion of the territories under these local chieftains to be auctioned off to new groups of ambitious warriors, most of whom were Hindu. As they had become state revenue farmers with the sultan's support, these warriors assisted the latter in furthering the accumulation of revenue and eliminating the influence of the formerly independent chieftains.<sup>110</sup> Wink points to a similar occurrence in the contemporaneous Maratha state. There, revenue farming was used

---

<sup>109</sup> Satya P. Gupta, *The Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan, c. 1650-1750* (Delhi: Manohar, 1986), 1-37; Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 274-275.

<sup>110</sup> Stein, "State Formation and Economy Reconsidered," 401.

by the new rulers, the Peshwas, to eliminate the economic and political support bases of the hereditary zamindars.<sup>111</sup> The grievances of the EIC over textile procurement is another good example of the political clout of revenue farmers. Since the seventeenth century, the EIC had been complaining of how some powerful South Asian overseas merchants had been using their advantageous positions as revenue farmers in strategic areas in the Coromandel to block other competitors from accessing the weaving villages and control the procurement of cloth for its own businesses.<sup>112</sup> This was similar to the conflicts that erupted between the Nawab and the EIC over control of textile production, discussed earlier.

These examples demonstrate the political influence that the revenue farmers wielded over local society and how revenue farming rights meant both economic profit and political control for the tenant. I argue that Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan used method of revenue-farming to keep the management of the Company's territories in his own hands and prevent direct British control over local populations, thereby curbing the EIC's growing political power in Karnatak territory. A similar case can be made for the territories that were under the Nawab's control, where he tried to keep them under his direct rule, as far as possible. As one EIC officer wrote in 1767, "he [the Nawab] had determined not to let it [Arcot province] out to the renters, but kept the whole in his hands."<sup>113</sup> This necessitated the maintenance of a large band of his private troops, headed by the Nawab's amildar, which proved to be a sore point in his relationship with the EIC.<sup>114</sup> It is said that from the early 1770s, the EIC's Bengal Presidency had been able to appoint British revenue collectors and revenue farmers within the Company's possessions, thereby allowing them to exploit the regions fully and so amass large fortunes.<sup>115</sup> The Nawab must have attempted to prevent similar occurrences in Karnatak and his degree of success in so doing is evident from the lamentation of an EIC officer in 1778. On the inability of the Company to obtain revenues from its own lands, he ruefully remarked: "as the Nabob is Renter we must intreat and be thankful for that assistance which we have a right to command."<sup>116</sup> The fact that the EIC could begin the survey of their Jagirs in Karnatak only in 1779 is also another good proof. However, the Nawab could maintain this politico-economic strategy well only until the end of 1770s, as the treaty of revenue assignment which the Nawab was forced to sign with the Madras Presidency in 1781 would

---

<sup>111</sup> Wink, "Maratha Revenue Farming," 623.

<sup>112</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 302-303.

<sup>113</sup> IOR, P/251/59, MP, MMSC, Aug. 1767, 767-770.

<sup>114</sup> This issue will be discussed further in Chapter Nine.

<sup>115</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 53.

<sup>116</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 206.

significantly alter the situation. This treaty and its effects will be discussed further in Chapter Nine.

### **Renting the “Northern Circars”**

The Nawab’s investments in revenue farming were not confined to the territories of the EIC within the Karnatak State but stretched into the “Northern Circars,” in the land of the Deccan Nizams. The sources allow us to see how the Nawab made use of his relationship with the Company to serve his commercial and political designs even within that neighboring state.

The “Northern Circars” is the collective term used in late-eighteenth-century British records to refer to the five districts of the Deccan state that lay along the Coromandel Coast between Orissa in the north and Karnatak in the south, namely Chicacole (Srikakulam), Rajahmundry, Condavir (Godavari), Kondapalli (Mustaphanagar), and Guntur (Murtezanagar). During the Third Carnatic War, the French and the Deccan Nizam were defeated by the Nawab of Karnatak and the British. As a result, in 1759, the Nizam was forced to hand over the Northern Circars (previously French) to the British as a free gift (*inam*). In 1765, the British managed to receive a farman from the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II officially acknowledging this acquisition. The Nizam had tried on several occasions to regain these areas but had not succeeded so, in 1768, after his attempt to defeat the EIC through a coalition with Mysore had failed, he decided to negotiate with the British. According to the treaty agreed, the EIC promised to render military assistance—two infantry battalions and six pieces of artillery—to the Nizam in every “proper” business and pay him an annual sum of 800,000 rupees. In return, the Northern Circars were transferred to the EIC as gifts, on condition that Guntur remained in the possession of one of the Nizam’s brothers, Prince Basalat Jang, until the latter’s death. However, the Company was allowed to rent that district from Basalat Jang in exchange for money and the services of Company mercenaries.<sup>117</sup>

The territory of the coastal Northern Circars was 470 miles long with a total area of about 30,000 square miles. It was rich in natural produce: Rajahmundry in teak; Chicacole was a rice-producing region; Guntur was so fertile that most of its villages produced more than 10,000 pagodas annually, being valued at 400,000 pagodas a year, and full of cotton plantations. The neighboring district, Masulipatnam, was famous for its textiles. These areas

---

<sup>117</sup> Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, IX: 21, 28-29, 35, 38-40; M.K. Chancey, “The Making of the Anglo-Hyderabad Alliance, 1788-1823,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 29 (2006): 186; Frykenberg, *Guntur District*, 26-29.

were so valuable that, during the early eighteenth century, the Mughal emperors had designated them crown territories, meaning that they could not be granted as jagirs.<sup>118</sup> In addition, the Northern Circars were strategically important: they constituted the border between the states of Karnatak and Deccan. Hyder Ali of Mysore also kept his eyes on the neighboring area of Cuddapah since the 1760s, and when the latter region was annexed to Mysore's territory in 1779, the border of Mysore also connected to Guntur district of the Northern Circars.<sup>119</sup> This made the areas a highly sensitive zone militarily as it was a site where conflict frequently broke out between the three states. The EIC was desperate to control these districts so as to maintain peace between them in order to ensure its own commerce was not negatively affected and to maintain its position as the main power in local politics. The wealth and strategic significance of the region attracted the attention of all the southern Indian potentates and large investors, including Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. The areas that the Nawab was particularly interested in were the districts of Guntur, Condavir, and Chicacole. According to the Nawab, several of Guntur's southern sub-districts were inseparable from the northern Karnatak districts of Ongole and Palnaud, and the proximity of Guntur to his kingdom implied that it could be easily administered by Karnatak. Condavir, situated near the Krishna River, was also a frontier zone between Karnatak and the Deccan. With regard to Chicacole, the Nawab laid claim to this territory on the grounds that it had been long managed by his father when he was in the service of Nizam al-Mulk.<sup>120</sup> The Nawab closely watched the moves of his adversaries vis-à-vis the Northern Circars and, immediately after dispute over control of them broke out between the EIC and the Nizam of the Deccan in the late 1750s, attempted to lay claim to them.

In 1762-1763, Nizam Salabat Jang sent one of his servants, named Husain Ali Khan, to Madras to negotiate the issue of the Northern Circars with the EIC. During this mission, Husain Ali Khan approached the Nawab, offering his services to help him secure rental contracts in the region from his master, the Nizam. Eager to take advantage of this opportunity, the Nawab invested as much as 1,000,000 rupees in the venture as payment to the Nizam and the EIC. With this money and the support of the Nawab, Husain Ali Khan successfully managed to gain the consent of both the Nizam and the EIC to rent large parts of the Northern Circars to him. However, subsequent events revealed that the Nawab had been

---

<sup>118</sup> Sarojini Regani, *Nizam-British Relations, 1724-1857* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1988), 73; Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 266; Sinha, *The Politics of Trade*, 25; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Jan. 1773, 122.

<sup>119</sup> C. F. Brackenbury, *Gazetteer of the Cuddapah District*, vol. I (Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1915), 44.

<sup>120</sup> IOR, E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 4 Mar. 1767, 582-583; E/4/869, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 10 Jan. 1781, 476-506; Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Dec. 1770, 140.

duped, because Husain Ali Khan, whose name was in the rental contract, pocketed the land revenue instead of handing it over to the Nawab.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, the Nawab continued to pursue his interests in the Northern Circars. In 1765-1766, he turned to his “ancient and faithful” ally, the EIC, and requested that it grant him revenue farming rights in the Northern Circars for as long as the British continued to remain in India. He even proposed a compromise whereby the-then tenant, Husain Ali Khan, was allowed to continue as revenue farmer for another three years but in the new role of diwan to the Karnatak Nawab. The Nawab also managed to extract a promise from the Madras Governor, Robert Palk, that he would become renter of all, or at least a large part, of the Northern Circars when each of them became a full possession of the EIC (many parts, at the time, were still under negotiation with the current Nizam, Ali Khan Asaf Jah II). However, the Nawab was once again rebuffed by the EIC, who claimed that the London Directors wanted to continue with the tenancy of Husain Ali Khan, who, supposedly, managed the territories expertly. Furthermore, the Directors decreed that they would reach a decision on any subsequent revenue farming requests (such as the two villages that were attached to the Ongole district of Karnatak for only 1,600 pagodas annually) submitted by the Nawab on a case-by-case basis.<sup>122</sup> Although it is possible that the EIC’s refusal to accept the Nawab’s request was because it really preferred the tenancy of Husain Ali Khan, it is more likely to have been the outcome of the Directors’ policy of preventing the Nawab’s increasing influence over Company territories, as had occurred in its Jagirs within Karnatak. They were, moreover, afraid of angering the Deccan Nizam and provoking frontier conflict between Karnatak and Mysore, so when the Directors were confronted with the Nawab’s proposal to rent Condavir they ordered the Madras Presidency to refuse, stating that: “such a boundary as the river Kishtnah [Krishna] must certainly prevent all colour of dispute touching limits.”<sup>123</sup>

Yet the Nawab was not a man to retreat from an objective that he had set his sights on, so when the British king’s representatives visited his court in the early 1770s he sought their support on this issue. The Nawab told the royal representatives that management of the Circars had been offered to him several times by the Deccan Nizam without the knowledge of the British on condition that he repudiated his alliance with them. He asserted that he had rejected these unethical offers because he wished to accept the Circars only “with the good

---

<sup>121</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Dec. 1770, 115, 130, 140-142.

<sup>122</sup> IOR, P/240/24, MPP, Madras Consultation, 23 Jan. 1766, 22.

<sup>123</sup> IOR, E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 4 Mar. 1767, 582-583.

will of the English.”<sup>124</sup> The Nawab, moreover, alleged that the two current chief tenants of the Northern Circars, Husain Ali Khan and Joggy Pundit, oppressed the locals to the extent that they were driven to suicide.<sup>125</sup> Although the British king’s representatives appeared sympathetic to the Nawab’s position, the latter was never able to convince the EIC to comply to his demands, as the Court of Directors was increasingly anxious to limit the Nawab’s influence over the Company’s territories. There was significant movement on the issue again in 1779, when the Madras Governor, Thomas Rumbold, successfully induced Prince Basalat Jang of the Deccan to cede Guntur to the Madras Presidency in exchange for military assistance and protection. This agreement was reached without consulting Nizam Ali Khan, the ruler of the Deccan, thus invoking the latter’s displeasure. The sultan of Mysore, with whose territory Guntur bordered, was also unhappy with the decision, and Prince Basalat Jang himself soon changed his mind and retracted his agreement with the Company. Senior EIC officers, both in London and Bengal, were outraged at this diplomatic blunder orchestrated by the Madras Presidency, as it placed that strategically important region at risk. Adding to their annoyance was the fact that, within six months of its signing the treaty with Basalat Jang, the Madras Presidency granted the revenue farming rights of Guntur to the Nawab of Karnatak for a period of ten years.<sup>126</sup> Importantly, one of the letters that the Nawab wrote to Rumbold revealed that it was through his efforts that Basalat Jang had agreed to cede Guntur to the EIC. He claimed that he had also advised Basalat Jang to dismiss the French soldiers from his army and replace them with Company troops. The Nawab’s claims suggest that the entire business may have been engineered for the benefit of (or even by) the Nawab and his British friends in the Madras Council.<sup>127</sup>

The Madras Presidency found itself in the difficult position of having to justify the allocation of revenue collection rights to the Nawab. First, it argued that it wanted to fulfil a promise made to the Nawab in 1767 to rent the territory to him for a period of ten years when it fell into the Company’s hands. Secondly, it said that the Nawab proposed a higher rent than the revenue obtained by Prince Basalat My Masters’ thesis, completed in 2012, was an initial experiment that explored Karnatak’s history by applying such a biographical approach. in the previous years. Thirdly, it noted that there was no-one else to whom such a responsibility could be entrusted. And fourthly, it pointed out that the Council of Madras had legally voted

---

<sup>124</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Dec. 1770, 140.

<sup>125</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Dec. 1772, 68; Jan. 1773, 123-124.

<sup>126</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, III: 146; Turnbull, *Warren Hastings*, 144.

<sup>127</sup> CPC, V, Nawab to Governor of Madras, 23 Feb. 1779, 294-295; Phillips, “The Development of British Authority in Southern India,” 221; Frykenberg, *Guntur District, 1788-1848*, 29-30.

in favor of renting Guntur to the Nawab. These justifications were, however, rejected by their superiors and they were ordered to immediately cancel the contract. The Madras Presidency, clearly revealing its somewhat underhand dealings with the Nawab, continued to delay the annulment of the contract for various reasons, and relations between Madras and its superiors deteriorated to the point that John Whitehill, the temporary successor to Rumbold as Governor of Madras, was suspended from office.<sup>128</sup>

The Nawab eventually failed in his efforts to make political inroads into the Northern Circars, but what is particularly illuminating in this episode is his influence over the Council of Madras, which was so great that he managed to convince it to make decisions which invited the ire of the Company Directors and the Governor-General of Bengal. This convinced the Company's higher echelons that its employees in Madras were corrupt and an investigation was ordered into their conduct. The report found that Sir Thomas Rumbold had received from the Nawab alone 1,600,000 pagodas within twenty months of his governorship. Rumbold also supposedly received another 2,500,000 rupees from other "Northern Rajahs" for letting out other parts of the Company's lands to them. However, without cooperation from the Nawab and other local rulers the investigator could not find sufficient proof to implicate Rumbold and so the enquiry was subsequently abandoned.<sup>129</sup>

#### **7.4 The Nawab as Real Estate Investor**

Madras was the biggest beneficiary of the growth in South Coromandel trade in the seventeenth century. It grew from being a small port town in the 1630s to a city housing a population of 100,000 by 1700.<sup>130</sup> The White Town, which was the core of the British settlement and was connected to Fort St George, emerged as the new center of Madras and the area experienced extraordinary growth from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Its population grew from around just 200 in the 1740s to 2,500 in 1769.<sup>131</sup> To house this expanding population, demand for land and houses within Madras steadily rose, impacting their sale and rental prices. Consequently, real estate became a profitable business there, one in which merchants and investors of all nationalities participated. There is evidence of British, other Europeans, Armenians, and Indians all renting out their houses in Madras on long leases and receiving the full rent while they themselves left the settlement to live or

---

<sup>128</sup> See the details of the Guntur conflict in: IOR, P/240/51, MPP, Governor-General to Madras, 10 Oct. 1780, enclosed in Madras Consultation, 7 Nov. 1780, 960-970; E/4/869, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 10 Jan. 1781, 476-506.

<sup>129</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, III: 224-225; Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 227.

<sup>130</sup> Asher and Talbot, *India before Europe*, 259.

<sup>131</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 63.

work elsewhere. The profits that could be made from such arrangements were staggering, and investors who owned several estates made large fortunes. A Tamil merchant, Cashia Chetty, for instance, is said to have owned three houses and seven gardens in Madras, and so did a number of other important Indian merchants. Their tenants included the EIC (for their numerous offices), Company servants, and free merchants from other nations, among others.<sup>132</sup> The high demand for accommodation in the White Town rendered its land and houses very expensive. Real estate in the area could only be bought with permission from the Madras Presidency, and applications were often rejected.<sup>133</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century, the value of areas in the hinterland of Madras also rose, as increasing numbers of Europeans sought houses with gardens.<sup>134</sup> The grounds were in such high demand that limits were sometimes placed on the size of the plots sold, and sometimes the sale of land was temporarily suspended. Each time “a purchase” (which was, in actuality, a 99-year lease) was allowed, the Madras Council had to deal with a flood of purchase applications.<sup>135</sup> The house and land crisis of Madras, especially in the Fort St. George and White Town areas, became so severe that the Committee of Distribution of Civil Apartments was established in April 1771 to help manage the problem.<sup>136</sup>

The Nawab, astute businessman that he was, did not miss this opportunity, and in 1770 the Madras Presidency expressed concern about the Nawab possessing lands and houses in Madras only two to three years after he had moved there to live (since 1767/1768). According to EIC accounts, as well as purchasing a large plot of land adjoining his palace in Chepauk in order to expand his own grounds, the Nawab owned at least a dozen houses in Madras: one on Choultry Plain, one near the Spur (Egmore), one at Vipary, four at the Mount, several at St. Thomé, and several more in the Black Town. Within the fort, where the Company’s permission was required to buy property, the Nawab possessed at least three capital houses in the names of several of his British secretaries or friends: one in the name of Boswall, another in the name of Storey, and the third in the name of Johnson. The Committee of Distribution of Civil Apartments stated that, although it could not officially determine whether these houses were purchased by the Nawab, it had little doubt that he was behind their acquisition. And, according to the committee, if the Nawab wished to expand his ownership of houses, he could do so very quickly. This was because the houses there were

---

<sup>132</sup> Arasaratnam, “Trade and Political Dominion in South India,” 23; Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 496-500.

<sup>133</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 464.

<sup>134</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 614.

<sup>135</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 615-616; III: 55.

<sup>136</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, III: 50.

frequently sold or transferred upon the death or departure of Company officials, and the Nawab could always afford to offer far more for them than any other potential buyer.<sup>137</sup>

Importantly, Paterson's diary reveals the logic behind the Nawab's real estate investments. According to this, it was common practice in the 1770s for members of the Madras Presidency and other British to build European-style houses in Madras, which were then purchased by the Nawab even as their former owners continued to live in them. In other instances, the Nawab rented them out to prominent British gentlemen visiting the town. The Nawab thus fashioned himself as a benefactor to these gentlemen while investing in real estate. After the Europeans departed—back to Britain or other parts of the world—the houses and lands came into the Nawab's full possession. This practice was not confined to Madras alone, as Paterson found a similar practice taking place in Trichinopoly. There were also many British gentlemen who, before leaving the country, offered to sell their estates directly to the Nawab as it was well known that he was a keen investor.<sup>138</sup> The list of land sales permitted by the Company in November 1774 mentions the names of the Nawab and “Cawn Sahib” (presumably the Nawab's minister Abd al-Rashid Khan) as buyers.<sup>139</sup> The evidence shows that the Nawab was one of the main real estate investors in Madras. However, it has not proved possible to find clear evidence of how the Nawab profited from these investments, except for the fact that he saw it as a means of patronage. We can only assume his activities were like those of other investors in this business at that time; he chose to either rent the houses to Company servants and free merchants or re-sell them after at a higher price, as their value was constantly rising.

## 7.5 The Nawab and Trade

The active role of the Nawab in various regional mercantile activities is reminiscent of the “portfolio capitalists” who lost out to their competitors and disappeared from the mercantile scene before the end of the seventeenth century. Some scholars, such as Tsukasa Mizushima, have argued that there was a revival of the portfolio capitalists in the eighteenth century Coromandel Coast, i.e. the so-called *nattar*, comprising of the Reddi, Pillai, and Brahmin castes (dubashes), who held various market ventures.<sup>140</sup> However, according to Subrahmanyam, they were not comparable to the portfolio capitalists as they worked on a far

---

<sup>137</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 612; III: 55.

<sup>138</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/1, DGP, Jul. 1770, 287-288; Mss Eur E/379/5, Mar. 1773, 29, 33; Mss Eur E/379/8, Jun. 1774, 204.

<sup>139</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, II: 622; III: 59, 61.

<sup>140</sup> Mizushima, *Nattar and the Socio-Economic Change in South India*, 114-138.

more limited scale.<sup>141</sup> What about the Nawab? Should we view him as an eighteenth-century portfolio capitalist? In my view, the activities of the Nawab in the second half of the eighteenth century did, in many ways, replicate those of the seventeenth-century portfolio capitalists. The Nawab used similar tactics to try to control the middle ground between the two worlds of politics and commerce, and to use entree to one to benefit the other. However, in his case there were also some crucial differences. One is that he was not able to regain control of the overseas trade from the Europeans, and so his participation in overseas commerce was very limited. Another difference between the Nawab and the seventeenth-century portfolio capitalists is that the latter were initially traders who tried to gain access to the political realm to benefit their commerce; although they subsequently built distinguished political careers, trade remained their principal activity and priority. The Nawab, on the other hand, was first and foremost a head of state, one who sought access to the mercantile world for political ends. He used various mercantile approaches to increase or (re)gain political influence over local society. The trading relationship between the Nawab and the EIC also suggests that the line that separated the worlds of “politico” and “merchant” was even more blurred in the second half of the eighteenth century than at any prior point in time. On the one hand, a merchant, the EIC, was gaining increasing access to the realm of politics at the expense of local landed aristocrats to expand its trade. On the other, a ruler, namely the Nawab, was attempting to penetrate the realm of commerce, which was being increasingly dominated by the EIC. The Nawab used various mercantile tactics—mostly subtle strategies—to resist, or at least slow, European domination over his territory.

Next, it may be useful to compare the Nawab’s mercantile activities with those of some neighboring South Indian rulers. According to Parthasarathi, towards the end of the eighteenth century, and as a result of their desire to develop permanent standing armies and adapt their military to suit the new type of warfare, many South Indian rulers realized that their land incomes and the revenue they received from taxing trade was no longer enough to cover their expenses. Such financial pressure caused these rulers to turn to the commercial world to profit, and they mainly did so by establishing monopolies in their dominions’ most lucrative commodities. One of the earliest and most successful was the raja of Travancore, who monopolized the pepper trade in southern Malabar. However, the most ambitious was Tipu Sultan, who monopolized many of Mysore’s most expensive export goods, including

---

<sup>141</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, 139-142; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 336.

sandalwood, areca nuts, pepper, and cardamom.<sup>142</sup> Parthasarathi also mentions the Karnatak Nawab as one example here, briefly mentioning his attempts to monopolize the textile and rice trades. But, on the basis of my analysis of the Nawab's various economic activities, it seems that the latter's participation in the commercial world was significantly different from those of his neighbors. Although the Nawab did sometimes use his political power to facilitate his business ventures, he still generally needed to follow the existing mercantile rules and compete to earn his share in the Coromandel markets as a merchant, one who was in fierce competition with many other traders, both South Asian and European. Unlike the neighboring rulers, he did not or, more precisely, could not set up a state monopoly in any business area on the Coast. In the grain trade, for example, the Nawab could only use his status as a ruler to buy up rice from his subjects at the lowest price during the harvest season; he was never the sole rice trader in Karnatak. As I also suggest, it was not because the Nawab did not want to have a monopoly or that he respected the free markets. More likely, it was because the context of Karnatak's politics and the Coromandel mercantile world did not allow him to do so. As discussed, from the mid-eighteenth century, trade on the Coast was increasingly dominated by the EIC and British private traders, while many local South Asian mercantile castes, and even the Dutch and the French, who had actively participated in these markets in the past, gradually disappeared. The merchants who did survive or rose to prominence in the late eighteenth century were mainly those who collaborated with the EIC or British private traders, or those who were satisfied with only limited success. It was thus hardly possible for the Nawab, as a new trading player, to use coercive power to beat this formidable European entrepreneurial force. The political and military interdependence between the two parties also prevented the Nawab from taking any particularly harsh measures, such as a trade monopoly, to remove a market-share from British hands. So, the only choices for the Nawab in order to profit, as well as for other competitors, were either to compete "fairly" with the British Company and private traders by following the existing commercial rules—which were, in fact, being increasingly defined or dictated by the EIC—or to become one of their collaborators. The Nawab seems to have tried both methods at different times and through various trading activities. However, as the evidence shows in many subtle ways, by using combinations of methods and his different positions (as a merchant, as the ruler of Karnatak, and as a "friend" of the Company), the Nawab was able to

---

<sup>142</sup> Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 133-134.

gain significant trading privileges at the expense of both other competitors and the Company itself in the various markets.

Lastly, I would like to argue against previous historians and the way they have limited the Nawab's role to that of ruler, rather than merchant. The clearest example is Parthasarathi, who has discussed the conflict over the textile business between the Nawab and the EIC as a battle between two conceptions of authority that were derived from different political worlds. He believes that the rulers of South India did not coerce the weavers (and laborers in general) as it was not a legitimate use of power in South Asian rulership, while the EIC could do so because the Europeans had no similar moral obligation.<sup>143</sup> In order to support his argument, Parthasarathi used a similar source as I have, namely letters in which the Nawab refused the request of the Madras Governor to force the weavers to return to the territory they had left and resume their work. Parthasarathi also highlighted the tone of the Nawab's message and how it was similar to that of other official revenue regulations, such as those issued by Tipu Sultan of Mysore, which supposedly shows the sultan's gentleness and his desire to protect cultivators and producers.<sup>144</sup> However, the rhetoric of these two local rulers did not necessarily represent reality. An article of Kaveh Yazdani indicates signs of Tipu Sultan's uses of forced labor.<sup>145</sup> Also, I have shown that the Nawab of Karnatak could use coercive force just as much as the EIC to compel the weavers to work for him. He could also send soldiers to control the weavers and force them work for him. Yet, often, the Nawab instead chose to use soft measures, in deliberately contrast to the Company's brokers, something that can be seen as one of his strategies to gain the weavers' trust, cooperation, and eventually their labor, at the expense of the EIC. From another perspective, one may suppose that, in the late eighteenth century, the EIC might not have had or might not have wished to use as much coercive power towards the local laborers as is usually believed, so needed help from the local Nawab. As such, both the Nawab and the EIC were playing the same game under the same rules; there are no indications of ideological or political incommensurability between Europeans and South Asians here.

---

<sup>143</sup> Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 121, 148.

<sup>144</sup> Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 126-127.

<sup>145</sup> Kaveh Yazdani, "Foreign Relations and Semi-Modernization during the Reigns of Haidar 'Ali and Tipu Sultan," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, 3 (2018): 402-403.



## Chapter 8: Cultural Encounters

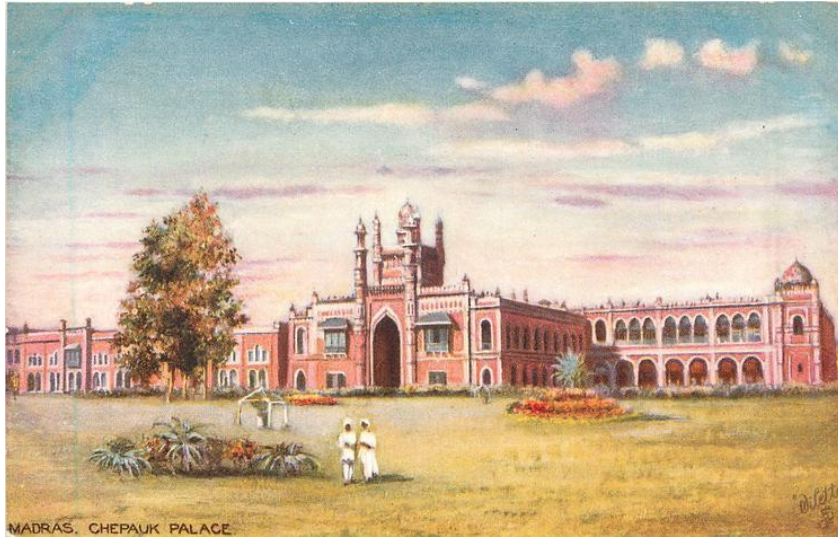
This chapter argues that, by embracing various European cultural elements in his microcosmos at Chepauk Palace, the Nawab was not only attempting to use them for practical purposes such as military support, political consultation, or facilitating trade; he also used them for ideological purposes, in his self-representation or self-reposition. The Nawab's main goals were to raise his honor and prestige in local society and to counter-balance the image of him as a British dependent. How and to what extent he was successful in these aims are the main questions to be explored in the following discussion. This chapter, which focuses on cultural encounters, has two main themes: his embrace of European material culture, and ritual and diplomatic exchanges. The discussion is divided into three sections. First, I will explore various aspects of European material culture that the Nawab adopted at his court—such as architecture, decorations, *objets d'art*, and customs and practices—and analyze their function from the Nawab's standpoint. Secondly, I will highlight the triangular relationship between the Nawab and the two rival British groups—the EIC and the representatives of the British king and government—who confronted one another at Chepauk Palace during the first half of the 1770s. These three parties were the main players whose interactions at the court during this time can provide us with vivid historical scenes of the “ritual battles” between East and West, or between South Asian elements and European ones. These tripartite ritual battles will be the main focus of the third section.

### 8.1 European Material Culture at the Nawab's Court

Chepauk Palace, the center of the Nawab's power in Madras, is a good starting point for our discussion. From the year 1758, the Nawab had repeatedly sent requests to the EIC to be allotted an area of Madras in or near Fort St. George where he could build his permanent residence, citing the convenience of conducting business with the EIC and his safety as the main reasons. Yet this was not accepted until the mid-1760s, because some of the EIC's officers initially objected to his wish, fearing that the Nawab, being so close, would have too much influence over the Madras Presidency. Eventually, however, the EIC's Directors granted approbation.<sup>1</sup> The Nawab then ordered a grand palace to be constructed right next to the EIC's headquarters. Chepauk Palace became the main residence of the Nawab and his descendants from 1767/1768 until 1855.

---

<sup>1</sup> IOR, E/4/861, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 5 Jul. 1758, 949; E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 4 Mar. 1767, 511-513.



*A painting of Chepauk Palace, printed on a postcard (1907)<sup>2</sup>*

This royal court was a two-story building facing the Madras seashore, immediately to the south of the EIC's Fort St George. It was famous for its lime mortar, red-brick walls, wide arches, and intricate carvings, and has been widely viewed by scholars as the very first building constructed in the Indo-Saracenic style.<sup>3</sup> This artistic term represents a synthesis of Indic and Islamic (Saracenic) architectural features, symbols, and materials, and the Gothic and Neo-Classical arts favored in Victorian Britain, which integrate Greco-Roman features such as columns and triangular pediments, all of which were successfully combined using the advanced engineering of Western Europe. Indo-Saracenic architecture was mainly developed by British architects in India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>4</sup> From its completion until the late nineteenth century, Chepauk Palace must have been through several restorations and renovations and, as far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no evidence of what the palace originally looked like. However, it is believed that it was the earliest attempt by a British engineer and architect to integrate “the dome and arches, the inlay and fretwork of the Mughals, with the spaciousness and the decorativeness of the Indian” and, therefore, the palace has been recognized as the genesis of Indo-Saracenic art, and its design would go on to have a great influence on many famous British Raj architects.<sup>5</sup> The name of the British engineer is still debated, being either Thomas Call or Paul Benfield,

---

<sup>2</sup> Raphael Tuck, “Chepauk Palace,” TuckDB Postcards, accessed 15 Jul. 2018: <http://www.tuckdb.org/postcards/84466>.

<sup>3</sup> M. Ramanathan, “The Majesty of Chepauk,” *Madras Musings* 19, 24, accessed 16 July 2018: <http://madrasmusings.com/Vol%2019%20No%2024/the-majesty-of-chepauk.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Samita Gupta, *Architecture and the Raj: Western Deccan, 1700-1900* (Delhi: BRPUB Corp, 1985), 18-29, 155-156.

<sup>5</sup> Subbiah Muthiah, *Tales of Old and New Madras: The Dalliance of Miss Mansell and 34 Other Stories of 350 Years* (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press, 1989), 72; Ramanathan, “The Majesty of Chepauk.”

both of whom had been EIC servants.<sup>6</sup> If, in its original form, Chepauk Palace was indeed the first building in this new hybrid style when it was built—or at least one of its earliest examples, as is widely believed—a hundred years before the style actually became popular and widespread, this would reflect just how unique and innovative this palace must have been at its unveiling. Its ingenuity also reflects, I would argue, a crucial aspect of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s self-representation. Chepauk was to be a royal palace, a principal symbolic representation of the Nawab and his family. Instead of choosing to build in either the classical Indo-Islamic style to celebrate his Mughal imperial background or the traditional Indic arts of South India to reflect his current prestige among the Hindu rulers, the Nawab chose this new hybrid style, from both civilizations, to represent himself. Furthermore, while we are not sure how far the original Chepauk Palace represented a hybrid of Islamic and Indic styles, certain facts about its production mirror the Nawab’s openness to European ideas and culture. Instead of employing indigenous servants—either Muslim or Hindu—the Nawab chose to entrust the design and construction of his new palace to a British engineer. Living in the heart of the European settlement and observing closely their formidable and expanding power in South Asia, something that was aided by their advanced technology, the Nawab incorporated European features into the building that was to represent the center of his power.

Inside the walls of Chepauk Palace, the enthusiasm of the Nawab for embracing European elements can be observed through many of his daily practices. As recorded by Paterson on first meeting the Nawab, the ruler had “a pretty good notion of English and spoke several words in that language very distinctly.”<sup>7</sup> All of his sons, who spent most of their lives in Madras, knew the language better than their father. It was common to see the sons of the Nawab visiting, hanging out with, and having public and private conversations with European noblemen and officers.<sup>8</sup> It was a regular habit of the Nawab, as noted in Paterson’s diary and the *Ruznama*, to follow and discuss news from Europe with his European secretaries and visitors regarding what was going on in Britain and other nations such as France, Turkey, and Russia. A favorite topic was his image and reputation in Britain.<sup>9</sup> It was also not rare to see the Nawab and his family learning and adopting some new European technology, manners, or lifestyle. Once, the Nawab used a telescope to view the ship he had sent to Mecca after it was

---

<sup>6</sup> Eaton, “The Art of Colonial Despotism,” 71.

<sup>7</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/1, DGP, Jul. 1770, 293.

<sup>8</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Jul. 1771, 299-300; E/379/8, DGP, Apr. 1774, 56-57.

<sup>9</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Feb. 1771, 182; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 2, 13, 20-22 May, 7 Jun., 19 Jul. 1773, bundle 68, 14 Jan. 1775.

reported that it had returned to Madras.<sup>10</sup> On another occasion, the Nawab and his courtiers gathered to observe the Western clocks just arriving from London.<sup>11</sup> And, one morning, Paterson went to the court and found the Nawab in “the chateau at the corner of his gardens” having breakfast with his family “in quite the English manner” with “tea, cakes, and several sorts of salading on table, a cloth laid and all on chairs.”<sup>12</sup>

Occasionally, Georgian-style parties were held in Chepauk Palace’s garden, and such events provide us with interesting examples of how Western entertainment was integrated into the local court. It was a custom that, during British national events such as the king’s or queen’s birthday, the British noblemen in Madras would celebrate them with grand entertainments similar to those they would have put on in London, possibly wishing to display Georgian prestige and grandeur to the locals. On one such occasion, celebrating the birthday of Queen Charlotte in 1770, a magnificent European-style temporary building was erected near Fort St. George to use as a grand ballroom. It is said to have been an immense construction made of spars and bamboo and measuring 120 feet by 160 feet. The front and back were decorated with nine gothic arches, and a European atmosphere was produced via European music, marching beats, food, wine, and fireworks. Seeing the splendid European architecture, the Nawab conceived the idea that, for the upcoming weddings of his two eldest sons, he would organize a similar, European-style ball to host the whole British settlement. The same temporary building was borrowed and re-placed in the Nawab’s garden, with a few small alterations. While, on one side, the initials G.R. referred to King George III, another side had the Nawab’s name and titles placed in its center and, on the right-hand side, his eldest son’s name and, on the left, his second son’s name, all in Persian characters. Entertainment was provided in the evening and the event was put on as close as possible to the queen’s birthday party, and the Nawab and all his family were at the ball.<sup>13</sup>

Chepauk Palace was filled with European furniture, portraits, miniatures, and “novelties” such as magic lanterns, telescopes, and clockwork toys, thanks to various European agents.<sup>14</sup> Such European adornments were not confined to Chepauk alone. When Paterson had the chance to visit another of the Nawab’s palaces, in Trichinopoly, he also found some of the galleries there decorated with European paintings of French royals and nobles and various pieces of European furniture. The main hall, where usually the local court

---

<sup>10</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 7 Jul. 1773.

<sup>11</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 67, *Ruznama*, 19 May 1774.

<sup>12</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 57.

<sup>13</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Jan. 1771, 161, Feb. 1771, 164-168.

<sup>14</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 169.

would be held, was furnished with full-length portraits of the king and queen of France. All the European items in the Trichinopoly palace were said to have been part of the spoils taken following the capture of Pondicherry in 1761, and which the Nawab had purchased from the EIC.<sup>15</sup> The French were always considered by the Nawab as an enemy, as they had played a role in the murder of his father. Hence, his use of French royal portraits and furniture in the palace was certainly not out of admiration for the Bourbon dynasty or to indicate good diplomatic relations. This suggests that European collections, an orientation towards European artistic tastes by the Nawab, and the European manners he embraced were not simply to show his admiration for or friendship with a specific European nation. Yet what, then, were his motives in such representations? Some examples of the Nawab's production of portraits of himself may provide some clarification.

During the Nawab's reign, many British painters traveled in or were dispatched by the EIC to Karnatak. At least two of them, Tilly Kettle (1768-1771) and George Willison (1774-1780), were hired by the Nawab at extraordinarily handsome rates to produce portraits of himself and his sons in the European style. These paintings were for both his private collections and as presents to the British king and noblemen.<sup>16</sup> His portraits, just like his palace, are said to be pioneering examples of Western art adopted and applied in South Asian courts.<sup>17</sup> One of the portraits—of him and his five sons—given as a present to the Madras Governor Charles Bouchier and exhibited in London in 1771, is believed to be the first portrait of South Asian monarchs to have appeared in Britain.<sup>18</sup> Some of these paintings have survived to the present day in the British Library, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the National Gallery of Scotland. One of them, the portrait by Willison that was sent by the EIC's Court of Directors to the Society of Artists' exhibition in 1777, is shown below as picture (1). This painting represents a full-length, larger than life-size Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan standing in a grand neoclassical durbar hall which is supposed to be in Chepauk Palace. The hall was decorated with a classical column and a baroque curtain. Wearing a ceremonial dagger and scimitar and flourishing a scarlet-sheathed sword, it seems to project the Nawab's majestic style and military prowess. In the background, local servants are giving him the

---

<sup>15</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 207-208; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 272.

<sup>16</sup> Eaton, "The Art of Colonial Despotism," 73, 77, 91.

<sup>17</sup> See a summary depiction of the portrait of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan by Tilly Kettle in: Victoria and Albert Museum's Collections, "Muhammad Ali Khan, Nawab of Arcot," Victoria and Albert Museum, last accessed 16 July 2018:

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O136746/muhammad-ali-khan-Nawab-of-painting-kettle-tilly/>

<sup>18</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 347.

*salaam*, while further outside the hall stands a regiment of sepoy, indicating the military cooperation between the Nawab and the EIC.<sup>19</sup>



According to Natasha Eaton, the Nawab's portraits by various European painters all have these same facets, which reflects the fact that the Nawab had little interest in the individual originality of these European artists. Instead, he wished the repetition of this image of him within these portraits to transform him into "an icon." This iconography was clearly borrowed from contemporaneous European monarchs, as can be perceived by comparing painting (1) with (2)-(4).<sup>20</sup> As Eaton goes on to argue, the likeness with the European counterparts

<sup>19</sup> Eaton, "The Art of Colonial Despotism," 73.

<sup>20</sup> (1) Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan by George Willison (1777). Current place of conservation: National Galleries of Scotland, digital file from: "Mohamed Ali Khan Walejah (1717-1795) Nawab of the Karnatak by George Willison," National Galleries of Scotland, last accessed 16 Jul. 2018: <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/38236/mohamed-ali-khan-walejah-1717-1795-Nawab-Karnatak>.

(2) Louis XV (r. 1715-1774) by Louis-Michel Van Loo (1707-1711). Current place of conservation: Bibliothèque Municipale de Versailles, digital file from: "Portrait en Pied de Louis XV," L'Histoire Par L'Image, last accessed 16 Jul. 2018: <https://www.histoire-image.org/fr/etudes/portrait-pied-louis-xv>.

mirrors the desire of the Nawab to demonstrate his importance by presenting himself as a world player on a par with European monarchs. Many of these portraits reflect the way he wanted to be seen by prominent Europeans, and by incorporating the European style—which was faultless in its production—the Nawab could be certain that the recipients would receive the political messages they carried correctly and easily.<sup>21</sup> As Susan Bayly also suggests, such displays of extravagant spending in artistic patronage were indispensable displays of power and kingship in pre-modern societies. In this light, paying twice the usual rate was not a sign of the Nawab’s ignorance or unawareness; rather, it was a deliberate sign of his generosity and high artistic taste. Moreover, the European painters who profited from the lavish distribution of the ruler’s patronage could be seen as his retainers.<sup>22</sup> I fully agree with these historians’ proposals and suggest, further, that the Nawab’s hidden political agenda—to show that he could be compared to other European kings through paintings and the patronage of artists—can help explain his enthusiastic embrace of other aspects of European culture. His palace was situated in a town governed by the British, he received many European visitors, and he made sure that he could not be viewed as inferior to his European counterparts in cultural refinement by both the European and South Asian populations of the town. Other Europeans—artists, architects, and engineers—who were hired by the Nawab for other projects may also be seen in this light, as his servants or protégés. Their presence at his court enhanced the Nawab’s standing as a patron and, as Eaton points out, it became a trend in Europe during the latter half of the eighteenth century for royals and nobles to embrace artistic elements of the Oriental World—Indian, Chinese, Turkish, Iranian, etc.—in their residences as a way of asserting and demonstrating their self-empowerment. The patronage of “exotic” arts became a vital manifestation of power, of multifaceted kingship, and of their immodest engagement with the world.<sup>23</sup> I argue that the Nawab was pursuing similar goals in his adoption of Occidental culture.

## 8.2 Triangle: Nawab, Company, and King

Whatever his critics—whether his contemporaries or later scholars—may have said regarding the Nawab’s policies in tightly linking his fate to that of the British people, the Nawab

---

(3) George III by Allan Ramsay (c. 1765). Current place of conservation: Art Gallery of South Australia, digital file from: “King George III in Coronation Robes by Allan Ramsay,” Google Cultural Institute, last accessed 16 Jul. 2018: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/king-george-iii-in-coronation-robos/vgGv1tsB1URdhg>.

(4) Catherine the Great of Russia by Alexander Roslin (c. 1777). Current place of conservation: The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, digital file from: “Portrait of Catherine II by Alexander Roslin,” The State Hermitage Museum, last accessed 16 Jul. 2018: <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+paintings/38686>.

<sup>21</sup> Eaton, “The Art of Colonial Despotism,” 73.

<sup>22</sup> Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 170-171.

<sup>23</sup> Eaton, “The Art of Colonial Despotism,” 67.

himself, as reflected in his chronicle *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, chose to justify his actions as “far-sightedness” and “rich and powerful commonsense.” The goodness of the British is described in the following example:

[the British] were celebrated for their virtue and fidelity, well-known for sincerity and friendship, famous for their qualities of justice and equity, firm in the organization of war and battle, bold in the field of battle and fighting, the pearl of wisdom and sagacity, faithful in their friendship [...], bound to and united with the people of Islam [...].<sup>24</sup>

However, notably, the court chronicler also put a great deal of effort into implanting in the mind of his audience—the chronicle’s readers—that it was more the Nawab who was the benefactor of the British than the other way around. As it suggests, the main reason the British Company continually supported him was its extreme gratitude for his benevolence towards it and, therefore, considered it a duty to return the favor. There are at least four occasions in the chronicle where it describes how, in the mid-1740s, the Walajah family helped save the EIC’s headquarters and the lives of its officers from a French siege and, after that, the Nawab consistently gave patronage to the British nation, helping it to become the most glorious power in South Asia, at the expense of the French.<sup>25</sup>

It is noteworthy that, although the Nawab praised the friendship of the British highly, his attempts to underline the distinction between the EIC and the British king should not be ignored, this clearly reflects how this local ruler positioned himself in their relationship. The chronicle accurately explains, in good detail, what the British East India Company was, how this economic institution had been formed, and how it rose from being a group of merchants to holding the exalted rank of ruler in South Asia, something that owed much to the kindness and energy of his family.<sup>26</sup> While presenting the EIC’s men as being of inferior social rank (as merchants) and the (former) dependents of his family, the Nawab also emphasized the close friendship between him and the British kings George II (r. 1727-1760) and George III (r. 1760-1820). At several points, the chronicle emphasizes the strength of the friendship and love between the Nawab and the British monarchs. The Nawab called one British king, supposedly George III, “our [the Nawab’s] brother dear as life” and mentioned that “the bond

---

<sup>24</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 104.

<sup>25</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 104-106, 115-124; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 51.

<sup>26</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 104; see also 97-106.

of union between them reached such a limit that the result was a brotherly treaty.”<sup>27</sup> It was also claimed that the British king gave his word that: “As long as our authority over England and the administration of Ḥaḍrat-i-A‘lā [the Nawab] in the Carnatic continues generation after generation, the friendship and union between the two powers will be permanent and firm.”<sup>28</sup> According to Francis Buckler, in the context of Islamic courts, calling someone a brother often meant that brother was inferior or subordinate.<sup>29</sup> However, it may be going too far to claim that the Nawab viewed the British king as his inferior. On the contrary, the chronicle referred to the British king by the Persian term *padshah*, which the populations and subordinate rulers of South Asia used for the Mughals. In this light, it indicates that the Nawab saw the British king as one such superior a suzerain. Receiving brotherly love and protection from a greater power could certainly elevate the Nawab’s status on the inter-regional stage, in the same way that the honors and acknowledgements from the Mughal emperors and Ottoman sultans he received also did. His relationship with and the acknowledgement from the British monarch would also have been increasingly relevant within local South Asian contexts in the second half of eighteenth century, at the expense of Mughal prestige.

The above is an idealized depiction of the triangular relationship between the Nawab, the EIC, and the British king that the local ruler wanted the world to see. It can be viewed as his primary means of dealing with the representatives of these two institutions at his court. We will see how each of the two parties was used by the Nawab in order to achieve his purposes. Prior to that, some background on British politics and the beginnings of the relationship triangle between the Nawab, the EIC, and the British king, will be provided.

In the late 1760s, the issue of “nabobs” became a hot topic, one that was extremely important within British politics. “Nabob” was a corruption of the word “Nawab,” a Mughal title for a regional ruler. But it was used in Britain at that time in another way, to describe some of their own countrymen, mostly EIC employees, who had returned from South Asia with extraordinary fortunes. In the motherland, Indian wealth helped these *nouveaux-riches* to enter elite society and national politics. The numbers and influence of the nabob MPs rose rapidly in Britain in the 1760s, causing widespread envy and disgust among the old nobility on the national political stage, and turning many of them into fierce opponents of the EIC.

---

<sup>27</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, part II*, 170; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, part I*, 106.

<sup>28</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, part I*, 124.

<sup>29</sup> Francis W. Buckler, “The Oriental Despot,” in *Legitimacy and Symbols: The South Asian Writings of F.W. Buckler*, ed. Michael N. Pearson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1985), 183.

Many old elite groups or classes then attempted to control the Company and gain a share of the South Asian wealth. As a result of their efforts, several special committees were established to investigate how the British nabobs had made their fortunes in South Asia and revealed them to the public. Whatever the reality was, in the early 1770s, the British public was presented with various allegations of South Asians being tortured to open their treasure and local rulers dethroned and murdered by EIC servants. Soon, the EIC and its officers became a type of monster in British public opinion, and sympathy was with the local rulers who were believed to have been deceived by the Company in the name of the British nation. This was followed by a public outcry for the king and government to intervene in order to stop such acts of despotism by the Company's servants in South Asia. However, there was a wide range of ideas regarding how this should be done. For example, the two main political parties in Britain, Tory and Whig, proposed different degrees of government intervention. The more moderate Tories wanted to give the British Parliament more control over the Company through the imposition of new laws and regulations. On the other hand, Whig supporters sought a complete end to the Company's role in South Asia and the transfer of all its business and possessions to the government. Yet, behind this conflict were larger ideological clashes. The EIC had been a national symbol of how British private property was protected by law. Hence, any infringement of its rights could risk the British government and the king being accused of stepping on private rights by the Company's supporters and other private sector groups, leading to a constitutional crisis. The British governments who were elected during this period thus needed to step very cautiously.<sup>30</sup>

One concrete outcome to the enquiry, the clamors in the press, the ministerial conspiracies, and the responses from the Company's members and supporters, was the Regulating Act of 1773, passed by the Tory government under Lord Frederick North. It was a first step, albeit not an extreme one, by the British government in controlling the EIC. Previously, the EIC in South Asia had been administered by three independent "Presidencies"—Bengal, Madras, and Bombay—each of which had its own governor and council, all equally under the supervision of the Court of Directors in London. By the Act of 1773, the Presidency of Bengal was elevated to the position of Supreme Council of the EIC administration in South Asia, superior to Madras and Bombay. The Governor of Bengal thus became the EIC Governor-General of India. However, three of the five members of the Supreme Council, who were to vote on every decision, would be appointed by the British

---

<sup>30</sup> James, *Raj*, 45-51.

government. Furthermore, although the Court of Directors maintained the right to issue the Company's directives, all such instructions had to be submitted for governmental approval. One crucial compromise that the government gave the EIC and its supporters was that it allowed Warren Hastings, a long-standing and prominent Company servant, to be the first Governor-General. The appointment of Hastings sought to prevent the fierce protests which could have erupted by members of the EIC if the government had appointed one of its own people or an outsider to such a crucial position.<sup>31</sup>

The intervention of the British government in Indian affairs, which began with the Regulating Act of 1773, would eventually lead to the dissolution of the EIC and the establishment of the British Raj in the following century. One point I would like to make here is that Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan played a significant role in allowing this intervention by the British government. However, it is not my aim to simply restate the assumptions of other historians, such as Rajayyan and Gurney, who have interpreted the Nawab as having unwisely facilitated the process of British imperial expansion. Instead, I argue, the Nawab had no intention of assisting the British crown to expand its power over the Company. Neither he nor British contemporaries could have foreseen at the time that their actions would be part of the larger subsequent process of British imperialism. Within their own time and context, the Nawab and the various British factions who were involved each had their own immediate aims. For the Nawab, his main wish was to make direct diplomatic contact with the British king and government, bypassing the EIC. Prior to this, contact between the British state and the South Asian polities had generally been monopolized by the EIC, with the exception of some British private traders and adventurers. Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan was, in fact, the first South Asian ruler to successfully break the hold that the EIC had. Ever since 1765, or even earlier, the Nawab had been trying to get direct access to the British king, as can be seen from a complaint by the EIC's Directors over this issue:

It is extremely improper for the Nabob to convey any letters to the King through other channel than our Governor and Council. [...] This observation arises upon his addressing His Majesty Colonel Monson a copy of which letter have sent us by the Deptford. [...] We shall depend upon your taking the proper care to prevent a repetition of it in future.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Turnbull, *Warren Hastings*, 71-72.

<sup>32</sup> IOR, E/4/863, DM, Courts of Directors to Madras, 4 Jul. 1765, 65-66.

Evidently, though, despite receiving direct orders from its superiors, the Madras Presidency failed to stop the Nawab. In March 1767, a Scotsman and adventurer named John Macpherson sailed for South Asia as a purser on a ship to South Asia. Landing in Madras, like many other Europeans seeking their fortune in South Asia, Macpherson found his way into the service of the local ruler of Karnatak.<sup>33</sup> The meeting between the Nawab and the Scot was private and nobody in the EIC knew it had taken place until its consequences bore fruit a few years later. Nothing is known of the conversation between the two of them nor of what specific results the Nawab was expecting from this private deal. However, the next part of the story, which occurred in November 1768, is well known. When Macpherson returned to Britain, he claimed he was an agent of the Karnatak Nawab, and approached the Prime Minister of England, the Duke of Grafton, with messages regarding the ill-treatment of the Nawab of Karnatak by the EIC's servants. He alleged that the EIC's officers in Madras used various tactics to extort money from the Nawab. Macpherson's arrival came at exactly the same time that the British government's jealousies over the Company's "nabobs" were at their peak and it was keenly looking for legitimate reasons to intervene in the EIC's affairs. Therefore, the Nawab of Karnatak had given them the perfect excuse. Having been provided with words from the Nawab's "secret" envoy, Macpherson, the British government immediately dispatched the Royal Navy commodore Sir John Lindsay to South Asia to act as the "British king's minister"—the king's representative extraordinary with plenipotentiary power—offering the Karnatak Nawab the British crown's friendship and protection and investigating corruption in the EIC in Madras.<sup>34</sup> The unexpected arrival of Sir John with his commission in late 1770 aroused strong protests from EIC members. In Madras, the Company's officers and the king's staff were in conflict from the very beginning. As a result, in 1771, Sir John was called back to Britain and replaced by the Royal Navy admiral Sir Robert Hartland, the second British king's minister, who had higher prestige and better-defined authority. He stayed in Madras until 1774. Through the king's representatives and other private adventurers, from the beginning of the 1770s the Nawab had regular and direct contact, and made friends, with many prominent British statesmen, outside the EIC's control. In 1774, Paterson mentioned some letters that the Nawab had prepared to send on a ship to Britain. Among the recipients were King George III and Queen Charlotte of Britain, Lord Frederick North (the British Prime Minister, 1770-1782), Lord Rockford (the Secretary of the State, 1770-1775), the Duke of Grafton (the British Prime Minister, 1768-1770), and Sir John

---

<sup>33</sup> Turnbull, *Warren Hastings*, 181.

<sup>34</sup> Fisher, *The Politics of the British Annexation of India*, 99-100.

Lindsay (of the Royal Navy, the first king's minister to India). He also sent letters to various senior EIC officers, most of whom had once been in Madras, such as Robert Clive, General Eyre Coote, George Pigot, Laurence Sullivan, Colonel Donald Campbell, and Charles Campbell, etc. Clive, Pigot, and Coote had returned from South Asia and at the time sat in the House of Commons as MPs. Sullivan had been an MP and was, at the time, on the EIC's Court of Directors and one of the most influential figures in the Company. The Campbells, meanwhile, were important EIC military commanders.<sup>35</sup>

### **8.3 Tripartite Ritual Battles**

It is not clear whether and to what extent the Nawab knew of the conflict that was brewing between the Company and the British government before he invited the latter onto the platform of Madras-Karnatak politics; it is possible that he only learned of it upon seeing the situation following the arrival of the king's ministers in Madras. Whatever the case, the Nawab had achieved a significant coup by escalating the level of his diplomatic relations with the British to the highest rank, i.e. between the two heads of state. This was not the first time that royal ambassadors from the British kings had been sent to South Asia, but, in the past, the British royal ambassadors had only been sent to the imperial court; for instance, Thomas Roe had been sent to Emperor Jahangir (1615-1619) and William Norris to Aurangzeb (1699-1702). On the other hand, regional courts had usually only received officers of the Company (who were basically merchants) or even South Asian brokers. Moreover, the previous royal ambassadors' visits had been organized by the Company, so they had essentially been sent by it, not directly on behalf of the British king.<sup>36</sup> So the Nawab's success was unprecedented and superior to anything achieved by other regional rulers of his rank. I would also argue that the Nawab was not only able to bring the British king and government into his micro-cosmos, but throughout the first half of the 1770s the Nawab sought to achieve the greatest possible advantage for himself from the presence and rivalry of the two British groups. Proof will be further provided by examining various diplomatic ceremonies and related entertainments that occurred at Chepauk Palace during that period, in which these three parties—the Nawab's court, the EIC's officers, and the king's ministers—were the main players.

---

<sup>35</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/9, DGP, Oct. 1774, 186.

<sup>36</sup> Van Meersbergen, "Ethnography and Encounter," 143, 146.

## **Khilat, Nadhr, and Durbar in the Reception of the British King's Letters**

Before discussing East-West cultural encounters in the diplomatic ceremonies and entertainments at Chepauk Palace, I would like to introduce three principal rituals or practices that were usually included in any ceremony at a Perso-Islamic court, and which will play significant roles in our debate. First is the granting of khilat or the ceremonial “robe of honor” from a superior to his servants as a symbolic expression of rewards, compliments, appointments, and promotions. Through this, physical contact was established through clothing; the grantor was including the receiver within his own person through the medium of his cloth; it was the public establishment or confirmation of a patron-client relationship. In other words, the acceptance of the robe was an act of homage and an acknowledgement of the superiority or suzerainty of the donor, and the refusal to receive such a gift was a declaration of independence or treason vis-à-vis the master. But, at the same time, the reception of the robe also distinguished the receiver from the common people and enhanced his status among his noble peers. As well as valuable clothing, the gift could also be other body decorations, such as a necklace or dagger, and to receive something that the ruler actually used, perhaps from his own wardrobe, would be the highest honor for the receiver.

Second was the offer of nadhr. Nadhr literally means a vow or dedication (giving something to the receiver), and it was expressed symbolically through various kinds of gifts, such as small gold or silver coins, a small amount of soil, or even a daughter in marriage. The ritual of nadhr was the counterpoint of khilat, as the giver who presented nadhr was displaying his acknowledgement of the recipient as “the source of all his wealth and being”,<sup>37</sup> in other words, nadhr was presented from an inferior to a superior or when the giver wished to show deference to the receiver. Both the granting of khilat and the offering of nadhr were customary at all levels of the Mughal imperial hierarchy, meaning that every royal and officeholder participated in the rituals of giving to his masters and receiving from his subordinates at various times.

Thirdly, the *darbar* (or *darbar*) refers to the presence or attendance of servants at the darbar—the court of a ruler—and it was a duty of a vassal to show himself whenever he was summoned so as to prove his loyalty to the ruler. On the other hand, it was a quality that a

---

<sup>37</sup> Buckler, “The Oriental Despot,” 181.

ruler required to be able to summon his servants to his durbar. The sharing of a meal with the ruler was also part of this practice.<sup>38</sup>

As is clear from various documents, the Nawab was always extremely pleased to receive signs of friendship and favor from the monarchs of Britain. He loved to publicly discuss the contents of the letters that they wrote to him with his nobles and foreign visitors, and made sure that they were written in the court's diary and chronicle as permanent testimony to his dignity and to reach as broad an audience as possible.<sup>39</sup> The events surrounding the delivery of these letters received the Nawab's attention no less than did the contents themselves. Many details of the special events that occurred during the years 1770-1773 were recorded in Paterson's diary, as he had the chance to participate in and eventually took a central role in organizing them. The *Ruznama* also occasionally provides some depictions of these events. In what follows, I summarize the details of several of such ceremonies and the evening entertainment: deliveries of the king of Britain's letters by the two king's ministers (August 1770, September 1771, March 1772, April 1773) and the granting of the Order of Bath to Sir John Lindsay, the first king's minister (February 1771). Through these events, the reader will gain a general idea of what happened in Madras and Chepauk Palace in those days.

One indispensable part of the ceremony was a display of military might and military cooperation between the Nawab and the British. A large military force was summoned to take part in processions. It was made up of the Nawab's cavalry, the battalions of the Nawab-EIC joint force, the marines of the British royal squadron under the king's ministers, and the Company's ships. The ships were anchored opposite the broad walk that led from Chepauk Palace to the sea, and the Nawab's flags, which were on the king's minister's ship, were to be hoisted on the mizzen topmast as a compliment to the local ruler. In the morning, the "four khans"—which seems to refer to the four highest ministers of the Karnatak court—would be sent to the residence of the king's minister with palanquins to conduct him and his escort to the palace. Royal letters were placed on a cushion which was richly laced and fringed, and carried by the secretary of the king's minister. The Nawab's diwan was at the head of this deputation, leading the group to meet the grand procession that was waiting at the gate of Fort St. George. Here, the Nawab's elephants, richly dressed, waited to carry the presents from the king of Britain. The procession was surrounded by military forces. There were

---

<sup>38</sup> Buckler, "The Oriental Despot," 178-182; Van Meersbergen, "Ethnography and Encounter," 174-177.

<sup>39</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 30 Apr. and 1 May 1773; bundle 67, 15 Jul. 1774; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 250-252.

hundreds of dancing girls and musicians, some on foot and some on bullocks, playing various instruments including tom-toms, kettle drums, horns, trumpets, flutes, clarinets, and cymbals. As the parade proceeded, it was met by one of the Karnatak royal family, who was waiting on horseback. This prince dismounted, and the king's minister came out of his palanquin, whereupon they embraced each other. The procession then resumed, and the prince rode by the side of the king's minister's palanquin. The whole road, from the Madras Governor's Garden House to Chepauk Palace, was lined with sepoy, drawn up on both sides and forming a lane through which the procession passed. At one point, the parade would halt in order to receive salutes from the military officers, and the drums beat a march in the European military style. At another place, the procession stopped again, where more members of the Nawab's party, of higher rank than the previous ones (either the Nawab's brothers or eldest sons), were waiting. Then, the princes of the state directed the king's minister to the palace, where the Nawab was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs to lead him into the court hall.

The Nawab was very richly dressed on these occasions. He had jewels on his head that were bound to a turban, from which a fine feather sprung up on one side. His body was also decorated with jewels and several strings of very fine pearls, along with a necklace with a large square diamond pendant. The court hall was covered with handsome carpets, in the middle of which was the *musnud*, a royal seat in the Indo-Persian style. However, the Nawab did not sit on the musnud on such a day but stood before it all through the ceremony, after which he would sit on a chair in the European manner, in the same way as did his guests. The Karnatak court hall was filled with an immense number of people. Every royal family member and officer was summoned to the durbar to bear testimony to the significance of the event. In the presence of all the indigenous and European noblemen, who were standing round in a circle, the king's minister pulled off his hat to deliver letters from the king and queen of Britain to the Nawab, and words of friendship were passed between the two of them. The Nawab received the letters with a great show of respect before the indispensable step of opening and reading them aloud publicly. The secretary of the king's minister read the English version, after which a local official read the translation in Persian to a very crowded durbar. Another essential part of the ceremony was the royal salute, which followed the European military custom. After the letters were read out, the Nawab's gun would fire the royal salute for the British king. This would be followed by a 21-gun salute—the number of shots representing the sovereign or head of state—from the king of Britain's ship for the

Nawab of Karnatak, followed by more salutes from other ships and Fort St. George. During the gun salutes, the local custom of offering nadhr to the Nawab would be performed by everyone assembled, except for the king's minister, who represented the king of Britain. After the ceremony in the hall was finished, the Nawab's regiment of horses assembled in the middle of the garden to perform an exercise of evolutions and firing, reflecting once again that the Nawab paid particular attention to exhibiting his military prowess to the world on such occasions. Thereafter, a luxury European-style lunch was prepared at the court. All throughout, the highest praise, along with gun-salutes, was exchanged between the king and queen of Britain—through their representative—and each of the Nawab's family members. On one such occasion, the Nawab insisted he wanted to toast the king's minister and ordered nineteen guns to fire from his own field-pieces to honor the royal envoy, something the latter was not expecting. Such an occurrence demonstrates that the Nawab knew European manners extremely well and was accustomed to using them to please his honored guests. The lunch ceremony ended with a local custom whereby the Nawab presented everyone with a garland of flowers, putting them around the neck of those sitting close to him himself and, at the same time, giving everyone betel and rose-water. In the evening, Chepauk Palace and its garden were brightly lit for a European-style dinner, supper, ball, and entertainments, such as traditional dancing and fireworks. All the English noblemen, including the king's minister's attendants and the Company's high-ranking officers, were invited to celebrate the special occasion, and the party again became a means by which everyone involved could exchange compliments and give each other dignity and honors.<sup>40</sup>

As well as the reception of the king's letters, in the period 1770-1773 there was another important ritual relating to the British royal house that took place in Chepauk Palace whose details are worth discussing here: the granting of the Order of Bath. In February 1771, a ship from Britain arrived in Madras with a decree from King George III to promote Sir John Lindsay, the first king's minister to India, to the fourth most senior order of British chivalry—known as “the Most Honorable Order of Bath”—and also to grant some royal ensigns to General Eyre Coote, a high-ranking British soldier in the EIC's army. This filled the Nawab with excitement because he was informed that he had been chosen by the king of Britain to invest the two British servants with these honors. He was “very inquisitive” to know how the right that had been conferred on him by King George III would do honor to himself, and whether this showed he was particularly distinguished in the eyes of the British

---

<sup>40</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1770, 17-29; E/379/3, Sep. 1771, 3-4, Mar. 1772, 166-167; E/379/5, DGP, Apr. 1773, 107-108.

king. As Paterson explained to the Nawab, when the British monarch chose to confer such an honor on any of his officials resident at a foreign court, it was customary for the sovereign prince at whose court that official lived to be the representative of the king. As such, the local ruler—in this case the Nawab—represented the king of Britain himself, the sovereign of the Order of Bath. Sir John Lindsay was appointed as the king’s minister to all the princes of South Asia. But Paterson went further, intending to please the Nawab, by saying: “His Majesty the King of Great Britain has made choice of your Highness in preference to them all on this occasion to represent his person” and “to perform a ceremony which is done by His Majesty alone in his own dominions,” and as the Nawab of Karnatak he was particularly chosen; “had it so happened that Sir John had been at Shah Allum’s Durbar at that time; even the Emperor of Hindustan could not have performed the ceremony.”<sup>41</sup>

After learning all the details of the ritual and being assured that this mission from the king of Britain would increase his dignity and fame, the British-Christian ceremony of knighthood was held at Chepauk Palace, following the rules set down by the British government in London. However, some additions were proffered by the Nawab; he wished to present Sir John with a dress (a suit of cloth in the European fashion) and some indigenous honors and titles on this occasion “as it was the custom of the country.”<sup>42</sup> Evidently, this referred to the ceremonial granting of khilat in the Indo-Persian tradition, from a ruler to his subject. Sir John approved the Nawab’s offer with pleasure, as he probably saw that such honors from the local ruler would increase his own standing. On the other hand, the Nawab’s intention seems not only to have been to please the king’s minister, since, with these offers, he was able to make the honorable king of Britain’s minister make a significant symbolic gesture of submission towards him. All the hidden meanings in the khilat ritual could easily be understood by the locals. The case of Sir John was not unique as regards how the British were used in this way at the Nawab’s court. The *Tuzak-i Walajah* and the *Ruznama*, which were aimed directly at local audiences, emphasize that the Nawab frequently bestowed presents of khilat, horses, and swords on senior EIC officers, such as Stringer Lawrence (the first Commander-in-Chief of the EIC in India), George Pigot (the Madras Governor, 1755-1763), and General Joseph Smith (Madras Commander-in-Chief) as reward for their service in wars. Pigot, for example, was also bestowed a mansab of 7,000, a *nawbat* (drum), and a palanquin, all of which were the dignitaries received by a mansabdar in the Mughal

---

<sup>41</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Feb. 1771, 183-184.

<sup>42</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Feb. 1771, 185, Mar. 1771, 210-212.

tradition.<sup>43</sup> From the South Asian standpoint, in receiving them, these senior British officers were showing their submission to the Nawab's authority and becoming integrated into his micro-cosmos as retainers.

During the preparations for the Order of Bath ritual, the Nawab also earnestly investigated the British royal ensigns from King George that were to be granted to Sir John Lindsay and General Eyre Coote. The ensigns of Sir John—collar, ribband, and star—to be used in the ceremony were shown to him, and it was recorded that the Nawab was extremely pleased with them and tried them all on, before then hinting to the secretary of the king's minister that he would not mind if the king of Britain also sent him some of these ensigns. He requested that the ensigns of Coote be brought to him, too, saying: "If the king has ordered me to invest him, he should receive them from my hands alone," and "it will be a great honour to me and will look well amongst the people here."<sup>44</sup>

The above accounts reveal some significant aspects of East-West cultural encounters at the Nawab's court. First, they reveal how the local and European codes of honor, rituals, customs, and ideologies could be mixed in this South Asian court as long as they were considered by both parties as amplifying both the ceremony and their own prestige. During one such event, the streets of Madras and the "darbar" were full of both local and European nobles, while the Indo-Islamic elements of nadhr, khilat, betal, rose-water, richly-dressed elephants, and local Indic music were mixed with Christian rituals of knighthood, Western-style royal salutes, toasting, music, balls, etc. Next, the evidence suggests that the Nawab was not only quick to understand and grasp the western codes of honor, he was also often able to use them smoothly and fluently as diplomatic tools with which to please his foreign guests and serve his own interests in the local context by adding some commensurable indigenous codes. One thing that should also be noted here is that what was always of ultimate concern to the Nawab in these diplomatic exchanges and his embrace of various European elements into his micro-cosmos was not how to please the British but how to "look well amongst the people here."<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 105; Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part II*, 173, 248; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 15 Nov. 1773.

<sup>44</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Feb. 1771, 183, 186.

<sup>45</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Feb. 1771, 183, 186.

## Theatres of Honor: Conflict and Competition for “The First Place”

As is shown in the records, all the ceremonies and entertainments that were related to the British were of great importance to the Nawab. He paid attention to every minute detail, including the furniture, food, and decorations in the palace, the way his servants should behave, and even the dress of the attendants. Wine was purchased from European ships for the drinks of European officers. Every possible enquiry was made regarding what had been customary on previous occasions to make sure that no mistake was made by doing either too much or too little.<sup>46</sup> Any deviation from the usual customs had to be discussed and consent given by both the Nawab and the British groups concerned. As discussed earlier, the Nawab was keen to add new features if it was considered that they would improve the sanctity of the ritual and his dignity. One more example can be given. For the reception of the king’s letter in March 1772, it was agreed that a pair of state British Jacks from the Madras Governor, as well as a fringed parasol given to the Nawab by the Mughal emperor as a mark of high rank “which had never attended on any such occasion before,” should be included in the morning procession.<sup>47</sup> However, any proposed reduction in the number of important elements was usually rejected, even when there were practical reasons for so doing. For example, in April 1773, after many such ceremonies related to the delivery of the king’s letters, the British proposed shortening the procession route and cutting out the country music “to give less trouble and to make it less tiresome.”<sup>48</sup> The Nawab, however, insisted on continuing as usual.

The Nawab’s and his retainers’ desire to increase his prestige by integrating various Eastern codes of honor were not always permitted by his European counterparts. Sometimes, such issues led to serious conflict. One such example occurred between the Nawab and the second king’s minister, Sir Robert Hartland, over the offering of nadhr. As mentioned earlier, the offering of nadhr was usually part of the delivery of the king of Britain’s letters to the Karnatak court. However, there had been an agreement between the Nawab and the party of Sir Robert that every participant, both European and local, would offer nadhr to the Nawab except the king’s minister himself, who was at that moment representing the king of Britain and, therefore, could not pay homage to others. However, this exception must have proved unpopular with the Nawab’s faction since, during one such event in April 1773, the princes Modal al-Mulk and Seif al-Mulk, the second and third sons of the Nawab, tried to challenge the custom. Using their familiarity with the king’s minister, they took hold of Sir Robert’s

---

<sup>46</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 1 May and 3 Jun. 1773; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1770, 19-20.

<sup>47</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Mar. 1772, 166-167.

<sup>48</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Apr. 1773, 105.

hands and urged him: “you present nazir [i.e.nadhr], you present nazir,” at the same time putting a few rupees in a handkerchief and forcing it into his hands.<sup>49</sup> Paterson, at that time secretary to both the king’s minister and the Nawab, tried to stop Sir Robert from such action, but the situation forced the latter to go along with it and the Nawab thus received his nadhr. The two young princes probably wanted to enhance their father’s honor and did not expect it to cause a significant reaction from the British. Yet the issue was more serious than they seem to have presumed, and the dispute continued for days after.

Prince Modal al-Mulk justified his actions and convinced Sir Robert to follow this local custom in future by arguing that previous high-ranking British officers, including the first king’s minister, Sir John, all used to give nadhr to the Nawab. Paterson responded that these other officers were not the representative of His Majesty, the king of Britain, who should not pay such a compliment to anyone on earth. Regarding Sir John, he had given nadhr on only one exceptional occasion, when he was invested with the Order of Bath by the Nawab, at which time the Nawab was representing the British king. In support of the local princes’ action, Venkatachalam, the Nawab’s Brahmin counselor, proposed that Sir Robert have a double identity on this one occasion. As the Brahmin suggested, as soon as Sir Robert had delivered the royal letter, he could cease to be the king’s minister and give nadhr simply as a British admiral. This proposal, and the local politics behind it, left Paterson bewildered. The Nawab tried to explain to Paterson that the nadhr implied no inferiority because one king could give it to another. However, Paterson was not convinced by this as he had researched the practice from other sources and found a reference in a record of the French Company that implied that nadhr was tribute offered by those subordinate to the prince: “Le Nazi reste un homage, qu’on accompagne d’un tribute de roupies d’or. Les Indiens offrent ce tribute a leurs Princes dans des jours de fêtes et de cérémonies!”<sup>50</sup> Eventually, Paterson, seeking a compromise, said to the Nawab that, if he believed it essential to his honor, he would ask the king’s minister to write to the British government to ask permission to do so in the future. However, such debates caused the Nawab great unease. He was afraid that Paterson and the king’s minister, the principal channels through which he could send messages to the British government, would harbor resentment towards him that would have negative consequences for his reputation in Britain. Eventually, the Nawab decided to attempt a conciliation, concluding that he would, from then on, leave it to Paterson to ensure that neither the honor

---

<sup>49</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Apr. 1773, 107.

<sup>50</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Apr. 1773, 113.

of the Nawab of Karnatak nor that of the king of Britain would suffer. However, he insisted that the episode be entirely forgotten and not mentioned in any letter or report.<sup>51</sup>

The Brahmin Venkatachalam's suggestion to the British king's minister, that he consider having a double identity, at one point being the royal representative and another himself—a British admiral—is worth paying particular attention to here. This may help in the ongoing debate within the recent work of Van Meersbergen regarding how one should interpret or perceive the meaning of receiving khilat, as well as other symbolic gifts, in early modern diplomatic exchanges. According to Van Meersbergen, the normative meaning of receiving khilat, first given by Buckler—which is solely about the recipient's acknowledgement of the supreme authority of the donor and the recipient's becoming a servant of the donor through this ritual—could not have been the case in the context of royal representatives of another king. Van Meersbergen thus does not fully agree with Pete Emme and Jos Gommans, who to some extent have followed Buckler, stating that during diplomatic exchanges between VOC envoys and the Persian court, “[b]y wearing such a robe of honour [...] without [the Dutch] noticing the VOC had thus become a subject of the Persian Shah!”<sup>52</sup> In other words, the receiving of a robe by a “foreign” officer or envoy could be interpreted in ways other than simply the submission of one sovereign to another. One historian who has tried to solve this problem, Stewart Gordon, suggests that multiplicity of meanings of the practice and the variety of contexts in which it occurred should be considered; thus, in a reciprocal exchange between two sovereigns, strict meaning of incorporation should not be applied.<sup>53</sup> However, Van Meersbergen also does not agree with Gordon's interpretation, and continues to incline towards Buckler's, Emme's, and Gommans's view of incorporation, albeit with some convincing modifications. First of all, when a royal ambassador or Company agents accepted the khilat, it was not “without noticing.” Second, it was not “the VOC” as a whole (or their kings, in other cases) who became “a subject of Persian Shah.” The seventeenth-century foreign envoys in Van Meersbergen's studies were fully aware of the significance of their acts and the meaning of the practices. They accepted being symbolically incorporated into the ruler's patronage network, which in practice implied they would receive his protection for the duration of their stay in his domain and formally pledged to remain the ruler's faithful servants in exchange for achieving what they had set out to in their missions: cultivating their relationship with the ruler, personal advancement, or trading privileges.

---

<sup>51</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Apr. 1773, 107-114.

<sup>52</sup> Van Meersbergen, “Ethnography and Encounter,” 178.

<sup>53</sup> Van Meersbergen, “Ethnography and Encounter,” 178-179. See also: Stewart Gordon, *Robes of Honour: Khil'at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2, 9-10, 21-22.

More importantly, this ritual rarely led to problems for them, mainly because they understood fully that the ceremony signified the establishment of “personal allegiance” and not a claim of sovereignty over the Company or the king they served. In other words, it was a personal relationship, one that did not compromise their overlord’s authority.<sup>54</sup> The viewpoint of South Asians, such as Venkatachalam, regarding nadhr offerings, described above, confirms and supplements the perspectives of the European agents towards the gift-giving rituals as presented by Van Meersbergen. What the Karnatak elites expected from the European participants in such rituals was an expression of “personal allegiance.” The Nawab’s aim was not to jeopardize the dignity of the British king or incorporate the latter into his suzerainty, but his target was the person of Sir Robert. If that British who was both the Royal ambassador and Royal Navy accepted his suzerainty, then other British agents in Madras, especially those of the EIC, who were merely merchants, had no right to deny the Nawab’s overlordship; the Nawab would thus be perceived, throughout society, as the overlord of all the British in Madras.

There were other issues, similar to the incident above, that could not be seen as “unintentional” mistakes resulting from different cultural ideas or traditions, and which frequently occurred during these ceremonies and entertainments at Chepauk Palace. These could be caused by the British faction just as easily as by the Nawab. I would suggest that these cultural “clashes” were often deliberately concocted by one group as tools to insult and lessen the greatness of their “rivals.” The ceremonial events could be seen, metaphorically, as theatres or battlefields in the competition for honor, prestige, and dignity. A prime example occurred during the reception of the first British king’s letter from Sir John Lindsay. As mentioned earlier, the arrival of the first king’s minister in August 1770 was a shock, and his authority was unacceptable to the Company’s people. To protest against both the king’s minister and the Nawab, who had played a crucial role in his posting there, the Madras Governor declared that the EIC would not participate in this ceremonial event. Such a rejection by the Company’s people would, naturally, risk bringing dishonor on both the king’s minister and the Nawab in the eyes of the public. In order to not lose face, the king’s minister and secretary offered the Nawab a simple solution: the royal letter could simply be delivered to him in private. This clearly demonstrates that the king’s minister’s party was too new to understand the mind of the Nawab and the real function of both the British royal’s friendship and the various related ceremonies within the local context. However, they soon

---

<sup>54</sup> Van Meersbergen, “Ethnography and Encounter,” 179, 181.

learned. In many subtle ways, the Nawab made the king's people understand clearly that he would in no way be happy with a private ritual. He wanted to be presented with the royal letters in a public ceremony because he knew full well that accounts of those letters "would be written everywhere and talked of all over the country; and the more show and parade made about this business, it would make the greater noise and would be the more for his honor."<sup>55</sup> Despite his declaration to the British minister that his wish was, as far as possible, to show respect to the British king, the Nawab's real concern was always the local audience.

Determined not to be defeated by the Madras government, the Nawab and the king's minister's party prepared the public ceremony themselves, in the most splendid way possible. It was essential that the ceremony should not look or be inferior to any previous occasion, i.e. any of those that had been organized by the Company's people, and, in the end, the ceremony and the evening's entertainment were a success. During the banquet, the Nawab was richly dressed, with a sword at his side in the European manner, a sword that he had received from the king of Britain only that morning.<sup>56</sup> Through this simple act of gratitude and by displaying his friendship towards the British crown, it seems that the Nawab was declaring in front of everyone his victory over the EIC's officers. By accepting a piece of royal clothing (the sword), the Nawab was incorporated into the royal person and the patronage network of the British king. Being the friend of and receiving protection from their overlord, the Nawab thus became the master of these British agents in South Asia.

After some time had passed, the situation between the British king's minister and the Company's people "improved." The Company's troops and officers were allowed by the Madras Governor to participate in subsequent ceremonial events, for the general benefit of the British nation. However, during the years 1770-1773, the Governor himself continued to insist that he was unable to take part in any official ritual whose leading role was assigned to the king's ministers. Governor Josias Du Pré made a stand that, as the chief of Madras, he could not give up "first place to anyone" in official rituals.<sup>57</sup> The term "first place" used by Du Pré seems to refer to the position of the most honorable or the most important individual on whom the spotlight should primarily be in a ceremony, event, or place. In the reception events for the British king's letter, the Nawab (as the host) and every participant should customarily give "first place" to the British king's minister, and, if the Madras Governor was there, he would be placed only in the second rank. Yet, as supreme leader of the British

---

<sup>55</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/1, DGP, Jul. 1770, 297.

<sup>56</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1770, 9-10, 17, 27-28.

<sup>57</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Apr. 1771, 247.

settlement in Madras, the Governor did not want that. Eventually, Du Pré made a compromise with the Nawab and the British king's faction: he could join any "unofficial" party and entertainment in the evening, either to celebrate the delivery of the king's letters or any other event hosted by the Nawab for the British people. This compromise by the Governor was likely due to the fact that, if he refused to take part in any event, it could either have been interpreted as rudeness and disrespect to the Nawab or people may have started to think that the Madras Governor was not as important as the king's minister so the Nawab did not invite him. In such circumstances, the Madras Governor would also have lost "first place" in the even wider context of being the premier British gentleman in Madras. I find the term "first place" crucial for understanding the competition between the Nawab and the British factions. As is seen frequently in the sources, whenever all the honorable people of Madras—both Indian and British—gathered together, there were always attempts to gain "first place."

The scene from one evening in March 1771, when the Nawab invited all the British gentlemen to congratulate his eldest son on his upcoming wedding, is a good illustration. According to local custom, the bridegroom had to sit in the musnud in the center of the *pandal*—a temporary pavilion erected for public meetings or rituals—for many nights to receive the respect and blessing of all the important people in the kingdom. Traditionally, the musnud consisted of rich carpets that were placed on the floor and surrounded by luxury cushions. But, on this specific night, when the European guests came, the musnud for the Nawab's son was specially designed; it was raised to the height of the chairs as a reflection of European manners of sitting, since it would be a disgrace for the prince "to sit lower than any person in the presence."<sup>58</sup> It is likely that this was because the Nawab was concerned that his son's "first place" would be taken by the Europeans. Among the British, there was also competition for "first place" at the same event, and, by a cunning trick, the Madras Governor Du Pré managed to make himself the first British gentleman to walk up to the musnud to congratulate the bridegroom, and thereby relegated the king's minister Sir John Lindsay to second place, before other Europeans of lower rank were allowed to follow. The king's minister immediately perceived the trick and was greatly annoyed with how he had lost first place.<sup>59</sup> The following month, such an event was held once more so that the British could celebrate the wedding of the Nawab's second son. The Madras Governor, probably afraid of some sort of retaliation, declared from the very start that he would only accept the invitation if both he and the king's minister were not "in competition;" while Sir John was with the

---

<sup>58</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Mar. 1771, 215.

<sup>59</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Mar. 1771, 214.

Nawab, he would stand with the bridegroom, and when Sir John chose to be with the bridegroom, he would attend to the Nawab.<sup>60</sup>

Another important example that clearly reflects the fact that the Nawab had good understanding of the “first place” concept and the competition between the two British factions occurred in March 1771, when he hosted two consecutive evenings of European entertainment at Chepauk Palace. The first night was a celebration for Sir John on the occasion of his receiving the Order of Bath; according to Paterson, the Nawab was determined to give the king’s minister “the first place” in that event, considering it “his night” and paying him the greatest attention. This was the case from the outset, as, when the Madras Governor arrived and Prince Abd al-Wahab Khan, the Nawab’s brother, started to walk up to welcome him, the Nawab suddenly took hold of his brother and ushered him in the direction of Sir John first. Paterson immediately noticed the king’s minister’s satisfaction at this, while the Madras Governor felt the polar opposite. This was probably why the second night of entertainment—claimed to be a party to celebrate the upcoming weddings of his two sons—was organized very shortly after the first. On this occasion, the Nawab dedicated the party to the Company’s people and the first honor was paid to the Madras Governor.<sup>61</sup> Paterson also remarked that the Nawab was very cautious regarding how he preserved his own “first place” when with the British nobles during such events. The Nawab made the polite excuse that he did not know the European custom of the right and left hand; all he wanted was to have his two best friends near him. But Paterson noticed that, at several times during the first night—that in honor of the king’s minister—when the Nawab received the Madras Governor he always placed himself to the Governor’s right; afterwards, he would call the king’s minister to sit by him to his right. In this manner, the Nawab, as host, would be in the middle, gracefully supported on his right side by the British king’s minister and on his left side by the EIC’s Governor of Madras. This situation was acceptable for the king’s minister because the most significant guest was the person sat to the right of the Nawab. But the Madras Governor, who was placed on the left, was certainly not pleased with the arrangement.<sup>62</sup>

The crucial point I would like to underline from these accounts is that the Nawab clearly understood this British rivalry. He recognized that, during these entertainments, his behavior—as well as that of other Karnatak notables—towards the competing British parties was seen by all participants as a significant indicator of loss or gain in their standing. He

---

<sup>60</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Apr. 1771, 247.

<sup>61</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Mar. 1771, 212-213.

<sup>62</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Apr. 1771, 247.

knew perfectly well how to play the game, how to control the situation, and when to play one off against another to his own advantage. Above all, in all these ceremonies and entertainment events, the Nawab knew very well how to keep “first place” himself. Seeing this through the lens of South Asian sensibilities, the Europeans who were invited to his entertainments were turned into part of his *darbar*, i.e. attendance at the ruler’s court by his subjects when summoned to come into his presence and share his food.

### **“Arddasht”: Titles and Honors, “Governor” or “King”**

One consequence of the visit and temporary stay in Madras of the king’s ministers that is clearly reflected in the sources was the Nawab’s changed attitude and approach towards the Madras Presidency. In the words of Paterson, who witnessed this development closely, “[...] lest anything which he [the Nawab] did, should even in the eyes of his own people, make him appear greater than the Governor [of Madras].”<sup>63</sup> One illustration of the Nawab’s display of his own superiority over the Company’s agents came when he wanted them to resume the custom of a gun-salute upon the arrival and departure of both him and his family at the Company’s fort. This practice seems to have been followed previously, but in the recent past at least had not received much attention from either the Nawab or the Madras Presidency, probably due to their visits being fairly frequent.<sup>64</sup> The Nawab’s seriousness in wanting to resume this custom was seen in June 1773; upon the departure of his second son to war, the Madras Governor said that there was no gun available at that moment, implying that the custom could be skipped. However, the Nawab would not accept this and did not let his son leave without first receiving the salute from the Company.<sup>65</sup> On another occasion, when the Nawab sent his ambassador to negotiate some business with the Dutch VOC in Negapatnam, he asked the Madras Governor for a salute for his representative to ensure an honorable departure. This was unprecedented, as the EIC claimed that it never saluted anyone but the Nawab’s family, and the Madras Governor naturally refused. This idea of the Nawab had been put to him by Paterson, his British secretary, with the agreement and support of the British king’s minister. As the king’s faction argued, it was widely known that the Madras Presidency saluted representatives from every Indian power that arrived, even from petty Poligars. Therefore, it was necessary for them to pay this proper compliment to the Nawab’s ambassadors. Furthermore, the king’s minister had already given the order to salute the Nawab’s envoy with thirteen guns, so the Company had no right to refuse a compliment that

---

<sup>63</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Aug. 1772, 252.

<sup>64</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Aug. 1772, 233.

<sup>65</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Jul. 1773, 232.

the representative of the British king was willing to make. Eventually, the Madras Governor was obliged to salute the Nawab's envoy.<sup>66</sup> These examples show that the Nawab attempted to position himself above the EIC in the pecking order, making use of the king's ministers as his assistants or supporters in order to do so.

Two other particularly important disputes between the Nawab and the EIC took place while the king's ministers were present, and I will discuss them in detail in this and the subsequent section. The first was a dispute over the terms "Highness" and "arddsht," while the second was related to extraterritorial jurisdiction. Before the mid-1770s, it had been customary of the EIC to address or refer to the Nawab using the term "Excellency" in its daily English-language correspondence and this had solicited no protest from the ruler. However, in August 1770, the Nawab for the first time objected to this to the Madras Presidency, expressing that he did not feel it appropriate that he be referred to by such a low title. Astonished at first, the Presidency soon learned that this idea had come to the Nawab, albeit unintentionally, through the first king's minister, who had just arrived in Madras. The king's people were unsure as to how they should address the Nawab in their interactions. Regarding himself in the honorable rank of the British king's ambassador, Sir John wanted the local ruler to address him publicly by the title of "Excellency." In that case, the Nawab, as the indigenous sovereign, should be called by a higher title than that. After consulting with his secretary Paterson, they resolved to proclaim that the king's people would address the Nawab in the style usually given to princes in Europe, namely "Highness." His decision pleased the Nawab exceedingly, but immediately provoked gripes from the Madras Presidency.

The king's minister must never have imagined that this trifling act, which sought to aggrandize his own honor and, at the same time, flatter the local prince, would spark off a battle for honor between the Nawab and the Madras Presidency that would last for more than two years, from August 1770 to December 1772. During this time, the Nawab insisted that the Company's people change their way of addressing him, while, for a year and a half, the Madras Presidency under Governor Du Pré claimed ignorance of the Nawab's desire and repeatedly demanded that the king's minister stop calling the Nawab "Highness," arguing that the Nawab of Karnatak was only a fawjdar—the Mughal term for petty provincial governor—and was never "sovereign" or "independent."<sup>67</sup> From August 1772, a time when

---

<sup>66</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Jul. 1773, 15, 21.

<sup>67</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Sep. 1770, 69.

the first request regarding the use of the term “Highness” had not yet been accepted, the Nawab put a further condition on the Company, one which was even harsher. The Nawab claimed that, since he did not understand English, the Company’s letters must be translated for him into Persian. In those letters, the Company must refer to the text as “arddasht,” rather than the term “*niaznama*,” which had been used thus far. This was because arddasht was the proper Persian term for writings sent to sovereigns, comparable to the rank of Highness in English. But, to everybody’s astonishment, despite this request being more demanding, the Nawab was successful and, in so doing, able to change Governor Du Pré, who just the previous year had called him a fawjdar and been his strongest opponent, into a supporter. In the last three months of 1772, Du Pré himself brought this issue to the Madras Council and consented to the Nawab’s wishes, not only with regard to the title of Highness in English but also arddasht in Persian. The problematic demands of the Nawab and the perplexing behavior of Du Pré generated “a most violent dispute” and split both the Madras Council and public opinion in Madras into two rival factions.

Some of the details of the arguments that both parties used in their dispute are worth discussing here, as they reflect clearly the complicated context in which both the Nawab and the British were operating. The first argument that opponents of the Nawab used related to the theoretical status of the Nawab within the Mughal imperial structure. From their perspective, a Nawab of Karnatak was only a fawjdar, not a sovereign prince, since he received his authority from his imperial masters. Although, by the treaty of 1768, the Nawab had become independent from the Deccan state (as discussed in Chapter Two), he was still under the authority of the imperial court. As was widely known, the Nawab always acknowledged the superiority of the Mughal emperors. The Nawab, exceedingly angry over being called a fawjdar, declared that that was a position very much below his current dignity judging by all the *de facto* rights and authority he had over his own country.<sup>68</sup> The Nawab and his supporters, both Indians and Europeans, put forth various pieces of practical evidence and ideological arguments to back up his claims. First, the imperial farmans, the sanads from the Deccan Nizams, the letters from the Maratha leaders, and letters from previous EIC Governors that were written to him were presented to the king’s ministers and the Madras Presidency. According to the Nawab’s interpretation, the honors, titles, and other marks of distinction given to him by all significant power holders in South Asia and high-ranking Company servants, as reflected in those documents, were almost the highest possible. They

---

<sup>68</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1770, 31-32, 35-36, Sep. 1770, 69, Mar. 1771, 231.

were testimony to how other rulers at the time viewed him as an independent sovereign.<sup>69</sup> A number of previous Company servants had even addressed him in the highest terms, as “His Majesty” and “Royal.”<sup>70</sup> Prince Modar al-Mulk used the roles of the ancient rajas and sultans of South Asia to support the position of his father. He explained that, in the past, the whole empire of Hindustan had been divided and ruled by many rulers in their respective countries; they truly had royal power and royal titles. It was not until “the great Timur” [Emperor Babur?] overran the whole country that all those rulers were displaced and Nawabs named as provincial governors, under the one emperor. In the words of the prince, “my father is an independent as any of those kings were.”<sup>71</sup>

Not only were the customs and practices of the South Asian context used, but European traditions were also frequently employed in the disputes, too. Some of the British declared that the status of the Nawab was certainly equal in rank to a viceroy, thus having the same position as the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, who was addressed by the British using the term “Excellency.”<sup>72</sup> Paterson, supporting the Nawab, argued against this, and stated that the Nawab was more like a “prince,” such as their Highnesses Prince Lewis and Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick. The Nawab’s rivals claimed that he could be demoted by the Mughal ruler whenever he pleased, to which Paterson responded that such could only happen if the emperor had enough force to execute the command, similar to the case of imperial Germany (i.e. the Holy Roman Empire).<sup>73</sup> Charles Smith, one of the Madras Council members who agreed with using the terms Highness and arddasht, used the position of the British king in his justification; he argued that the Nawab was an ally of the king of Britain, and the latter could not have an alliance with a subject, only with other sovereigns.<sup>74</sup>

One point worth highlighting is that, by late 1772, the way in which the Nawab was addressed in English was of no concern anymore. With the powerful influence of Governor Du Pré, who had given his support to the Nawab, the Madras Council eventually “agreed” to a concession regarding the term Highness.<sup>75</sup> But, for many of the British, what could not be accepted was the use of the term arddasht in the Persian letters, as they were convinced that it would jeopardize the Company’s prestige locally. These British men had carried out significant research into the local culture and thereby learned that the term arddasht was used

---

<sup>69</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1770, 35-36, Sep. 1770, 52.

<sup>70</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Aug. 1770, 20; E/379/3, Aug 1772, 252.

<sup>71</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 34-35.

<sup>72</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Mar. 1771, 231.

<sup>73</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 15.

<sup>74</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 53.

<sup>75</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 54-55.

only by an inferior to a superior, implying a slavish submission to a master. As they argued, it was a rule in the empire that a Nawab of the provinces could not receive the title of arddasht even from those who were imperial diwans.<sup>76</sup> The EIC's officers raised this argument because, from 1765, the Company was appointed the imperial diwan of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa by a farman of the Mughal emperor.<sup>77</sup> As the EIC went on to claim, at that time the Company was the only noteworthy European power in India, possessing full sovereignty over large areas and immense revenues, and it frequently received titles from the emperor. In its conclusion it stated: “[f]rom the dignities given them by the Mogul,” it had a right to deal with and act towards the Nawab “on an equal footing.”<sup>78</sup> However, the Nawab absolutely denied the Company's equality regarding the Mughal rank. As he firmly argued, “the Company were not subadar of Bengal, [but] only dewans [of Bengal].”<sup>79</sup> In addition, even though it was evident that the EIC was the *de facto* supreme ruler of Bengal, the Nawab still insisted on its inferiority to him in Karnatak, stating “[...] they are not sovereigns in this country [Karnatak]. That is true, neither is the Nabob of Arcot sovereign in Bengal.”<sup>80</sup>

Before we examine how this incident came to a close, one important question should be explored: Why was the issue of the words “His Highness” and “arddasht” so important for the Nawab and the British officers that they devoted significant time and energy to it? A reported conversation between the Nawab's Brahmin, Venkatachalam, and Paterson may help us better understand the wishes and concerns of these eighteenth-century elites:

---

<sup>76</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 17, 28, 51-52.

<sup>77</sup> Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 53.

<sup>78</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 15, 18-19.

<sup>79</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, Nov. 1772, 44.

<sup>80</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 21.

Paterson: I supposed they [the EIC] never would call their letters Arzdasht [i.e. arddasht] for the reasons that occurred to me about Bengal [...]

Venkatachalam: why did they give it to the Nizam [of Deccan] then?

Paterson: I did not think they did.

Venkatachalam: Yes they do. If they did not he would not receive their letters.

Paterson: perhaps that might be formerly but could not be so now.

Venkatachalam: if they do not give it to him [the Nizam], I am sure the Nabob will never ask it.<sup>81</sup>

The Nawab's people claimed that there was evidence of the Company addressing Nizam Ali Khan (recently, in 1768), whom the Nawab perceived as his equal, not his superior, with the title of Highness and that of arddasht in its Persian-language correspondence. Furthermore, all the rajas of the small ancient kingdoms that formed part of the Karnatak state, such as the Tanjore raja, had also been called kings and addressed in the royal style by the EIC, and the remnants of their royal houses still had those appellations at the time. The Nawab viewed himself as both superior to and the inheritor of all the authority and honor of those Hindu rajas and, therefore, he had the right to the royal titles.<sup>82</sup> Yet the Nawab's opponents argued that, while such had been true in the past, it was primarily due to the limited economic and political power of the British in South Asia, as well as their lack of knowledge in local languages and customs, and everything was different now. Recently, the Company had been accustomed to writing to all significant rulers in the same manner, using the word niaznama, which put themselves almost equal to the receiver. It was also concerned that, if it compromised with Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan on this matter, other rulers would probably demand the same, something that would severely compromise the Company's dignity.<sup>83</sup>

The dispute had started two years earlier, when the Nawab became angry after hearing that Governor Du Pré had called him a fawjdar. But, as I argue, the true motivation of the Nawab in all this was not as superficial as simply teaching the company's officers to learn how to respect him. As reflected in the conversation above and various other conversations between Paterson and the Nawab and his people, the principal reason was more related to

<sup>81</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 20.

<sup>82</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Mar. 1771, 232; E/379/3, DGP, Aug. 1772, 252; E/379/4, Nov. 1772, 26-27, 42-44; E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Nizam Ali Khan, 12 Jan. 1768, 37; Court of Directors to Nawab, 12 Jan. 1768, 41.

<sup>83</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 51-52.

jealousy and the competition between himself and other local power holders. How the Company referred to him would be used by the Nawab to advance his status and dignity in the local, South Asian context. The Nawab and his Brahmin also told Paterson directly that the Persian title would do him great honor and was significant in the eyes of all his servants.<sup>84</sup> Paterson believed that, when the Nawab received the British company's letter with the term *arddsht*, he would immediately "acquaint all the courts of India with it."<sup>85</sup> The same was true for his opponents. What the rivals of the Nawab worried about most was, similarly, the potential impact of the Company's status and prestige on the indigenous people's views.

Eventually, after intense debate, the dispute ended with the Nawab's victory over his rivals after he secured the use of the word *arddsht* as a result of the influence of Governor Du Pré, securing a majority of votes in the Madras Council by five to four, and the constant support of the king's ministers.<sup>86</sup> After this incident, the British, his powerful allies, continued to be used by the Nawab as a tool in order to achieve similar results whenever the Nawab felt himself deserving of higher standing and wished to refashion himself in the eyes of the public. For example, near the end of 1773, when the Nawab had just received the latest *farman* from Emperor Shah Alam, he immediately sent an English translation of it to the Madras Governor, explaining that he had received the new titles "Asaf al-Dowlah," "Zafar Jang," and "Sipah Sarlar." His purpose in so doing was to ensure the Company added all of these new titles to his name in its future letters to him. Furthermore, the Nawab also told his secretary, Paterson, to pass this information on to the British government via the king's minister, and expressed his great desire that, in future, the king of Britain would address him by the term "Prince of the Carnatick" instead of "Nabob" saying it would be more suitable for the new Mughal titles to which he had just been promoted.<sup>87</sup> No doubt, if and when he received such letters, they would have been circulated to the public as widely as possible.

Regarding this episode, Governor Du Pré's behavior in turning from the Nawab's sternest opponent into his most powerful supporter is important. His case is a good illustration of how the Nawab managed to make "friends" with individual British. Stunned at the beginning, Paterson soon began to understand why Du Pré had changed his mind. This was mainly related to the end of his term as Madras Governor, which was fast approaching, in late 1772. As had many of his predecessors, Du Pré wanted to leave his position with

---

<sup>84</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 44.

<sup>85</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 27.

<sup>86</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 39.

<sup>87</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 150, Feb. 1774, 217.

generous gifts and promises from the Nawab. He also needed positive recommendation letters from the Nawab to present to his masters in Britain. In this light, the Nawab's attitude towards him—friendly or hostile—was significant for his future career and fortune. The two parties, therefore, proceeded with their “secret” compromises.<sup>88</sup>

### **Conflict over Extraterritorial Jurisdiction**

The dispute over extraterritorial jurisdiction was not directly related to cultural encounters. Yet it is worth discussing here as one more example of the Nawab's attempts to place himself above the EIC's Madras Presidency from the early 1770s. One factor that meant the fate and business of the Nawab and the EIC were complicatedly entangled was the Madras Presidency's possession of a vast region within Karnatak's heartland (i.e. the Jagirs). Before the early 1770s, there seems to have been an agreement between the Nawab and the EIC that legal jurisdiction over the people living within the Jagirs was the Company's alone. This meant that both the Europeans and the indigenous people living in the Company's domain were subject to British law. In addition, the EIC also had extraterritorial jurisdiction, meaning that, within his territory, the Nawab only had full jurisdiction over the native population, not over British people and some indigenous servants who were registered as subjects of the EIC.<sup>89</sup> When the Nawab had consented to this, he may have been extremely grateful to and trusting of the EIC as a result of its past military efforts, or he may have considered that it would not be wise to resist the Company's wishes. But the situation must have been more complicated in practice, particularly after 1767 when the Nawab moved to Madras along with a large number of his family and servants, who in theory came under British law. It must have been a great embarrassment for the Nawab, as ruler of Karnatak, to allow himself and his people to be subject to foreign rules. When his attitude and self-regard began to change, especially after the arrival of the British king's ministers, the Nawab attempted to renegotiate with the Company, just as he had with the issue of his title. In 1771, the Nawab requested that the Madras Presidency give him certain privileges over legal jurisdiction in Madras so that the matter would not affect his dignity. However, there was no breakthrough for a year. However, in December 1772, there was a clash over juridical rights that was extremely irritating for the Nawab but which also allowed him to bring the issue to the negotiating table once more, something he did through a series of increasingly aggressive gestures. One Abu Mahomed, a kotwal of Arcot, was arrested by the British Mayor's Court, while entering

---

<sup>88</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Nov. 1772, 24-26, 48, 54.

<sup>89</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Feb. 1771, 169; E/379/5, Mar. 1773, 22.

Madras to meet the Nawab, the result of a debt he owed to a Frenchman. The Nawab immediately protested to the Madras Governor, asking what right the British had in exercising their jurisdiction over the people of Arcot. To this the Governor replied that, although Abu Mahomed was a kotwal of Arcot, he was within the jurisdiction of the British Mayor's Court at the time he was arrested.<sup>90</sup>

The Nawab: I gave you a Jaghire that you might enjoy the revenue of it; but I did not give you the sovereignty over my subjects: and you never can expect then that I shall ever consent to give you a jurisdiction over my family. [...] but if you claim any superiority, in your country [the Company's possessions] over my people, I must do the same over your people in mine.

The Governor: No our laws must follow our arms.

The Nawab: So must my laws follow my arms.<sup>91</sup>

As can be seen from this conversation, the Nawab offered the Madras Presidency two choices. The first was focused on people: the Nawab agreed to let the British do whatever they pleased with their own subjects (British men and indigenous servants) anywhere, but he must also have the same exclusive jurisdiction over all natives, wherever they were, including in the Company's territory. The second option was spatially oriented. If the Nawab's subjects were under British laws in Madras and the EIC's Jagirs, then British subjects must be under the Nawab's authority in any part of Karnatak outside the Company's territory. The Nawab not only sent his appeals on this matter to the EIC but also to the king's minister in an attempt to make sure that the issue reached the British government in London.

As a result of Abu Mahomed's case, a previously-hidden fact was revealed to the public: that, at the request of the Nawab in 1771, the EIC's Court of Directors had already produced a compromise for the Nawab and sent it to the Madras in March 1772.<sup>92</sup> This EIC compromise owed much to the political atmosphere and public opinion in Britain—which wanted the Company to be more respectful of the rights of local rulers—and also to the pressure from the king's minister in Madras. The Directors had decided to grant the privilege to the Nawab that, from that point on, his family, servants, and dependents would all be free from arrest in civil cases within the Company's dominion. But in order for the Company to

---

<sup>90</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Dec. 1772, 86-88.

<sup>91</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Dec. 1772, 87-88.

<sup>92</sup> IOR, E/4/865, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 25 Mar. 1772, 681-682.

have a clear definition of who were the “people of the Nawab” covered by this new privilege, the Nawab was asked to send a list of all such names to the Madras Presidency. However, after the new regulation arrived in Madras, the Presidency there delayed sending it to the Nawab and the Mayor’s Court for further enforcement. This may have simply been due to ignorance on the part of the Madras officers, but more likely it was out of concern that this privilege would further aggrandize the Nawab’s ambitions at their own expense, especially coming at a time when the Nawab was intent on increasing his standing and, as a consequence, placing many demands on them.

To make the situation even more complicated, as in other Presidencies, judicial rights in Madras were not within the remit of the Company. Andrew Ross and George Smith, the two judges of the Mayor’s Court of Madras at the time of the conflict, explained that their institution had been created by acts of the British Parliament and received their judicial authority directly from the British king to whom everyone, even the Governor of Madras, was subject. The two judges were likely referring to the charter of 1726 that had been issued by King George II, which demanded the establishment of the Mayor’s Court at the three Company towns—Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta—to enforce British laws uniformly. This meant that, from then on, the British judges in those courts derived their authority not from the Company but from the British king, and their decisions had to be based on the laws of Britain and acts of that country’s Parliament alone. Therefore, as Ross and Smith said, they were not bound by the aforementioned instructions by the Company’s Directors to grant such a privilege to the Nawab’s people. As such, the judicial rights issue was not like other conflicts between the Nawab and the EIC, which could be “easily” solved through bargaining and negotiations; in this case, the standing of the Mayor’s Court—or, to put it another way, the prestige of the British king and government—was directly involved.<sup>93</sup> The case of Abu Mahomed was very problematic and the British were at a loss to know what to do, since it happened when the new regulation from the Company had not yet been relayed to the Mayor’s Court, not to mention the fact that the Court had not approved of it. Furthermore, even if the court were to approve the regulation, there was still no list of the “people of the Nawab” who were to be accorded the privilege that could have prevented Abu Mohamed from being arrested. Therefore, the British officers had no justification for releasing Abu Mohamed, as the Nawab desired, without losing face and tarnishing the dignity of their nation. On the other hand, the Nawab could not risk such an affront to his character and

---

<sup>93</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Dec. 1772, 88-89.

standing at such a time, when he was working hard to improve his status. He had put significant pressure on the newly-appointed Madras Governor, Alexander Wynch, and the party of the king's minister to make all efforts and use all possible influence to resolve this issue, and to his own advantage. Eventually, the Nawab received a promise from Wynch that he would do his best to help, and requested that the Nawab use the influence of his many powerful friends in Britain to support him. The two judges of the Mayor's Court also gave their word that they would do everything in their power to help the Nawab.<sup>94</sup>

The matter of Abu Mohamed was resolved in March 1773. Every party—the Nawab, the Madras Presidency, and the Mayor's Court—agreed to lobby the Frenchman who was the litigant in the case to withdraw his suit from the British court and instead appeal to the Nawab for justice. Then, later, the Nawab closed the case by paying the debt owed to the Frenchman himself. The judge, Ross, gave the justification for the Mayor's Court's decision in favor of the Nawab as follows. First, the king of Britain had been pleased to constitute the court and appoint the king's minister to the South Asian princes for their own protection, of which the Nawab of Karnatak was considered one. Secondly, it was advantageous for the Company's honor, and necessary for business, to have the Nawab's residence so near Madras, and if indulgences were not granted to him then that ruler might go to his own country. And thirdly, "it is natural right" of the Nawab "to know how far his servants may be entitled to protection from warrants of arrest."<sup>95</sup> This last statement means that Abu Mohamed was automatically included in the list of protected people in the Nawab's judgment. Again, the situation bears testimony to the extraordinary influence and friendship networks that the Nawab had with various British agents in both Madras and London.

What the Nawab regained in 1773 was special protection for his followers in civil judicial conflicts that took place within the Company's territory. This was a huge step, yet it was not the ultimate aim of the Nawab, which was extraterritorial jurisdiction over all his subjects in any criminal matter; this would, essentially, equal the rights of British people in his lands. In other words, he would appeal to the British government for justice against any subjects of Britain, and similarly he wanted them to appeal to him for justice against any of his subjects who might give cause for complaint. Immediately after the case of Abu Mohamed had ended, the Nawab pursued this aim, repeating his previous proposals to the

---

<sup>94</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Dec. 1772, 88-89.

<sup>95</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/4, DGP, Mar. 1773, 246-247; E/379/5, DGP, Mar. 1773, 62; TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 27 Aug. 1773.

Court of Directors and planning to appeal to the British Parliament.<sup>96</sup> At around this time, in London, the Regulating Act was launched by the British government; this was the first step in taking control of the EIC's enterprise in South Asia. This was passed at the same time as the Judicature Act of 1773, which resulted in the establishment of a Supreme Court in Calcutta, whose judges were British—directly appointed from London—and from which appeals could be made to the Privy Council in London. This Act was passed to show the British government's deep concern regarding the legal rights and fair treatment of South Asian peoples.<sup>97</sup> It is very likely that the legal conflict involving the Nawab of Karnatak in the previous few years had been a significant factor in generating, or at least shaping, the action of the British government on this issue.

The competition and conflicts between the Nawab (and his supporters) and his opponents in the early 1770s reflect that indigenous and European politico-cultural worlds were complicatedly interwoven and that the ideas, ideologies, customs, and political practices of both sides could be easily transferred from one to the other in order to serve practical purposes in encounters between those involved. Such conflicts usually broke out when one side deliberately used these political and cultural elements as tools to insult, challenge, or lessen the prestige of their opponents, such as when the Madras Presidency refused to give the Nawab the gun salute he demanded or when the Nawab wanted the EIC to address him using the terms “Highness” and “arddasht.” Disputes also broke out when one side realized it had been deliberately used or tricked by their opponents, such as happened during the nadhr-offering disagreement between the Nawab and Sir Robert Hartland and the competition over “first place” between the Madras Governor and the king's minister. During these conflicts, one side often attempted to trick their opponent by incorrectly telling them the meaning of certain cultural markers—wishing to make use of foreigners' ignorance—but they were usually unsuccessful because their opponents understood the meanings of the customs only too well. Examples of this can be seen in the disputes over the meanings of “Excellency” and “Highness,” “niaznama” and “arddasht,” and the nadhr offering, among others.

It is even more important to note that the Nawab and his opponents not only tried to learn foreign elements in order to impress their foreign guests or prevent themselves from being abused, but they were even able to use foreign systems to support their own interests. Their position in the Mughal hierarchy, for example, was used by both the Nawab and the

---

<sup>96</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Mar. 1773, 22.

<sup>97</sup> James, *Raj*, 51.

EIC to understand their place within the local societal context. Also, the status of European princes in the Holy Roman Empire was used to support the Nawab's claim to the title of "His Highness." In summary, all the evidence indicates that the Nawab, his local servants, and all European parties involved had the ability and the means to learn and understand such foreign politico-cultural symbols and practices almost perfectly. The conflicts that occurred between them were by no means based on mutual incomprehensibility, but were, instead, deliberate expressions of challenges and dissatisfaction from one side or from both. They could happen when a position of mutual benefit could not be reached or when one side wanted to re-negotiate an issue. Using Subrahmanyam's expression, these were "a very particular form of communication, a sort of unilateral redefinition of the rules of the game."<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 16.



## Chapter 9: Military Encounters

This chapter argues that, in their military encounters and “military cooperation,” the Nawab and the EIC attempted to control each other just as they did in the economic and cultural spheres. However, the Nawab’s schemes went wrong in the military sphere as a result of miscalculations on his part, as well as various other complicated and uncontrollable factors. This chapter is divided into three main parts. In the first, the discussion will focus on how the Nawab’s military plans went awry. In the second part, the Nawab’s efforts to fix his mistakes and improve his military position will be explored. In the final section, I will discuss how the wider context of British-South Asian politics was significantly transformed from the mid-1770s, and how this shaped the Nawab’s military successes and failures.

### 9.1 Clashes of Interests in the Joint Force

On the surface, the grand project of military cooperation between the Nawab and the EIC began positively and harmoniously.<sup>1</sup> However, from the very beginning both parties viewed it from completely different perspectives. As is revealed by correspondence between the Court of Directors and the Madras Presidency, the Company had seen this project as a great opportunity “to keep the Nabob the more firm in our interest by having under our own orders and control almost the whole military force by which the province [of Karnatak] is to be protected and kept in obedience.”<sup>2</sup> The EIC’s Directors sent many instructions to Madras to ensure that the joint force would be fully under the control of the Company, that none of the troops would consider themselves nor be considered by others to be the troops of the Nawab, and that they would never receive nor obey any direct orders from him. Among the various measures that were taken to ensure the dependence and affection of this force of native sepoys was confined to the EIC alone, the Directors requested that the Madras officers conceal from their soldiers the fact that the Nawab was the financial sponsor. In order to do so, the paymaster of these sepoys had to be a civilian British official within the Presidency and he had to pay each soldier directly, the money not passing through the hands of any indigenous chief. Furthermore, they insisted that these sepoys should have a uniform that was completely different from that of the Nawab’s other indigenous troops. Instead, British colors, such as those carried by the Company’s battalions, would be employed.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This continues the discussion in Chapter 4.3: “the Nawab-EIC Joint Force.”

<sup>2</sup> IOR, E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 19 Feb. 1766, 335.

<sup>3</sup> IOR, E/4/863, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 19 Feb. 1766, 332-343.

Despite the EIC's proposals being fully adopted at the start, it soon became clear that the Nawab also had a view on the future of this military force, one which differed significantly from that of the EIC. From 1767 to the early 1770s, one finds frequent complaints by the Madras Presidency that the Nawab did not want to disband his other "private forces," as he had promised to do after the joint force with the EIC had been established. On the contrary, the ruler increased their numbers daily.<sup>4</sup> When the Company appealed to him about this, he requested that the British let him judge what was best for the management of his own country. The precise number of the Nawab's private troops was unknowable by the EIC's officers, and it was probably the Nawab's intention to hide how many he had from them. Yet, from estimates, it seems there were no fewer than 20,000 in both 1767 and 1769.<sup>5</sup> From Paterson's record of the period 1770-1773, as well as the twelve battalions that constituted the joint force with the EIC, the Nawab had another twelve battalions of sepoys, seven of which were disciplined with European officers and five were *sibandi*—lower-ranking soldiers used for revenue collection. It is likely that each battalion contained about 1,000 men. Some of the European officers who trained the Nawab's private force were EIC military officers borrowed by the Nawab, while many others were independent European mercenaries who had been hired by him and were, therefore, under his direct command. This number does not include several thousand cavalry and 500-1,000 *topasses* (artillery men).<sup>6</sup> The total number of people in the Nawab's private forces was between double and triple the amount that the EIC had expected the Nawab to maintain after the establishment of the Nawab-EIC joint force. Evidently, and unlike the initial British understanding and expectation, the Nawab never trusted the EIC to the extent that he would place his entire military future into its hands. Instead, he wanted to use it as just one of a number of military resources, as well as employing his good relations with it and its skills to create his own high-quality private troops. The fact that the Nawab officially declared the lands he granted to the EIC to be "jagirs," even though they were, in fact, inams or free grants, can, in this light, be interpreted as the Nawab's perspective on or approach to his military

---

<sup>4</sup> IOR, P/251/59, MP, MMSC, 17 Aug. 1767, 702, 767-770.

<sup>5</sup> IOR, P/251/59, MP, MMSC, 17 Aug. 1767, 769-770; E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 17 Mar. 1769, 633.

<sup>6</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Dec. 1770, 107; E/379/3, Dec. 1771, 98; E/379/8, Jun. 1774, 164; Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 270. The *topasi* was defined by an eighteenth-century South Asian soldier as a tawny race of foot soldiers who were descended from the Portuguese marrying indigenous women and called Topasses because they wore hats (i.e. Portuguese Topo-European style hats). Alternative etymologies of *topasi* include: Turkish *top-chi*, "cannoneer." This new *topasi* military type included specialists in Western firearms, which included soldier with either a Western biological ancestor or South Asian converts to Catholicism. See further: Roy and Lorge, *Chinese and Indian Warfare*, 329.

project with the EIC. He wanted the Madras Presidency to be one of his jagirdars, with the result that it was duty-bound to maintain and provide him with sepoy troops.<sup>7</sup>

The combination of his trust in the EIC as a result of its service to him over the course of a decade, his eagerness to have a large, European-trained army to serve his interests, and his confidence in his own ability to manage relations with the Company supposedly made the Nawab initially negligent, which meant the joint force was managed solely by the EIC for a number of years. In the meantime, he kept himself busy accumulating and expanding other private forces. However, a number of incidents that occurred in the period 1769-1773 drastically altered the Nawab's attitudes and policies regarding military cooperation with the EIC.

### **The Mysore War**

The first was the war between the Nawab-EIC alliance and Hyder Ali Khan, known as the First Anglo-Mysore War (1767-1769), which was the first significant conflict after the Nawab-EIC joint force had been established. It may be imagined that the Nawab was very confident of victory, as he had twelve battalions of the joint army—trained and commanded by skillful EIC military commanders—combined with large numbers of his own private troops, led by his indigenous servants. His expectations rose even higher when he received a promise from the Madras Presidency that, after it won the war, the Mysore throne and territory would be transferred to him.<sup>8</sup> However, the outcome was both disappointing and shocking for the Nawab. There were reports that the joint force and the Nawab's private forces were unable to cooperate properly in the field nor match their opponents. As such, Karnatak was devastated, and the EIC's Commander-in-Chief, General Smith, seems to have done everything he could to avoid a major confrontation with enemy forces.<sup>9</sup> In 1769, in defiance of the Nawab and the Karnatak elites, who still believed they could win the war, the Madras Presidency under Governor Du Pré decided to surrender and open peace negotiations. Although the Nawab made repeated protests, demanding that the army continue fighting, a treaty was eventually concluded. This was the first severe clash of interests between the Nawab and the Company since the beginning of their friendship two decades earlier. The Nawab was furious, because he believed that there had been secret negotiations and bribes between the Madras Presidency and Mysore. More significantly, this episode made the

---

<sup>7</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Sep. 1771, 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> IOR, Z/E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 17 Mar. 1769, 588-609.

<sup>9</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Nov. 1771, 46-47; Turnbull, *Warren Hastings*, 54.

Nawab realize for the first time that, although he had spent much of his own money on creating a large, European-trained army, he could not use it without the Company's permission. As such, and significantly, he lost power on the inter-regional stage to the Madras Presidency. After the Mysore war, the Nawab protested against the Company in several ways. For example, he declared his intention to abolish the entire joint force under his pay and remove the Company's military officers from all the forts he held in the hinterland. However, such displays of assertiveness were likely to have been threats to remind the EIC of his own authority and prestige, rather than any real attempt to cut himself off from his most important military resource. The EIC's Directors also strongly desired for there to be no more clashes with the Nawab, as he was their main ally and sponsor in the region. Thus, they sent strict orders to Madras to compromise with the Nawab as far as possible in the future in order to calm him and regain his trust and favor.<sup>10</sup> Their relationship would have been improved by the Company's new direction in this regard if new conflicts over Tanjore had not followed soon after.

### **The Two Conquests of Tanjore**

As discussed earlier, the conquest of Tanjore had always been one of the Nawab's principle aims, but the peace treaty of 1762 had prevented this. However, a justification to do so presented itself in February 1771, when the raja sent his troops to invade Ramnad and Sivaganga.<sup>11</sup> Seizing on this great opportunity, the Nawab immediately sent a request to the Madras Presidency, demanding that it send the Nawab-EIC joint army, along with his private troops, to punish the raja. However, Governor Du Pré, who had just made peace with Mysore against the Nawab's consent, again rejected his request. One of his reasons was that the Company was the guarantor of the 1762 treaty, so it needed to be cautious about getting involved in such an affair. Furthermore, it could only enter such a war if it had ensured that it would be fought effectively, since the Company's honor was at stake. The Nawab then proposed that, in order not to involve the Company's reputation, he would not rely on its military Commander-in-Chief, General Smith, to lead the war. Instead, he would give the role to Captain Matthews, a British man, probably an ex-EIC officer, who had been hired by the Nawab to command his cavalry. What he needed from the EIC was just three battalions of the joint army (of the seven under his pay) to support his private troops. The Nawab also promised that he would only defend Ramnad against the aggressor and that he would not

---

<sup>10</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Apr. 1771, 256; Z/E/4/865, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 30 Nov. 1770, 77-82.

<sup>11</sup> See the previous discussion on Tanjore and the treaty of 1762 in Chapter Four (4.3).

break the 1762 treaty by attacking Tanjore. Even with these many attempts at compromise by the Nawab, however, the Madras Governor forbade the battalions from moving without his approval. As the Madras Governor claimed, most of the military officers commanding the battalions were Company officers, bearing the Company's name and representing it. If the Nawab still insisted on sending troops, all the Company's officers must be withdrawn.<sup>12</sup> As such, from March 1771, the conquest of Tanjore became the principal point of conflict between the Nawab and the Madras Presidency, and was, in fact, the primary cause of many of the other battles of honor that took place during the early 1770s (discussed in the previous chapter). The British king's minister was drawn into this conflict as the Nawab's supporter, since he was convinced by the latter of the Tanjore raja's bad behavior and of the EIC's injustice in not allowing him to protect his own lands nor to use the military forces on which he had spent significant amounts of money. By this time, it no longer seemed necessary for the EIC to hide its true designs regarding authority over the Nawab-EIC joint army, as the Madras Governor freely gave the following statements to the king's minister, surely knowing that his words would reach the Nawab's ears:

[...] These troops were raised no doubt for the service of the Carnatick [...] but not to answer every capricious scheme of the Nabob. They were always to remain under the orders of the governor and council [of Madras].<sup>13</sup>

[...] they have no forces of the Nabob's under their orders; but all are absolutely the Company's to be employed for the defense of the Carnatick solely as their servants shall judge best.<sup>14</sup>

As an eyewitness described, during this period the Nawab was always in a violent rage, and he once expressed his distress as follows:

Nobody will either trust or respect me now. It is plain I have no authority even in my own country, even my own troops are not suffered to march to protect one subject against the insults of another. The people here first ruined my credit and now they want to sacrifice my honor. [...] Besides the Company have seven Battalions of my sepoys which I pay under their orders. Surely they are mine as I

---

<sup>12</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Feb. 1771, 187-191, Mar. 1771, 204-205, Apr. 1771, 252; IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Jun. 1772, 185-186.

<sup>13</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Mar. 1771, 230.

<sup>14</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Apr. 1771, 256. See also: TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 17 Oct. 1773.

pay them, and they should assist to support my honor and dignity, and to maintain the peace of my country. But this the governor absolutely refuses.<sup>15</sup>

Although being consistently rejected by the Madras Governor, the Nawab continued to explore all possible avenues. Eventually, after six months, in July 1771 he managed to get the Madras Presidency to agree to march the joint army against Tanjore. According to Paterson, who claimed to have learnt the information from various credible sources, many intrigues were behind this Tanjore expedition. The main reason that the expedition had been delayed was the “renowned fact” that the Tanjore raja had been paying 30,000 pagodas annually as a bribe to the Madras Governor, Du Pré, to maintain his friendship with the EIC. But the Nawab solved this problem by enticing the Governor with a larger amount of money, said to be as much as 100,000 pagodas in cash and security. All members of the Madras Council and many of his British private creditors also received generous promises from the Nawab should Tanjore fall. Nevertheless, things did not play out as the Nawab had anticipated. Only three months later, General Smith abruptly ended the war with a negotiated peace, claiming that he had no confidence in his ability to gain victory. As with the end of the Mysore War, this outcome was contrary to the Nawab’s wish and made him extremely angry. It is likely that the downfall of Tanjore was prevented by the raja using similar methods, of bribing the EIC officers (and probably also the Nawab’s eldest son), that the Nawab had applied in order to attempt to eliminate him.<sup>16</sup>

Although this first attempt at conquering Tanjore was a disappointment for him, the Nawab kept reporting the disruptive deeds of the raja to the British in order to urge them to attempt a second conquest. “Proofs” of a conspiracy between the Madras Presidency and the Tanjore raja were consistently shown to the king’s minister by the Nawab in an attempt to use the king’s faction to put pressure on the Company. A good opportunity for the Nawab emerged once more in mid-1773, when it became clear that the raja was about to break the recent peace treaty. Furthermore, it was during the period of transition between the Madras Governors Du Pré and Alexander Wynch. Unlike the former, Governor Wynch was well disposed towards the Nawab, and during his initial period in his new position showed an inclination to forge good relations with the ruler. Seeing this as his best chance, the Nawab stridently asked the Madras Presidency to recommence the campaign. Just as in the previous war, many deals and intrigues were said to have been required first. Publicly, the Nawab

---

<sup>15</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/2, DGP, Mar. 1771, 194-195.

<sup>16</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Oct. 1771, 32, Nov. 1771, 38, 53-56, Dec. 1771, 69; Gurney, “The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot,” 145.

promised to pay all the expenses of the expedition and to increase his contribution to the Nawab-EIC joint army from seven to ten battalions, “as a present to the Company.”<sup>17</sup> The latter was one of the EIC’s most long-standing requests, one which the Nawab had consistently refused under Governor Du Pré. Under the table, huge rewards were promised to Madras Council members and military officers if Tanjore fell. As a result of these deals and the pressure placed on the EIC by the king’s minister, the joint force was dispatched in June 1773. This time, the Madras Presidency was loyal to its agreements and Tanjore was taken within a few months.<sup>18</sup>

## **9.2 Nawabi Efforts at Military Reform**

After the incidents of 1769 to 1773, the Nawab must have been very aware of his previous, significant mistake in heavily and incautiously trusting most of Karnatak’s armed forces, especially the most effective one, to the EIC. Evidently, during this period, the Nawab’s trust in the EIC was in pieces. However, the accounts also show that the Nawab did not simply surrender to his fate when he realized that his military capability had been unexpectedly lost. Eventually, he was able to successfully use the British men around him to achieve his political designs. What has been discussed in the above are some of the short-term means the Nawab used to solve his immediate problems. In the following sections, we will explore further the long-term policies that the Nawab used while attempting to fix his past military-based errors in management.

### **The Reduction of the EIC’s Military Power in Karnatak**

Learning that he had almost no power over the joint army, one of the first things he did to improve the situation was to limit, to an extent, this force within Karnatak territory. His attempts to do so were two-fold. First, he requested a reduction in the size of the joint force. Secondly, he tried to remove them from various strategically important places within Karnatak. In fact, long before the final conquest of Tanjore, jealousy and distrust of the EIC had been festering in the Nawab’s mind. He had been worried that the Company would keep that wealthy domain for themselves instead of handing it over to him,<sup>19</sup> and, after Tanjore was taken, the Nawab quickly requested that the joint army withdraw as soon as possible, leaving the country under the management of his own people. The Nawab’s suspicion was not groundless, as many of the EIC’s civil and military officers strongly opposed his request,

---

<sup>17</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, May 1773, 131, Jun. 1773, 208.

<sup>18</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Jun. 1773, 217.

<sup>19</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 186; Z/E/4/865, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 27 Nov. 1771, 467-469.

claiming that if all of the joint force under British commanders moved out, the Nawab might face counter-attacks from Tanjore.<sup>20</sup> Enraged, the Nawab threatened to stop paying the joint army and to send petitions on the matter to the British king and government through the king's minister. According to Paterson, during this time, the Nawab became panicked and very cautious in his movements so as not to give the British the chance to expand their influence in Tanjore, nor in any other part of his domain. In October 1773, when he requested that Paterson write a letter of friendship on his behalf to the British king, the ruler approved all the contents of the draft, except one diplomatic sentence that stated: "it was his [the Nawab's] firm solution, no nation but the English should have territory so as to enable them to maintain a standing army in his country."<sup>21</sup> Believing that this sentence could communicate the idea that the British would be allowed to claim as much ground to maintain a standing army as they pleased, the Nawab firmly objected. He wished to change it to an unambiguous line, saying that "he was very well pleased with what they [the Company] had got; but he did not ch[oo]se to give them anymore."<sup>22</sup> It was a long time before Paterson could convince the Nawab of the impropriety of that harsh expression, and that the former sentence did not convey the idea about which he was worrying.

Several signs suggesting an unusually cordial relationship between the Nawab and the French CIO and the Dutch VOC during the early 1770s were also likely to have been part of his attempts to pressure the EIC. In June 1770 (just after the peace with Mysore), the Nawab insisted on receiving the representatives of the French from Pondicherry in his palace and showed himself sympathetic to a French request to rent lands around Pondicherry that were worth 60,000 pagodas. And certainly, this caused the EIC great anxiety.<sup>23</sup> Regarding the Dutch, the conquest of Tanjore in 1773 caused the Nawab and the VOC to clash over the port-town of Nagore, not far from the VOC's Coromandel headquarters of Negapatnam. Not long before, the raja of Tanjore had traded this town to the VOC in exchange for military aid against the Nawab. After the conquest of Tanjore, the Nawab demanded that the Dutch return the port-town to him, claiming that the raja, who had been paying tribute to him, had no right to give any land to a foreigner without his consent. However, after a short period of confrontation between the troops of the Nawab and the Dutch, both parties agreed to negotiate.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, the Nawab offered to re-purchase Nagore at the same price the Dutch

---

<sup>20</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Sep. 1773, 210, 223.

<sup>21</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Oct. 1773, 313-314.

<sup>22</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Oct. 1773, 313-314.

<sup>23</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 125.

<sup>24</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 204-205.

had paid for it, to which the VOC consented, with one condition; in future, should the Nawab choose to part with it, Nagore would never be given to anyone but the VOC. Usually, the Nawab was very sensitive about any European nation placing conditions on him or interfering his decisions. Yet in this case, the Nawab not only quickly acquiesced to the Dutch request, he also said in his letter to them that “the English have agreed with me, never to ask a foot more of ground: and I never intend to give Nagore to anyone.”<sup>25</sup> As Paterson stated, this statement was totally unnecessary, but “the Nabob seems too fond of every opportunity of letting everyone know, that he does not mean to give the English anymore country.”<sup>26</sup> Certainly, the words caused great irritation to the Madras Presidency, who did indeed want to have control of Nagore in order to check the VOC’s influence in Negapatnam.<sup>27</sup>

The assertive attitude the Nawab showed during this period, at least, was not in vain. It caused the Madras Presidency to make some compromises, such as moving its troops out of Tanjore and stationing them at the nearby fort of Vellum. However, such did not reduce the Nawab’s distrust of the Company. During mid-1774, Paterson received many complaints from the EIC’s military officers, who were working in the battalions of the Nawab-EIC joint army in various areas of Karnatak, that the Nawab had ordered his servants to closely monitor any instances of bad behavior by the British officers towards the locals. Then all these “trifles” were to be “magnified in an extraordinary degree” by the Nawab in order to blame the Madras Presidency for ruining his country. Behind those appeals was the Nawab’s determination to reduce the number of joint troops stationed within his domains and to increase his control over them.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Alteration of the Paymasters’ Customs**

Around the same time that the Nawab tried to decrease the Company’s military influence in his territories, he started another policy that was probably aimed at stimulating changes within the joint army. Condemning the current system of military payment through the civil officers of the Madras Presidency, which had been initiated by the Company in 1765, the Nawab requested that the EIC resume the ancient practice of distributing the role of paymasters to various European military commanders of each sepoy sub-section. As the Nawab argued, it had been the custom of South Asia that the sepoys and cavalry were always

---

<sup>25</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Nov. 1773, 57.

<sup>26</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Nov. 1773, 58.

<sup>27</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Nov. 1773, 60, 62.

<sup>28</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jul. 1774, 234-235.

considered the “Buxies” (bakhshi)—the military officers-*cum*-paymasters from whom the soldiers received their means of subsistence directly—as their immediate masters, to whom they should devote all their services. A bakhshi, in the past, had always taken to the field with his soldiers, hence a very firm attachment was formed between them, making the soldiers’ fighting much more efficient than it was at the present time. In order to pressurize the EIC into resuming this tradition, the Nawab also drew comparisons with the EIC’s practice in the Bengal Presidency and the general custom in Europe: “I [the Nawab] am told in Bengal Captain Commandants always pay their own Battalions. And I know in Europe the pay always goes from the Captain to his Company: but the practice had arisen here from an injudicious jealousy in the civil power of the military.”<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, the Nawab understood that letting the payment of the joint army’s troops be made by the Madras Presidency had been a major mistake; as such, he wished to stop the Madras Presidency’s monopoly of the sepoys’ loyalty. Instead, he would attempt to ensure that their devotion was to their immediate, individual commanders. But how would this benefit the Nawab? In my view, the answer lies in the Nawab’s belief in his own ability to “make friends” with individual British commanders. As the many aforementioned examples have shown, the Nawab had excellent ability to make many individual British his “friends” and “supporters,” people who were prepared to serve his interests even if, sometimes, they went against their institutions’ wishes. In fact, through “presents” and “rewards” doled out in the previous two decades of his reign (1750s-1760s), the Nawab had developed good private relations with many of the EIC’s officers and, according to Gurney, the British who had the largest financial bonds from the Nawab were Company’s military officers, not civil servants.<sup>30</sup> Presumably, the Nawab believed that this approach—of distributing the loyalty of the sepoys to many individuals—would open up more opportunities for him, through personal relationships, to influence the management of the joint army and undermine the Madras Council’s control of it. Such an approach is reminiscent of the concept of “divide and rule” and the local practice of “fitna.”

### **The Increase in the Numbers of European Officers in the Nawab’s Service**

As various sources reveal, throughout the 1770s the Nawab’s court was open and welcomed all British war-jobbers who wanted to be directly employed there. They were hired mainly to drill and to lead the sepoys of the Nawab’s private troops, and thus they were in positions that,

---

<sup>29</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Jan. 1774, 176.

<sup>30</sup> Gurney, “The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot,” 59.

in previous times, were usually taken by military officers that the Nawab had temporarily borrowed from the EIC. In mid-1773, Paterson noted that the Nawab was firmly resolved not to give command of his private troops to anyone unless those in his direct employment.<sup>31</sup> Significantly, the Nawab's recruitment was not limited to adventurers or free mercenaries; he was also able to convince large numbers of EIC officers to move into his private service. Certainly, this caused great dissatisfaction within the Company. In 1772, the Company filed grievances against the Nawab, complaining that its interests and honor were suffering because the Nawab had given help or support to British subjects who had severely violated the Company's rights. The EIC asked the Nawab to dismiss those British soldiers who had entered his service without the consent of the Madras Presidency<sup>32</sup> but, despite many complaints and further efforts to put obstacles in the way, the EIC failed to prevent the Nawab's recruitment drive. To put it more bluntly, it failed to prevent its own servants from moving into the Nawab's service. Throughout 1773 and 1774, many British soldiers sent the Nawab applications for employment. The majority of them were ex-Company officers whose contracts had just expired, meaning that they were not violating the rules. Furthermore, there were not only officers from the Madras Presidency but also some from the Bengal settlement in the Nawab's forces. Some of them were still under contract with the Company, but they had expressed their intention to resign from their posts if the Nawab promised to secure them a commission. The EIC was highly apprehensive about this, believing that, if such a practice continued, it would not be able to keep any talented officers in its service when their contract had expired.<sup>33</sup> The Company's anxiety rose still further when the Nawab hired men from other European nations. One such example is from August 1774, when a French soldier, Martinz, was appointed as a commanding officer in Tanjore. Criticisms of his nationality were put forward by the British, but they were not able to interfere with the decision of the Nawab.<sup>34</sup>

The key to the Nawab's success in enticing large numbers of British and other European soldiers into his circle was the promise of better pay and rank. Along with recruitment, during this period the Nawab often showed generosity to the European soldiers in his service by granting them promotions to higher ranks and giving them better pay, and in so doing demonstrating to other British soldiers that they could have better careers in his court than in the service of the Company. A very important point worth noting is that the

---

<sup>31</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Jun. 1773, 195.

<sup>32</sup> IOR, Z/E/4/865, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, (no date) 1772, 789-790.

<sup>33</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 140-141, 147, Feb. 1774, 228; E/379/8, Apr. 1774, 44, 50.

<sup>34</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/9, DGP, Aug. 1774, 91.

system of military ranking used by the Nawab to promote his private European soldiers was wholly lifted from the British custom of military organization—for example, lieutenants, captains, and majors—rather than the “distant” Mughal mansabdari system.<sup>35</sup> This is another example of how the Nawab was very pragmatic in adopting foreign customs for his own benefit. The Nawab’s promotion of British soldiers in the European style also seems to have been done previously, to some British officers who had served in the Nawab-EIC joint army and to some of the Nawab’s private troops. Beforehand, promotions had always taken place under the supervision and approbation of the EIC, so that they were considered as coming from just one source of authority, i.e. the Company; in later cases, the Nawab applied this right independently of the EIC’s decision-making processes, in a way that seems to have been both unprecedented and frequent. This issue of military ranking soon added another dimension to the conflict between the Nawab and the Company’s people. For example, in April 1773, a dispute broke out during a joint military operation between a British lieutenant of the joint army—under the EIC’s control—and a British captain of the Nawab’s private troop. The heart of the conflict centered on which of them had the right to command the other. In general, captain was a higher rank than lieutenant, but the Company’s officers, of every rank, considered themselves superior to the private officers of the Nawab, both indigenous and Europeans, and refused to be commanded by the Nawab’s people.<sup>36</sup> A significant problem thus arose; how could the military hierarchy be organized when European soldiers in the Nawab’s service had to work with those officials in the Company in joint military operations? However, such disputes regarding military honor and hierarchy were not unprecedented; starting in 1754, units of the British royal army were often sent to South Asia to supplement the Company’s troops in important wars. Inevitably, this gave rise to disputes between the two British military organizations over the same issue; who had the right to command the other?<sup>37</sup>

Paterson, as the Nawab’s secretary, proposed several possible solutions to both the Nawab and the Presidency. His first idea was that the Nawab’s troops and the Company’s troops were always to act separately. This would certainly prevent conflict, but was not possible in practice, since troops from both parties always needed to work together in battle. The second alternative was based on seniority; all the officers, in both armies, were to be ranked according to military rank and then, if this was equal, the date of their commission.

---

<sup>35</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Apr. 1773, 87; E/379/7, Dec. 1773, 111.

<sup>36</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Apr. 1773, 91.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur N. Gilbert, “Recruitment and Reform in the East India Company Army, 1760-1800,” *Journal of British Studies* 15 (1975): 91.

This may seem the fairest solution, but it was hardly possible for the Company to allow some of its officers to be of lower rank than those of the Nawab. The third possibility was the model used when the EIC's troops had to work with the British royal troops: the Nawab's troops should have the same relationship to the EIC's troops that the EIC's had to the crown's. As such, the youngest captain of the Company was to command all the Nawab's captains and the youngest of the Nawab's captains was to command all the subalterns of the army—both the Nawab's and the Company's soldiers—and so on in all other ranks. Paterson thought that the last idea seemed to be the most practical, but the Nawab declared his people to be extremely displeased with it. As the Nawab said, he had no objection to giving first place to the military officers of the British king, but he was a sovereign prince and the Company's people were his subjects, so “why should their troops have their advantage over his?”<sup>38</sup> At least until 1775, the debate on this issue was still ongoing, with no solution found. The Nawab insisted on equality; the officers he appointed should be on the same level as the Company's officers in all situations. The Company, who disdained the Nawab's officers and complained that the Nawab could raise up anyone—people from the lowest station, Company deserters, or even enemies (other Europeans)—to serve him, insisted the EIC's officers had to be ranked over those of the Nawab.<sup>39</sup>

### **Improvements in the Nawab's Private Troops**

Wanting to reduce the numbers and role of the Nawab-EIC joint army, the Nawab then realized it was an urgent necessity for him to improve the quantity and quality of his private forces. As a first step, the Nawab placed particular emphasis on his cavalry. The reason for this is obvious. As a former Mughal army, the cavalry was the ablest and most reliable part of his forces. From the beginning of their contacts in the late 1740s, the Nawab's indigenous troops, especially the infantry, had usually been looked down upon by the British officers for their lack of discipline, equipment, and skill. In sharp contrast, his cavalry units frequently received compliments for their efficiency and usefulness from the British soldiers, and thus saved the Nawab's pride.<sup>40</sup> The Nawab's ambitious plan to improve his cavalry commenced around 1773, a short time before his second conquest of Tanjore. The Nawab's goal was to have a large force of 6,000 horses in total. While, at the time, he had roughly half that number, the Nawab intended to purchase some and to gain others as spoils of war from Tanjore. They

---

<sup>38</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Apr. 1773, 92.

<sup>39</sup> IOR, Z/E/4/866, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 12 Apr. 1775, 243-245. I have been unable to find evidence as to whether this problematic issue was ever resolved, and, if so, how.

<sup>40</sup> IOR, P/D/42, MP, MMSC, 26 Nov. 1759, 721; Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 123.

would be formed into six regiments, each with a battalion of infantry sepoy with high quality arms. When he originally started to put his plan into effect, the Nawab requested that the EIC lend him some of its skilled officers in order to drill his new regiments. However, after the conquest of Tanjore, the Nawab's distrust of the EIC increased so much that, despite many recommendations and applications from various skilled Company officers, the Nawab insisted on using only individuals who could be called "his people" because "he could not trust the Company's officers anymore."<sup>41</sup> Eventually, the Nawab decided to appoint two newly-recruited British mercenaries who were unrelated to the Company as commanders of the first two regiments. One thing is particularly worth remarking on here. At first glance, because his pioneering experiments with the European military had caused him much trouble it seems as if the Nawab wanted to return to his old, tried and tested traditional army model. But, in fact, the Nawab did not change his approach, since the new cavalry he intended to form was not in the traditional Mughal style but fully European.<sup>42</sup>

In December 1773, Prince Modar al-Mulk—the second son who became the Nawab's favorite and his principle assistant in all of his most ambitious military projects during this time—presented to the EIC and the British king's minister a structural blueprint for the future of the Karnatak forces and the means for paying them. This scheme clearly demonstrates how determined the Karnatak elites were to rid their military of dependence on the EIC. As well as the concrete idea for how the cavalry regiments would be organized, it also included a plan for the Nawab's infantry; the Nawab would form twelve disciplined battalions of regular infantry that would be under his own command. Each battalion consisted of a thousand men, with a proper amount of artillery, drilled by his European officers. This explains the Nawab's efforts to recruit large numbers of European military officers, as discussed previously. In addition, another twelve or fifteen battalions of sibandi would be kept, to collect revenue.<sup>43</sup> The Nawab and the young prince also put great efforts into accumulating high-quality arms, something which caused great anxiety for the EIC. In fact, right from the beginning of their relationship, the Nawab had been trying to gain as much of an advantage as possible from the EIC in this respect; for example, he had always wanted the EIC to provide his forces with European arms and military stores. This was actually mutually beneficial; while the Nawab received European arms, the EIC made enormous profits from the deals. However, the EIC had always been cautious about making such provisions, since it did not want to let the local

---

<sup>41</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 86-87.

<sup>42</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/6, DGP, Aug. 1773, 122.

<sup>43</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/7, DGP, Dec. 1773, 121-122.

ruler create too strong a force that could one day be a threat to the Company's own existence. After 1765, the EIC wanted to provide arms only for the joint army that was under its management and was not willing to give such to the Nawab's private troops. There were even secret orders from the Court of Directors to supply the Nawab's forces with old-style and lower-quality arms and to keep the new and better ones for the Company's own use.<sup>44</sup> In response to the EIC's efforts to curtail his military progress, the Nawab sought to gain access to military provisions, both in public and in secret, from various other European ports along the Coromandel Coast, such as Pondicherry, Porto-Novo, and Tranquebar. British private merchants, the Danish East India Company, and probably traders from other nations, too, became the Nawab's business partners. Frequently, clashes broke out between the Nawab and the EIC because the arms-smuggling was detected. Not wishing to break its relationship with the Nawab, the EIC usually had to allow the arms to pass with firm requests to the Nawab not to make any additional purchases of arms from foreigners in the future. However, such repetitive requests-*cum*-warnings could not stop the Nawab from doing so.<sup>45</sup> When the Nawab made direct contact with the British government he also asked it, via the king's minister, to provide him with 10,000 stand of arms<sup>46</sup> and 14 brass guns, "such as are used for the [British] king's troops"; he was willing to pay the full price and expressed his desire that such might be sent out to him each year. However, it is likely that the deal was never concluded.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, in 1775, the Nawab made the large request to the EIC to send his military stores as much as 700 tons of equipment, worth £76,000, to him. In the latter case, the sources suggest that the EIC was faced with a huge dilemma, but eventually thought it necessary to acquiesce to the Nawab's demands in order to prevent him from smuggling in arms through other channels. However, the Company sought to control the quantity and quality as far as possible.<sup>48</sup>

The Nawab not only relied on imports of arms from Europe. There is evidence that he attempted to imitate European technology by making his own versions of their products.<sup>49</sup> For example, in 1774, when Paterson visited the Nawab's palace in Trichinopoly, he found the place was being used for making and storing the Nawab's weapons, the quality of which

---

<sup>44</sup> See some examples in: IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 164-166; Z/E/4/864, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 25 Mar. 1768, 98; Z/E/4/866, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 20 Feb. 1774, 10.

<sup>45</sup> See the examples in: IOR, P/240/27, MPP, Madras Consultation, 12 Sep. 1768, 707; P/240/38, MPP, Madras Consultation, Aug. 1774, 638-639; P/240/56, MPP, Madras Consultation, 1 Mar. 1783, 287-288; Mss Eur E/379/5, DGP, Jun. 1773, 176-177; Mss Eur E/379/9, DGP, Jul. 1774, 76; Z/E/4/868, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 23 Dec. 1778, 241-243.

<sup>46</sup> A stand of arms denotes a complete set of weapons for one soldier including a musket, bayonet, cartridge box, belt, and etc.

<sup>47</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Apr. 1772, 178.

<sup>48</sup> IOR, Z/E/4/866, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 25 Nov. 1775, 459.

<sup>49</sup> TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 65, *Ruznama*, 30 Apr. and 12 Jun. 1773.

impressed him. Following Paterson's account, there were foundries to create arsenals, many good gun-mounts on field carriages, and a good store of small arms, all well-arranged. These foundries were directed by a European officer. As Paterson went on to describe, many workmen were employed there, in all different branches of the gunsmith, "who seem to understand their business well, and go thro's it in a mastery manner."<sup>50</sup>

The evidence suggests that, after the Nawab had realized his mistake of putting too large a percentage of his military capacity into the hands of the EIC, he applied various short- and long-term policies to reduce the Company's control and strengthen his own forces. Yet he knew very well that he needed to take such steps very cautiously. It was still crucial for him to maintain and monopolize the EIC's friendship and assistance and to prevent it from having contact with other local powers. The EIC had a similar perspective towards keeping his friendship with the Nawab. In this light, one can see that there were conflicts, pressures, compromises, negotiations, and conspiracies on both sides of their military relationship, but a real break-up of the bond between the Nawab and the EIC never occurred.

### **9.3 The Irreversible Context**

As well as his increasing distrust of the EIC, another crucial factor that allowed the Nawab's military ambition to increase during the conquest of Tanjore was his belief that his revenue would be greatly increased by the wealth acquired from that region and the peace that would reign across his whole state when the war had ended. Unfortunately, from the mid-1770s and for two decades subsequently, many of the circumstances in which he found himself were unexpected and unfavorable to the Nawab. Most of them were the result of the effects of the British government's increasing interference in EIC business after the Regulating Act of 1773 had proved ineffective in preventing the "evil" behavior of the EIC's people. The British king and government, as one interest group, had long had a passive role in South Asia, being a tool by which the EIC could develop links with local rulers, and recently also as a tool of the Karnatak Nawab to put pressure back on the EIC. But from the mid-1770s, it transformed itself into active players in British-South Asian politics, ones that would forever change the whole political scene at the expense of old, active players such as the EIC and the South Asian rulers. In the following section, I will discuss how the Nawab of Karnatak received an enormous blow—especially regarding his military plans—from the new, changed context, and how he struggled to reverse his fortunes in the last two decades of his reign.

---

<sup>50</sup> IOR, Mss Eur E/379/8, DGP, Jun. 1774, 208.

## **The Restoration of Tanjore**

At a time when public demands for the EIC to stop its servants' evil practices in South Asia were heard across Britain, news of the corruption and conspiracies of the Madras officers in relation to the Tanjore conquests of late 1773 added fuel to the fire. The Tanjore expeditions were seen as a violation by the Madras Presidency of the Regulating Act of 1773, which had banned the Company from becoming involved in South Asian rulers' wars of territorial expansion. Having been pressured by the British government and public opinion, as well as the various moves by the Nawab to display his military independence from the EIC and manipulate its agents in the Madras Presidency in the previous few years, in 1775 the EIC's Directors decided to give disapprobation to the conquest and order Tanjore to be returned to its raja as soon as possible. The mission to execute this order was given to George Pigot, a former Governor of Madras who was appointed to that position for the second time.<sup>51</sup> Pigot arrived in Madras in late 1775, at a time when the Nawab had high hopes that the revenue of Tanjore would soon pour into his treasury, allowing him to repay the enormous debts that had been caused by the wars and to achieve his grand military projects. This unexpected order immediately disturbed all his plans and sent the Nawab into a state of apoplexy.

Pigot returned this second time not only to complete that specific mission but also to set right all the matters related to the Madras Presidency. Such included efforts to eliminate the extraordinary influence of the Nawab over the Madras Presidency which had, on too many occasions, caused the Company's servants to act "unreasonably" in serving his interests at the expenses of the institution. He moved quickly to restore Tanjore to its raja in April 1776. However, Pigot was probably not able to fully understand just how deeply entwined the interests of the Nawab and British individuals in Madras were by that time, since they were almost certainly much more complicated than during his previous time there, in 1755-1763. His hasty move to restore Tanjore, which suddenly deprived the Nawab of its prospective revenue, not only caused huge losses to the local ruler but also to all the Nawab's European creditors and associates, who numbered more than 150 British gentlemen in Madras, both Company servants and private entrepreneurs. Most of them had advanced large sums of money to the Nawab for his wars and in return had received promises of repayments primarily in the form of land-revenue assignments of the new conquest territories for the

---

<sup>51</sup> The details of the two conquests of Tanjore and the EIC's Directors' opinions on them can be found in IOR, Z/E/4/866, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 12 Apr. 1775, 291-350.

subsequent years.<sup>52</sup> During this period, Pigot also dismissed several senior Company officers who disagreed with his new approach and were thus considered the Nawab's friends.<sup>53</sup> Pigot's harsh policies in reforming the Madras Presidency made him many enemies and eventually led to his demise. In mid-September 1776, he was overthrown in a coup by most of the Madras Council's members, who claimed that his dictatorial actions threatened the stability of the Presidency.<sup>54</sup> Paul Benfield, one of the Nawab's biggest creditors and someone whose business was deeply entangled with Chepauk Palace, was said to have been the main sponsor. Furthermore, and although no evidence could be found, it seems to have been widely believed that the Nawab also had a hand in the coup. Unfortunately, and to everyone's surprise, Pigot became sick and died in captivity in May 1777. All the company's servants and the most influential Britons in Madras who were believed to have been involved in the coup were investigated, but, in the end, little progress could be made due to the many intrigues that were swirling around.<sup>55</sup>

For many years after Pigot was removed, the Nawab sent protests about the restoration of Tanjore to its raja in all directions: the EIC's Directors, the Governor-General in Bengal, the British government, and his friends in Britain.<sup>56</sup> This is a good reflection of how the Nawab attempted to play fitna even in Britain. However, his rival, the raja of Tanjore also used the similar tactic. By many public and secret deals the raja of Tanjore had also successfully developed many contacts in London who would act in his best interests, just as the Nawab had done. In fact, and ironically, the Nawab and his British friends contributed greatly to the raja's success in forming his support network, since many of the raja's supporters had been opponents of the Nawab's party and his interests in British-South Asian politics. Phillips, whose work discusses the long-running debates over the Tanjore Restoration in London in great detail, describes how, in 1776-1778, the Nawab's agents, led by Lauchlin Maclean (mentioned in Chapter Five), and the agents and supporters of the Tanjore raja, led by the famous politician and writer Edmund Burke, were at each other's throats. To support the interests of the South Asian ruler they supported (as well as their own), each used a variety of means, including appealing to the EIC's stock holders, the British king's compassion, and the British Parliament, as well as campaigns in the press to get public opinion on their side. This debate was certainly not merely about whether the two

---

<sup>52</sup> Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 264.

<sup>53</sup> For details of the Nawab's conflicts with Lord Pigot, see: *CPC*, V, Nawab to Governor-General, 10 Sep. 1776, 37-39.

<sup>54</sup> *CPC*, V, Nawab to Governor of Madras, Dec. 1776, 71; Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 284-324; Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 75-144; Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 266-287.

<sup>55</sup> Turnbull, *Warren Hastings*, 98.

<sup>56</sup> *CPC*, V, Nawab to Governor-General, 14 Apr. 1778, 133-135.

local South Asian rulers would win or lose, but involved the rights of the Company, the corruption of its servants, and the right of the state to intervene, as well as the future direction of the British nation in South Asia. To sum up, the Nawab's party eventually lost the battle, and, while the Nawab considered the raja to be his subject, the British nation considered the raja as an independent sovereign under their protection.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Nawab's Debts**

The Nawab had had an enormous debt to the EIC and hundreds of private investors from the very beginning of their relationships, and many historians have assumed that this was the main cause of the Nawab's constant acquiescence to the Company's power. I argue along the lines of Ramaswami, who views the debt as a main tool by which the Nawab was able to tie the British into his interests.<sup>58</sup> With a few exceptional and temporary periods, the debt was seemingly never a serious hindrance to the Nawab's political or economic designs. As is revealed by many EIC documents, although the EIC's agents always worried and complained about the Nawab's great debts, when the Nawab proposed new projects related to conquest or business investments to them—meaning the creation of new debts—they usually agreed. This was because, thus far, the Nawab had proved his ability to pay his debts—along with their very high rates of interest—albeit with some delays. Many times, the Madras officers gave their reports to the Court of Directors with positive evaluations, stating that within a few years the Nawab would be able to clear all his past debts, so the latter gave its consent for new ones to be created.<sup>59</sup> The fact that hundreds of private investors, both European and South Asian, invested their money in his business and became his creditors is one of the best proofs for how the financial credit status of the Nawab had, up to then, been very good.<sup>60</sup> In fact, as Phillips points out, for many of the Nawab's bonds in the 1770s the money was never actually lent; bonds were given as gratuities or bribes to the British, a practice which actually began in the 1760s.<sup>61</sup>

The period when possession of Tanjore was suddenly and unexpectedly taken away from the Nawab after his large financial investment in it was an exceptional case. It was likely to have been the first time that the Nawab's finances had been in real trouble since the

---

<sup>57</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 156-168, 174, 177-179, 181-182. Among the raja's supporters in London were Hugh Pigot, William Waldegrave, William Burke, and Edmund Burke. Among the Nawab's agents were Lauchlin Maclean, John Macpherson, Frederick Stuart, James Macpherson, and James Mackenzie-Stuart.

<sup>58</sup> See my discussion on Ramaswami's work in the main introduction.

<sup>59</sup> Gurney, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot," 67, 210, 215-218.

<sup>60</sup> Detailed discussions of the Nawab's debts can be found in Gurney's doctoral dissertation, "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot" and Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, especially 237-326.

<sup>61</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 18-19.

early 1750s. This can be seen by the Nawab being forced to reduce the numbers of his private troops, the last thing he would have wished to do. Due to the enormous arrears in payment—which had reached 700,000 pagodas—and various mutinies that broke out, in April 1777 the Nawab was forced to negotiate a “Cavalry Loan” for 400,000 pagodas (£160,000) with his British creditors, on the Company’s security. Under this loan’s contract, the Nawab was compelled to disband 9,000 of his infantry and a number of cavalry after the arrears had been paid to them.<sup>62</sup> There were yet more mutinies by his cavalry in 1778-1779, and the Nawab was pressed hard by the EIC to reduce his expenses and disband his private troops while, at the same time, continuing to pay the ten battalions of the joint force.<sup>63</sup> However, as Phillips points out, even at this time of manifest financial crisis on the part of the Nawab there were many British people in Madras who had been long associated with the Nawab who viewed the event in a different light. In 1778, a military commander Hector Munro alleged that the Nawab was not truly short of money but was instead merely pretending to be extremely poor and causing his cavalry to mutiny and imprison their European officers in order to force the EIC to lessen its demands on him and turn its attention to the Tanjore raja instead. In August 1778, an old creditor, Charles Smith, gave his opinion on the Nawab’s debts by stating that he had “never yet failed us in the End.”<sup>64</sup> Also, in 1778-1779, when conflict again broke out between the British and the French on the Coast, the Nawab offered the British government to defray the full cost of taking Pondicherry to make a favorable impression in London.<sup>65</sup> Phillips argues that the Nawab’s finances at this time were certainly strained, but he was never actually vacant of the funds needed. Instead, the Nawab was intentionally holding back on his payments, hoping that the Madras Presidency’s unavoidable need for money would compel it to coerce the funds from the Tanjore raja and reconsider restoring that kingdom to the Nawab who, when having revenue resources, would pay them much better.<sup>66</sup>

In my opinion, the suspicions of the British officers and creditors that form the basis of Phillips’ arguments were probably not groundless, especially in light of the evidence from Chapter Seven that, during the late 1770s, the Nawab was still very active in many mercantile investments. At this time, the Nawab could still maintain his position as the sole renter of the Company’s Jagirs in Karnatak and was also able to manage to secure the rental contract of Guntur district, in the Northern Circars, in 1779, albeit under the table. Also, there is

---

<sup>62</sup> IOR, MP, P/251/83, MMSC, 21 Apr. 613-14, MMSC, 28 Apr. 1777, 626.

<sup>63</sup> *CPC*, V, Nawab to Governor-General, 13 Apr. 1779, 319-320, 12 Nov. 1779, 386; Ramaswami, *Political History of Karnatak*, 307, 313-317.

<sup>64</sup> Phillips, “The Development of British Authority in Southern India,” 206-208.

<sup>65</sup> Phillips, “The Development of British Authority in Southern India,” 212.

<sup>66</sup> Phillips, “The Development of British Authority in Southern India,” 207-208.

evidence that, during the negotiation to rent Guntur district from the Company, the Nawab paid his debts more regularly and quickly reduced the size of his public debt.<sup>67</sup> Two possibilities can be deduced from the accounts. It was either that the Nawab very quickly regained a firm financial position after a short crisis in 1777 or, in fact, there were no real financial problems but the Nawab was using his debts to further his political agenda. Both possibilities reflect the fact that the “unmanageable debts” were hardly the core of the Nawab’s failure to resist the British domination, at least until the late 1770s.

### **The Nawab-Bengal Alliance**

While the restoration of Tanjore left the Nawab’s military designs of the early 1770s in tatters, two other, related events that reduced the Nawab’s ability to reverse his fortune happened in the first half of the 1780s. The first was the start of the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-1784), the second was the appointment of George Macartney as the new Madras Governor (1781-1785). The Second Anglo-Mysore War started when the British invaded the French port town of Mahé on the Malabar Coast, which the Mysore sultan considered to be in his territory.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, Hyder Ali Khan and his son Tipu Sultan declared war on the EIC and sent Mysore troops to invade Bombay and Madras. At the beginning of this war, while the Mysore soldiers were invading many parts of Karnatak, the Nawab and the Madras Presidency under Governor Rumbold failed to defend the state as a result of internal conflict. On one side, the Madras Governor pressed the Nawab to assign some of his provinces to the Presidency so that it could collect the revenue to pay his debts and the costs of the current war, for it was his country that the Presidency needed to defend. On the other, the Nawab refused to pay, blaming the EIC for creating the war. The Nawab was pleased that the EIC was at war with Mysore, the enemy that the Nawab most wished to see eliminated and, throughout the 1770s, the Nawab had been trying to convince the EIC to use its military forces to destroy Mysore.<sup>69</sup> Now, however, the Nawab had another, more urgent goal. As he claimed, he had no money to pay for the war and to cover his debts because the EIC had taken Tanjore from him. If Tanjore was returned to him, he claimed, the British would not lack for troops or money as they did currently.<sup>70</sup>

It was only when the situation was almost irreparable that the Nawab realized he had no choice but to cooperate with the Company to ensure the survival of both parties. This

---

<sup>67</sup> Phillips, “The Development of British Authority in Southern India,” 218, 222.

<sup>68</sup> Fox, *North Arcot*, 79.

<sup>69</sup> See for examples: IOR, Mss Eur E/379/3, DGP, Sep. 1771, 14, Dec. 1771, 69, 104, Aug. 1772, 252.

<sup>70</sup> Fox, *North Arcot*, 89; *CPC*, VI, Nawab to Governor-General, 14 Mar. 1781, 39.

occurred at the same time that Governor-General Warren Hastings, after finishing his long stint struggling to gain control of the Supreme Council, began to turn his attention to Madras and Bombay. Hastings' aim was to bring these other two Presidencies under the control of Bengal following the Regulating Act of 1773. However, he was shocked to learn that the two Presidencies had caused the war with Mysore and thereby caused a crisis for their settlements, especially Madras, which was close to being lost. Hastings immediately wrote to the Karnatak Nawab that he would send reinforcements from Bengal with General Eyre Coote—the famous EIC Commander-in-Chief who had played a significant role in the Carnatic Wars of the 1750s-1760s—to recover the situation and appealed for the Nawab's full cooperation.<sup>71</sup> The Nawab, who was also desperate to save his country but still deep in conflict with the Madras Presidency, immediately embraced the Governor-General and Sir Eyre Coote.<sup>72</sup> Remarkably, in early 1781, the Nawab made an unprecedented move by sending his diwan, Saiyid Asim Khan, and his British representative, Richard Joseph Sullivan, to Bengal to suggest a direct treaty of friendship between him and the Supreme Council, thus side-stepping the Madras Presidency. It is also important to note that Richard Sullivan was a relative of Laurence Sullivan, one of the most powerful Company Directors of the period and the patron of Warren Hastings. From 1776, Richard Sullivan had worked in Karnatak as a secretary to the Madras Presidency. He went to Bengal ostensibly on leave but appeared later as the Nawab's envoy, helping his diwan to negotiate the treaty.<sup>73</sup> Clearly, Richard Sullivan was one of Warren Hastings' friends and collaborators. According to this first treaty with the Supreme Council (concluded in April 1781, but not yet approved by the Company's Directors), the Nawab requested full authority to manage all his domestic affairs without any outside interference. In return, he would pay for ten battalions of the joint force and his previous debts to the Company on time so that the EIC could continue the war against Mysore. Furthermore, Richard Sullivan was to be appointed to reside at the Karnatak court as the representative of the Supreme Council to give him direct advice and protection. The Nawab also added the condition that, after Mysore was defeated, he would not be prevented from resuming his plan of creating 5,000 well-drilled cavalrymen.<sup>74</sup> Evidently, like the king's agents earlier, the Nawab saw Governor-General Warren Hastings as a potential new ally that he could play off against the Madras Council because, at this time, Hastings was planning to

---

<sup>71</sup> For Sir Eyre Coote's heroic role in the Carnatic Wars of the 1750s-1760s, see: Fox, *North Arcot*, 67-69.

<sup>72</sup> Turnbull, *Warren Hastings*, 145-148, 151; Fisher, *The Politics of the British Annexation of India*, 94.

<sup>73</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 58; Henry Dodwell, "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic," *The English Historical Review* 40, 159 (1925): 378, 380.

<sup>74</sup> Dodwell, "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic," 379-380; Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, X: 43-51; CPC, VI, Nawab to Governor-General, 26 Mar. 1781, 42-44.

subjugate the Madras Presidency to his control. This is reminiscent of the traditional tactic of fitna and the case of the king's ministers in the early 1770s: when the Nawab felt that his power was threatened by one group in his network of allies, he tried to find a new one among its potential "rivals" to balance its power. However, it may be wondered why the Nawab trusted Warren Hastings. His decision was probably due to their long and good friendship. While Hastings spent most of his career in the Bengal Presidency, there were a few years in the 1760s when he had been appointed to Madras and met with the Nawab. After Hastings had become the Governor-General of Bengal, he and the Nawab kept up their regular, official correspondence, thereby informing each other regarding important affairs and asking each other for assistance in various small matters.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, Hastings was known for having an especially sympathetic attitude towards South Asia and the region's sovereigns, particularly those who were bound to the EIC and the ruler of Britain by treaties of alliance. According to him, in order to secure the co-operation of the local rulers, the strictest justice must be displayed and only at the highest level of necessity should the EIC interfere. Another reason that the Nawab was supposed to like Hastings in particular related to the latter's views of the status of the native polities, which perfectly fitted the Nawab's interest. He firmly delineated the "independent princes"—the Nawabs of Awadh, the Nizams of Deccan, and the Nawabs of Karnatak—from "dependents" such as the rajas of Banares and Tanjore. So, regarding the Nawab's argument regarding the status of Tanjore, Hastings was one of the most prominent of the Company's figures to support the Nawab, as he viewed that polity as no more than a zamindar of Karnatak.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Nawab vs George Macartney during the Madras Presidency's Reforms**

The direct treaty between the Nawab and the Supreme Council was a public insult to the Madras government and widened the breach between the two EIC Presidencies. However, I argue that, just as in the case of the king's minister, the Nawab did not wish to throw himself fully beneath the shield of the Supreme Council, passively waiting for its protection. As Henry Dodwell rightly suggests, the Nawab knew very well that the Bengal government lacked the means to directly enforce its decisions within the territories of the two subordinate Presidencies. The rivalry between Bengal and Madras merely provided the Nawab with more time and opportunities to delay the demands made upon him by the latter. One further important point to note regarding this relates to Richard Sullivan. In the preceding few years,

---

<sup>75</sup> Their correspondences can be found in *CPC*, vol. I-XI; see also TA, Catalogue of Persian Records, bundle 66, *Ruznama*, 22 and 25, 28 Aug. 1773.

<sup>76</sup> Dodwell, "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic," 390, 396.

he had been the military and political secretary to the Madras Presidency, before suddenly becoming the Nawab's representative in treaty negotiations with the Bengal government. He was certainly considered as a traitor by the Madras officers. The fact that he returned to Madras as the appointed Governor-General's representative in the Karnatak court merely served to reinforce the Bengal-Madras hostility.<sup>77</sup>

The news of this treaty and the appointment of Sullivan reached Madras at around the same time as George Macartney—the new Madras Governor who had been appointed to replace Rumbold—arrived. Macartney promptly sent petitions to London and Bengal requesting the cancellation of this arrangement. As he proclaimed: “none of the members of the Madras Government would ever approve of the exercise of the Governor-General's authority over his head.”<sup>78</sup> After a war of words, eventually the treaty and the appointment of Sullivan were annulled with the consent of all involved, including Hastings and the Nawab, primarily because Hastings had been informed by his friends in London that the new Madras Governor was not his enemy and had been fully prepared to cooperate with him, unlike earlier Madras Governors. Believing this to be the case, Hastings then convinced the Nawab to come to an understanding with the new Madras Governor and, trusting in Hastings, the Nawab then arranged a new treaty with Macartney, in December 1781. According to this treaty, for a period of five years from the time of its agreement, the Nawab granted the Madras Presidency full authority to collect and administer the revenue of the whole Karnatak for the purpose of carrying on the war with Mysore and discharging all his debts, with the exception of one-sixth of the revenue, which was to be left for the Nawab's own expenses. The Madras Governor was also empowered to appoint renters and collectors, but their appointments needed to be confirmed by the Nawab, who maintained the right to veto.<sup>79</sup> This was the first time in the three decades of their relationship that the Nawab had given authority over his internal affairs to the EIC.

The selection and appointment of Macartney occurred at the beginning of 1780, when moves to transfer Company's South Asian administration into the hands of the British government became strong again in Britain. This was mainly because of the many wars that had broken out in South Asia in the previous decades between the EIC and various regional states, bearing testimony to the failure of the EIC's senior figures and the Regulating Act of 1773 to fix the corruption and despotic acts of their officers. Macartney, as with Hastings

---

<sup>77</sup> Dodwell, “Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic,” 378, 380.

<sup>78</sup> *CPC*, VI, Nawab to Governor-General, 22 Nov. 1781, 112.

<sup>79</sup> Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, X: 51-52.; *CPC*, VI, Saiyid Asim Khan to Governor-General, 1 Jul. 1782, 194.

back in 1773, was appointed at a time when the British Tory government and the Company's Directors were being heavily pressured by anti-Company factions to improve the situation in South Asia. However, one sharp difference between Macartney's case and Hastings' is that it was the first time that the EIC's stockholders elected "an outsider" to one of its main positions. Macartney used to serve the British government and had a great reputation as a statesman, but no previous connection with the Company. Hence, he was widely accepted by those who believed that the crisis in Madras required a new head, one who was wholly unconnected with any of the contending interest groups there. However, behind the scenes, Macartney also owed his adoption as a candidate to the group of "Company politicians," led by Laurence Sullivan and James Macpherson (both of whom were the Nawab's friends). The former was the patron of Warren Hastings, and it was he who told Hastings to trust the new Madras Governor. Furthermore, it was Paul Benfield, one of the Nawab's biggest creditors, who financially supported Macartney's nomination and travelling expenses to Madras. These old players likely thought that, as a result of his ignorance of South Asian affairs and lack of connections in Madras, Macartney could be easily controlled by them. Nevertheless, those experienced Britons were all wrong, as it turned out that Macartney was not prepared to be anyone's puppet.<sup>80</sup> Soon, Macartney revealed his true self: an opponent of Hastings, with a determination to reform the Madras Presidency in his own way with no intervention from Bengal. During the Anglo-Mysore War, Macartney often failed to listen to or support General Eyre Coote, who had been sent by the Governor-General to save Karnatak, seeing him as "Hastings' man." The Anglo-Mysore War ended with a peace negotiation between Macartney and Tipu Sultan in 1784, despite the strong objections of Hastings, who had believed the EIC could win the war.<sup>81</sup>

The individual who was most impacted by the unanticipated character of Macartney was the Nawab. What distinguished him from previous Madras Governors was the fact that the Nawab was not only unable to convince Macartney to compromise in any of his ideas, the latter also did many things that the Nawab viewed as public challenges to his sovereignty. For instance, Macartney insisted on appointing a district renter of whom the Nawab did not approve. This was a violation of the treaty of 1781 and led to bloodshed in Nellore between the local people and the Company's officers. Elsewhere, Macartney threatened to dismiss the Nawab's old amildars if they did not obey the orders of the Madras Governor. He also gave

---

<sup>80</sup> Lucy S. Sutherland, "Lord Macartney's Appointment as Governor of Madras, 1780: The Treasury in East India Company Elections," *The English Historical Review* 90 (1975): 523-529; Dodwell, "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic," 375, 381.

<sup>81</sup> Turnbull, *Warren Hastings*, 154, 156.

protection to the Nawab's relatives who had caused that ruler trouble. This was a violation of the treaty of 1760 between the EIC and the Nawab, which stated that the EIC would not give protection to any of the Nawab's families and subjects. Macartney also tried to lessen the amount the Nawab was spending on charity and canceled various jagir and inam lands that the Nawab had granted to various individuals in his patronage networks, turning them into central government lands so that he could collect more revenue in order to clear the Nawab's debts. This was despite the fact that religious donations and rewards of land to prominent subjects were the core means by which a local sovereign could maintain his political power. On the international stage, Macartney also went over the Nawab's head by concluding a treaty with Mysore to end the war in 1784—the Treaty of Mangalore—without including the Nawab's name in the agreement.<sup>82</sup>

Yet the most problematic aspect of Macartney's governorship for the Nawab was related to his military power. The treaty of 1781 reduced the Nawab's expenses to only one-sixth of what it had been, so he could barely maintain his private troops outside the EIC's joint forces, and the arrears caused mutinies among his officers; in turn, Macartney used this to press the Nawab to disband most of them. In May 1784, Macartney went a step further by issuing an order, posted at the gates of Fort St George and circulated throughout Karnatak, forbidding any recruitment of sepoys without the explicit permission of the Madras Governor. As justification, Macartney argued that several of the Nawab's servants had been treacherously recruiting men in Karnatak for the army of Tipu Sultan, so he launched the order to prevent it. Whether the allegation was true or not, this was an unprecedented challenge to the Nawab's authority as a sovereign. In earlier times, all the recruitment of local soldiers in Karnatak, for whichever troops, had to be done via the Nawab and solely under the Nawab's order, as the supreme leader of the state. Even when the EIC had wanted indigenous soldiers for its own troops, it had to request that the Nawab issue the order. Some of the Nawab's native officers certainly tried to challenge this rule, and supposedly the Nawab was behind their actions. But these officers were severely punished by Macartney, the Nawab unable to protect them. Next, in August 1784, Macartney disbanded the Nawab's private cavalry which he had sent to assist the Company during the war with Mysore, without the Nawab's permission. Macartney allowed the Nawab to maintain only one cavalry regiment, of 500 horses, instead of the many thousands that he had been planning since 1773. More

---

<sup>82</sup> For details of the conflicts and complaints between the Nawab and Governor Macartney, see: *CPC*, VI, Saiyid Asim Khan to Governor-General, 1 July 1782, 192-197, Saiyid Asim Khan to Governor-General, 25 Nov. 1782, 226-229, Nawab to Governor-General, 7 Apr. 1783, 259, Nawab to Governor-General, 22 Jun. 1784, 365-367; Keay, *India*, 396-397.

importantly, the soldiers who were disbanded from the Nawab's force were immediately enrolled in the Company's service to form two new regiments of Company cavalry. Some of those soldiers who were still loyal to the Nawab and refused to enlist were taken prisoner and punished by Macartney as mutineers. It is likely that the intention of Macartney was to remove as many Karnatak soldiers as possible from the Nawab's private forces and to transfer them to the Company's control.<sup>83</sup>

During these years, the Nawab tried to fight back against Macartney, inch by inch. On the one hand, as is hinted in several documents, the Nawab worked secretly to impede Macartney's revenue collection. For an example, in 1782, an EIC officer in Nellore reported that indigenous officials there had received orders from the court to send as much money as they could to the court but not show it in their accounts.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, in the years 1782-1785, the Nawab made countless complaints, containing severe charges against Macartney, to the EIC's senior officers and his British friends everywhere. Significantly, the Nawab's complaints against Macartney were very similar in style to those he had made against Pigot in the mid-1770s. For example, the Nawab stressed how Macartney violated his power, how he abusively dismissed the Company's old servants who defied him, and how he secretly negotiated with Tipu Sultan and Raja Tanjore against the Company's interests.<sup>85</sup> In my view, the Nawab would probably have desired a similar end to Macartney as that of Pigot, by an "internal coup." During this period of crisis, Warren Hastings was still seen by the Nawab as his main ally, and the Nawab sent his diwan Saiyid Asim Khan to stay in Bengal from May 1782 to 1784 in order to repeatedly deliver his complaints to Macartney, pressuring Hastings and the Supreme Council of Bengal to help him terminate or alter the treaty of 1781 as soon as possible. The Nawab let it be known to Hastings that he was willing to hand over his power to collect the Karnatak revenue and five-sixths of Karnatak income to the EIC during the war with Mysore. However, his power was not to be in the hands of Macartney, but of Hastings, and the Nawab suggested that General Sir Eyre Coote should be the man appointed to do so. That general, currently in Karnatak fighting against Mysore, was a member of the Supreme Council and a friend of Hastings. Above all, as Dodwell has observed, Coote had been on the worst terms with Macartney from their first encounter. Coote and the Nawab were thus linked by a common enemy.<sup>86</sup> According to the Nawab's plan, if Hastings agreed, he would invest Coote alone with full authority over revenue

---

<sup>83</sup> *CPC*, VI, Nawab to Governor-General, 22 Jun. 1784, 365-367, 16 Aug. 1784, 381.

<sup>84</sup> Dodwell, "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic," 384.

<sup>85</sup> *PC*, VI, Nawab to Governor-General, 7 Apr. 1783, 259, 13 Oct. 1783, 307.

<sup>86</sup> Dodwell, "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic," 385-388.

collection, and the latter would receive the right to issue any orders regarding Karnatak's officers, zamindars, Poligars, and the inhabitants. The Karnatak's supreme military general, Muhammad Najib Khan, would carry the Nawab's seal and always stay with Coote so that his order would be legalized.<sup>87</sup>

For Hastings, from early 1782 at least, he not only realized Macartney was not his friend but also had strongly believed that Macartney was attempting to destroy his reputation at home in London. As is revealed by Hastings himself, the Karnatak Nawab played a crucial role in planting hostile feelings towards Macartney in Hastings' mind. In a letter Hastings wrote in 1782 to one Mr. Scott, in which he complained about Macartney's behavior, he said: "[t]he second symptom is contained a letter from the old Nabob Walajah. [...] I doubt the facts stated in this representation, and yet I fear their reality."<sup>88</sup> Believing so, Hastings promptly agreed to the Nawab's proposals that would undermine Macartney's authority and allow him to maintain his influence in Karnatak. In January 1783, he issued orders to the Madras Presidency to follow the Nawab's plans. However, Macartney utterly refused to obey Hastings' orders. Furthermore, and unfortunately for the Nawab and Hastings, General Coote suddenly died of an illness in April 1783, so their plan had to be dropped. In the mid-1783, the Nawab proposed a new scheme to Hastings. He wanted to take back total control of the revenue collection but promised to still pay the five-sixths' revenue to the EIC in order to support the war and discharge his debts. Securities from reliable bankers would be provided to guarantee his regular payments. The Nawab convinced Hastings that he could definitely collect the revenue with the addition of a third more than the current management of Macartney, while local people would suffer less from the Governor's tyrannical behavior.<sup>89</sup> Again, the Nawab succeeded in obtaining an order from Bengal to restore his authority, but it was ignored by the Madras Governor. In the meantime, news had arrived from London that the treaty of December 1781 between the Nawab and Macartney had been approved by the Court of Directors. As can be seen, although the Nawab and Hastings cooperated well, the latter could not help much to improve the Nawab's situation. Principally it was because the changing political circumstances in Britain during these years gave much more influence to Macartney than Hastings.

At the time that Macartney started to reform the Madras Presidency in 1781, many Whig politicians in the House of Commons, led by Charles James Fox and Edmund Burke,

---

<sup>87</sup> PC, VI, Nawab to Eyre Coote, 6 Jun. 1782, 184, Governor-General to Saiyid Asim Khan, 27 Feb. 1783, 250-251.

<sup>88</sup> Dodwell, "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic," 390.

<sup>89</sup> PC, VI, Nawab to Governor-General, 10 Apr. 1782, 155-156, Governor-General to Nawab, 25 Jun. 1783, 290.

actively resumed their attempts to bring change to South Asian affairs by ending the Company's rule. The beginning of Burke's deep interest in affairs of this region had been caused by the issues of the Nawab's debts and the conquest of Tanjore by the Madras Presidency in particular.<sup>90</sup> The Whigs pushed two main demands during this period: first, to issue the "Magna Carta" for South Asia; second, to dismiss Warren Hastings on charges of failing to improve the EIC's situation there and acting against the policy of the British nation over the preceding decade. The Whigs were not yet successful because Company supporters used their traditional strategic cry about assaults on private property.<sup>91</sup> However, the Tory government under William Pitt (the Younger), who had just won the general election of 1783, was well aware that South Asian affairs thereafter needed to be managed on a new ground. The outcome of this political situation was Pitt's India Act of 1784, which resolved to place the EIC's South Asian possessions under a form of dual government. By this Act, the roles and powers of the EIC's Directors were retained only nominally, and executive control of all matters was passed to a new body, called "the Board of Control," whose president was a member of the British Cabinet and answerable directly to Parliament.<sup>92</sup> Intending to make the EIC a "peaceful" organization, subsequently the only times the Company could go to war in South Asia were in self-defense, or in defense of the allies it was already committed to.<sup>93</sup> As a result of Pitt's reformation, around early 1785, Parliament summoned Warren Hastings back to Britain to face impeachment over his misdeeds in South Asia. Thus, the Nawab was left to face Macartney's reformation in Madras (up to June 1785) and the new British administration in South Asia alone.

The appointment of Macartney, Pitt's reformation, and the impeachment of Warren Hastings signaled a crucial turning point in the British-Karnatak politics; the rules of the game were totally changed at the expense of the old players like both the Nawab and the old-style EIC officers who he had dealt with for the past four decades. The EIC—though still continued to exist for almost a century—was hereafter heavily controlled, nationalized, and merged into the British government. The new generations of EIC officers increasingly saw themselves as representatives of the British "national" interest. Company officers were no longer able to "legally" gain individual interests without risking corruption charges. Under these new circumstances, many doors were likely shut for the Nawab to use the tactic of *fitna* with individual British officers and to play the old political games that he used to play so well.

---

<sup>90</sup> Eaton, "The Art of Colonial Despotism," 85.

<sup>91</sup> James, *Raj*, 54; Dodwell, "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic," 392.

<sup>92</sup> James, *Raj*, 54; Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 56-57.

<sup>93</sup> Oak and Swamy, "Myopia or Strategic Behavior?," 353, 361.

Phillips used the India Act of 1784 as the end point of his study of the Karnatak state. According to him, after Pitt's reformation—meaning from 1785 until the formal annexation of Karnatak in 1801—the Nawab and his heir, Ghulam Husain (r. 1795-1801), were only revenue collectors for the Company. The Nawab had failed in his role as partner and was made to assume a role of complete subservience.<sup>94</sup> Rajayyan also depicts post-1785 as a period when the Anglo-Saxons simply “imposed burdensome treaties upon Arcot and Tanjore” and “reduced the whole coast to the status of a British protectorate.”<sup>95</sup> I agree with them that the Nawab's situation changed significantly thereafter. However, I argue that, even in the last decade of his reign (1785-1795), the Nawab did not stop such attempts to reverse his fortunes. Some ways in which these new circumstances impacted the Nawab and how he reacted to them are worth briefly observing.

### **Karnatak in the New Context**

The ramifications of Pitt's Act of 1784 reached South Asia in 1785, around the same time that the five-year treaty of Revenue Assignments (1781) between the Nawab and Macartney was about to end. In fact, in the previous few years, there had been serious discussions among the EIC's senior officers regarding whether they should return the management of the Karnatak state to the Nawab or not. However, because of the Nawab's strong protests and his influence as one of the Company's oldest allies, the EIC, under the new Board of Control, eventually agreed to cancel the old treaty and restore revenue collections to the Nawab. A new treaty, of 1785, and an improved version of it, in 1787, were negotiated and signed; these would form the basis of the new Nawab-EIC relationship. The Nawab experienced some important losses and gains by the new treaty of 1787, which are worth discussing here. The treaty was, first and foremost, focused on paying the Nawab's debts and future expenses for the joint force to defend his country. Principally, he agreed to pay 1,200,000 pagodas a year to clear his debts to both the Company and his private creditors, and another 900,000 pagodas a year to cover the military defense of Karnatak. He shared the latter cost with the EIC and the raja of Tanjore, as it totaled 2,100,000 a year. In peaceful times, the Nawab had full autonomy in managing his country. In times of war, the Nawab, as well as other contracting parties (the raja of Tanjore and the EIC), would pay four-fifths of their total revenue for the defense of Karnatak. But if the Nawab could not pay the amounts detailed—in cash—certain districts, specified at the end of the treaty, would be assigned to the Company for a certain

---

<sup>94</sup> See abstract of Phillips, “The Development of British Authority in Southern India”; Phillips, “A Successor to the Moguls,” 388.

<sup>95</sup> Rajayyan, *Administration and Society in the Carnatic*, 13-14.

length of time until the payments could be collected. Reflecting on these conditions, although the Nawab regained control of his country, the new treaty came with the strictest measures for controlling his spending. The new atmosphere in British-South Asia politics also favored strict implement of the treaty. According to Oaks and Swamy, unlike the Regulating of 1773, Pitt's Act of 1784 was taken very seriously by the Company's officials in South Asia under the new leaders, especially Charles Cornwallis, who was appointed the new Governor-General in 1786.<sup>96</sup> They left little room for the Nawab to postpone or delay paying his debts without penalty. He lost the freedom to use his surplus revenues freely, in the usual ways: in lavish patronage, bribing natives and Europeans to create "fitna," accumulating a large private military force, and so on. This treaty officially engaged the Nawab in a subsidiary alliance with the EIC for the first time after four decades of relationship (if not including the abovementioned treaty of Revenue Assignments during the irregular war period between 1781-1785).<sup>97</sup>

There are two other important points related to the Nawab-EIC treaty of 1787 that are worth noting. The first is related to the Nawab's power on the international stage. According to Article 15, the Nawab agreed to relinquish his right to enter negotiations with other states or powers without the consent of the Madras Presidency. However, when the Company wished to enter into negotiations, declare war, or make peace with any power holders of Hindustan in which the interests of Karnatak and its dependencies might be concerned, the Madras Presidency also needed to communicate all such issues to the Nawab, and the name of the Nawab should be inserted into all such treaties.<sup>98</sup> At first glance, it may seem that the Nawab was again negatively impacted by this treaty. However, viewing it in long-term context of the Nawab-EIC relationship, I would suggest the opposite. In reality, from the beginning of his reign up to that point, the Nawab had never made any crucial political and military treaties with any other powers without the consent of the EIC, as he considered the latter to be his most important ally, one that he needed to keep. So the condition in the treaty of 1787 would change little in practice for the Nawab. In contrast, there were many times, as previously shown, when the EIC became involved in wars or peace treaties with his

---

<sup>96</sup> Oak and Swamy, "Myopia or Strategic Behavior?," 361.

<sup>97</sup> Being engaged in a treaty of subsidiary alliance with the EIC meant that the South Asian rulers were not allowed to have private armed force beyond the amount that the EIC permitted. Their territories were to be protected by the EIC's forces, but the local rulers had to pay for the subsidiary forces that the Company was to maintain for that purpose. In some treaties, local rulers needed to permanently assign parts of his territory to the Company to directly collect revenue for the maintenance of subsidiary troops. In other cases, local rulers only relinquished his rights on parts of those territories as indicated in the treaty only when he failed to make the payment. Further, the local rulers also relinquished their autonomous right to make any negotiations and treaties with any other rulers beyond the British's consents. The early subsidiary treaties that were signed between the EIC and the South Asian rulers were, for example, the treaties with the Nawab of Bengal in 1760 and 1765 and the treaties with the Nawab of Awadh in 1775, 1787, and 1801, and the treaties with the Nawab of Karnatak in 1787 and 1792. See Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, II: 105-119, 130-133, 230-232, 237-240.

<sup>98</sup> Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, X: 52-63.

neighboring power holders—such as the Deccan, Mysore, or Marathas—without the Nawab’s approbation and/or without listing him as party to the treaty, even when the interests of the Karnatak state were directly related. In all such cases, the Nawab had to put great efforts to insert his name in the treaties later. Thus, Article 15 seems to fit the desires of the Nawab more than the EIC.

The military aspect of this treaty is also significant. Glancing through its conditions together with those of other documents, it is likely that, after four years of harsh reforms (1781-1785), Macartney had been successful in disbanding the Nawab’s entire private force. The only military resource the Nawab relied on at that time was the joint force, which had long been under the sole control of the Company. The Nawab’s role was now officially limited to financial sponsor. However, Article 14 of the treaty of 1787 shows that the Nawab may, at least, still have been in charge of the very limited military capacity he retained. According to this, if the Nawab, at any time, needed military troops “for the security and collection of his revenue, the support of his authority, or the good order and government of his dominions,” he could make a public request to the Madras Presidency; the EIC would then furnish him with a sufficient number of troops for the purpose, while expenses would be charged to his accounts.<sup>99</sup> As the evidence shows, Article 14 indeed proved to be very problematic for the EIC: in the early 1790s, the EIC’s Board of Control in London repeatedly expressed its concern and dissatisfaction with how the troops of the Madras Presidency were being used by the Nawab like “mercenaries” in his unjustified campaigns because of the condition in the treaty of 1787:

[...] It appears that tho’almost the whole strength of the southern Army was at one time employed in support of what was termed the Nabob’s authority they were considered in no other light than as Mercenaries, to attack, or to retreat, at the pleasure of the agent appointed by the Nabob to march with the force, [...] <sup>100</sup>

These complaints were caused by several recent times, in 1789-1790, when the Nawab had requested military assistance to help him subjugate two rebellious tributary subjects—the Poligars of Sivaganga and Sitarampur—under the pretext of regaining the tribute owed to him.<sup>101</sup> As was known among the British, if the EIC did not agree to his requests then the Nawab would complain that it was in violation of the treaty of 1787, but the EIC was also

---

<sup>99</sup> Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, X: 60.

<sup>100</sup> IOR, E/4/877, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 6 May 1791, 524-525.

<sup>101</sup> See also the discussion on this local Hindu ruler in Chapter Four (4.3).

very aware of the potential for the Nawab to overstep the mark and so it needed to work out where the line was to be drawn.<sup>102</sup> The sources reveal that, the British still sometimes found themselves being involuntary driven to follow the Nawab's military designs, even after attempting to reform the Madras Presidency and to limit the power of the Nawab. This is another good example of how the Nawab was able to exploit the European treaty system at the expense of the European themselves. These "military successes" of the Nawab, mirroring his ability to adjust to new political conditions, however, proved to be inappropriately timed and soon led to negative outcomes for his independence since it forced the EIC's Board of Control to seriously reconsider how best to manage its relationship with the Nawab. During 1790-1791, in order to prevent the EIC being used in the internal affairs of Karnatak, it ordered the Madras Presidency to interfere in the disputes between the Nawab and the Karnatak Poligars by being the guarantors and protectors of the rights of those tributary subjects. By taking this new approach, the British forced the Nawab not to disturb the internal affairs of local Poligars as long as they paid the agreed amount of tribute or contributions.<sup>103</sup> To this, there were strong protests from the Nawab. However, this period coincided with the outbreak of the Third Anglo-Mysore War (1790-1792) and the Nawab was not able to keep his promise regarding his contribution during wartime as set down by the treaty of 1787. Therefore, the EIC was justified in imposing new conditions upon the Nawab by forcing him into a new treaty in 1792.<sup>104</sup> According to an article in that treaty, the Nawab was forced to assign all the tribute paid by some of his Poligars (according to a list) to pay off his debts and military expenses, while the management of the revenue collection in all those Poligar districts was to be directly controlled by the EIC. Although the treaty (Article 6) said "the said company, desirous of preserving the rights of sovereignty over the said Poligars to the said Nawab," to permanently lose the management of those areas was, in practice, equal to the ruler's loss of sovereignty over them. The treaty of 1792 was the last one between the Nawab and the EIC, and it was very different from the first treaty between the Nawab and EIC, in 1760, in which the EIC had promised never to interfere with any of the Nawab's subjects nor his internal affairs.

---

<sup>102</sup> IOR, E/4/876, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 5 Mar. 1790, 140-145; 19 May 1790, 474-527.

<sup>103</sup> IOR, E/4/876, DM, Court of Directors to Madras, 19 May 1790, 493-495; E/4/877, 6 May 1791, 504-529.

<sup>104</sup> Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, X: 63-71.



### Conclusion to Part III

From the discussions above, it is unnecessary to re-examine whether or not commensurability existed in East-West encounters in late-eighteenth-century Nawabi Karnatak. It is clear that all the participants knew perfectly well the rules of the games they were playing, and they also understood various aspects of the acculturation and syncretism of local and European elements from civil and military personnel, mercantile approaches, military technology and management, political ideas and practices, codes of honor, diplomatic ritual, artistic tastes, styles of entertainment, and so on. As mentioned earlier, my discussion in Part III sought to be a supplement to Van Meersbergen's debates on Euro-South Asian encounters during the early modern period in two main ways. First, my study of the Karnatak Nawab shows that South Asians were no less able and open to embracing and adapting foreign customs and technologies than were their European counterparts. Secondly, I have highlighted the local viewpoint by tracing the motives and/or approaches of the Karnatak Nawab in his enthusiastic attempts to penetrate the European world and embrace European elements.

Himself entangled in the various branches of the EIC's business, the Nawab not only sought a share in its lucrative work, he also utilized various mercantile approaches to maintain and increase his political influence over the population. His attempts to be the textile broker between the EIC and local weavers and to be the sole revenue farmer of the EIC's Jagirs were, for example, aimed at limiting direct contacts and preventing links between the British (and their employees) and local societies. This argument is supported by the long-term failure of the EIC to survey its own Jagirs due to the Nawab's interference. The Nawab's tactic of applying revenue farming for political ends can be compared to many other early modern South Asian rulers. However, his attempts to profit in and expand his political influence over the neighboring state of the Deccan (in the Northern Circars) by using this old tactic in combination with the assistance of his influential friend the EIC was remarkable. The Nawab's embrace of various European cultural elements and practices highlights clearly his unrestricted worldview and his desire to incorporate into his micro-cosmos of Chepauk Palace all potential elements that could support his political power and social status, as he also did with Perso-Islamic and Indic ones. Due to the rapid rise of the Europeans as the new, dominant power in South Asia—politically, militarily, and economically—European culture, knowledge, and technologies were increasingly acknowledged by local societies as symbols of power and refinement. It is likely that the Nawab had realized that he was caught in a transitional period and quickly learned to utilize them. While European cultural elements

served him well in embellishing his kingship ideologically, adoption of European military elements significantly increased his real political power.

However, by becoming increasingly entangled in the rising power of the EIC, the Nawab faced many challenges and significant costs. In *realpolitik*, the Nawab increasingly realized, from the end of 1760s, that he had lost control of Karnatak's military to the EIC, which significantly affected his autonomy in both internal and external affairs. As a result, his prestige as an independent ruler and as the supreme ruler of Karnatak was severely compromised ideologically in the eyes of both his neighbors and his local subjects. From the earliest period, when the Nawab began to mix with the EIC's officers and embrace European elements, he had always been careful to maintain his position at the top of his micro-cosmos. Many rituals and symbolic gestures from local South Asian systems, which represented the patron-client relationship, were repeatedly performed to stress the Nawab's position as patron of the British agents in Madras, such as the grants of khilats and local honorifics to prominent EIC officers. Also, by referring to the lands granted to the EIC as "jagirs," he clearly wanted the Company's employees to be perceived as one of his jagirdar. However, from the beginning of the 1770s, when the Nawab increasingly felt his prestige being attacked, he made many attempts to reposition himself in the Nawab-EIC relationship to display his overlordship of the latter in the eyes of local audiences. His successful invitation to the British king's representatives to come to his court during this period gave the Nawab an excellent opportunity to pursue his goal. Through various rituals and performances in diplomatic exchanges, the Nawab displayed his acceptance of the British king as his suzerain and protector and, at the same time, incorporated the two British king's ambassadors (who were also prominent admirals in British Royal Navy) into his micro-cosmos as his servants. Through the support of the king's men, the Nawab also successfully obliged all British gentlemen in Madras to address him using the terms "Highness" and "arddasht." Through such examples, the Nawab proceeded to fashion himself in a rank comparable to that of a sovereign prince in Europe. By being acknowledged and treated by the British king's representatives as a sovereign prince and their overlord, the Nawab thus, at least symbolically, became the master of all the British Company's servants in South Asia. The signs of the Nawab's reception of the British king's suzerainty over him were unmistakable. He referred to King George III using the term padshah and claimed to be referred to by the latter as his (subordinate) brother. The Nawab also wore the sword he had received from the king in public ceremonies and urged the latter to send him some British royal ensigns and

decorations. However, I suggest that one should not view the nominal acceptance of the British king as his overlord as something negative. In his worldview, the Nawab placed the British king in the same position as the Mughal emperors and Ottoman sultans. In this light, the acknowledgement, protection, and brotherly love from this greater ruler only gave the Nawab more prestige on the interregional level. With the rising power of the British Company during that period, the prestige of the British Padshah was also increasingly relevant in South Asia during the eclipse of the Mughal imperial house.

During their time in Madras, the Nawab also attempted to use the power of the king's ministers in various *realpolitik* businesses, such as in the farming of the Northern Circars, his re-negotiations with the Madras Presidency about extraterritorial jurisdiction rights, and disputing rights over the Nawab-EIC joint force during the Tanjore conquests. However, in fact, it is hard to evaluate to what extent the British king's ministers really contributed to the Nawab's achievements in these tasks. Because, as well as lobbying the king's ministers, the Nawab also sought to achieve his goals via various other means, especially his old tactic of under-the-table negotiations with various individual EIC servants in Madras. Yet it could be supposed that direct contacts with the king's ministers and the British government did not yield as much fruit as the Nawab may have expected. Because, after the second king's minister left in 1774, the local ruler was not as keen to have the British king's representatives in his court as he had been before. It is likely that he seemed to have realized that the symbolic incorporation of himself into the political networks of the British king did not significantly increase his political bargaining power over the EIC. In fact, around the same time that the second king's minister departed from Madras, the Nawab had begun to form new potential alliances, with some private British adventurers who had close links to the faction of Warren Hastings in the EIC.

There is one vital point I would like to make here on the strategy of the Nawab in embracing the British king and government at his court. The main goal of the king's ministers during their stay in Karnatak was to get the Nawab to trust them and throw himself upon the protection of the British government, which meant revealing every corruption of the Company's servants in Madras and allowing the British government to intervene in the Company's affairs. This is the main reason why, throughout their time there, the king's people tried to please the Nawab as much as they could and often became an instrument in his fight with the EIC's servants. However, as the cases of the king's ministers and of Warren Hastings both suggest, it was never the Nawab's intention to simply change from an old ally

to a new potential one. The Nawab never wished to destroy the Madras Presidency, which had always been his closest and securest resource of financial and military assistance, one whose interests were intertwined with his. Only when he was in significant conflict with some of the Madras Governors or Council members would he draw other potential rivals of the Madras Presidency into the game and play them off against each other to increase his bargaining power. After all, the Nawab never trusted any European individual or group too much and was always ready to bring in potential new allies. This again echoes how the local practice of *fitna* was often used by the Nawab in his dealings with the Europeans.

Another crucial conclusion from the case of the Karnatak Nawab is that the British transformation into an imperial power in this area was the end-product of ongoing negotiations and the triangular competition between the EIC, the local ruler, and the British government in British-South Asian politics from the 1770s; it was the culmination of their efforts, reactions and counter-reactions, in which they made use of one another to serve their immediate purposes while at the same time preventing themselves from becoming a political and military stooge of any one else. None of them had a long-term plan with imperialism as the end result. The final victor was the British government, at the expense of both the older players, i.e. the Nawab and the old-style EIC's officers. While, in the end, the Karnatak Nawab could not avoid succumbing to British power, he had played an active role in bringing about the rise of the British government. But, if one wants to see what, from the Nawab's side, was wrong with his approach to state formation and which led to his failure to resist the British's domination, the military pillar should probably receive the most attention. While the Nawab could manage economic affairs well and clearly won the ritual battles with the EIC, from the late 1760s his military designs did not go as planned. As is acknowledged by modern scholars, after witnessing the capability of European armies from the mid-1740s, almost all South Asian rulers wanted to have European mercenaries and/or standing troops of indigenous sepoys drilled in the European style and equipped with European weapons to serve in their army. In South India, the Nawab's neighboring rulers in Mysore, Maratha, and Travancore actively increased their revenue in order to fund their standing armies and hire European mercenaries to discipline them. The Deccan Nizam, as well as hiring some Europeans to drill his native forces, tried to gain a military alliance contract with the European Companies. In 1752-1759, he traded some regions of the Northern Circars to the French CIO in exchange for its sepoys and in order to keep his throne. In 1768, under the condition of relinquishing the Northern Circars to the British, the Nizam gained a promise

from the EIC to provide him with two infantry battalions and six pieces of artillery in every “proper” business for the defense of his country. In 1779, Prince Basalat Jang of the Deccan also agreed to give Guntur district to the EIC in exchange for a few battalions of its sepoy. In fact, if the costs he had to pay are ignored, it can be said that the Karnatak Nawab attained much greater success in his military ambitions than did any of his neighbors. He could gain easy access to large numbers of the best British military officers in South India, who were always lent to him by the EIC to drill his private forces. Furthermore, the establishment of the twelve battalions of the joint force allowed him to possess the most formidable European-style army in South India at the time. According to Subrahmanyam, military commensurability was a crucial factor in many Asian states—such as China, Korea, and Japan—being able to stop the West at bay throughout the early modern period. They were perfectly prepared to embrace Western military innovations, but always adapted them to local conditions in a unique and effective way. South Asia was less capable in this respect.<sup>1</sup> Another modern historian, Kaushik Roy, has a similar opinion. As he argues, one main reason that South Asian warriors (in his study: Mysoreans, Marathas, and Sikhs) were not successful in resisting the European forces was their “partial Europeanization.” The South Asians realized that a radical transformation of their armies to suit European warfare was necessary, and they had developed European-style infantry and embraced some Western technology, but they were unwilling to imitate the European military system completely, and still kept significant numbers of indigenous elements. The net result was an incoherent military system and a less effective warband than its Western counterparts.<sup>2</sup> In my opinion, the Karnatak Nawab, with his worldview unrestricted regarding new developments, went much further than did his South Asian neighbors in trying to make perfect compatibility with the European military. However, the Nawab’s openness and inclusiveness, which he used well in other aspects of his consolidation of power, turned out to be a great mistake in the case of embracing aspects of the European military. The Nawab’s main mistake was his miscalculation of the EIC’s policies towards the joint force and his overestimation of his own ability to control his British ally. The Nawab quickly realized his mistakes and diligently worked to reverse them. The Nawab’s attempts to reform his military, as well as many of his efforts to manipulate the local EIC officers to help him achieve his economic, political, and military ambitions, even though his autonomy was increasingly limited, had a high degree of success as they brought trouble and anxiety to the EIC’s senior officers throughout the 1770s

---

<sup>1</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Roy, “Military Synthesis in South Asia,” 660-661.

and 1780s. His achievements, which reflected his unusually strong influence over the local EIC agents included: managing to move the joint force to subjugate his tributaries in 1771, 1773, 1789, and 1790; gaining of the ten-year-long revenue-farming contract of Guntur district in 1779; gaining of the titles “Highness” and “arddasht” by majority vote; securing of judicial privileges in Madras in 1773; and enticing EIC military and civil officers into his service despite many attempts by the Company to prevent this. The most extraordinary case may be the scandalous coup of Lord Pigot in 1776. However, the final consequence was the reverse of what the Nawab may have expected; his successes merely forced the EIC to use harsher measures to limit his power. The increasingly fierce competition between the Nawab and the EIC, combined with various unexpected occurrences in both India and Europe, finally led to the intervention of the British government. The Nawab fought the ever-changing circumstances inch by inch, but his minor successes in the last decade of his rule were not enough to reverse his fortunes or resist the rising force of British imperialism.

It may be also interesting here to draw comparisons between the trajectories of state formation of Nawabi Karnatak and Mysore under contemporaneous rulers, Hyder Ali (r.1761-1782) and Tipu Sultan (r.1782-1799). The latter two rulers have been known for their success in transforming Mysore into a true eighteenth-century regional state with clear breaks from the old system of the Mughal Empire. In order to be free from local aristocracy and to increase their ability to respond to European powers, from the 1750s, Hyder Ali decided to establish large standing armies which were heavily modernized in the European model. To reach their aim, a number of European mercenaries and military engineers were recruited and various European technologies adopted. European specialists were hired in manufacturing weapons, and according to French documents, the weapons produced in Mysore were of excellent quality equaling any produced in Europe.<sup>3</sup> From the 1760s, Hyder Ali also went further than any other South Asian rulers of the time by building up a navy, a project which was later continued by Tipu Sultan.<sup>4</sup> Further deviating from the old regimes, the two rulers reformed the management of agricultural land, abolished the practices of land farming, and standardized and centralized the tax collecting system, all of which help increase the stability of state revenue.<sup>5</sup> Tipu Sultan also created state monopoly of trade, reformed currencies,

---

<sup>3</sup> Yazdani, “Foreign Relations and Semi-Modernization,” 395-398; Yazdani, “Haidar ‘Ali and Tipu Sultan,” 102; M.P. Sridharan, “Tipu’s Drive towards Modernization: French Evidence from the 1780s,” in *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, ed. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 1999), 146.

<sup>4</sup> Mahmud Husain, “Regulations of Tipu Sultan’s Navy,” in *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, ed. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 1999), 174-181.

<sup>5</sup> B. Sheik Ali, “Developing Agriculture: Land Tenure under Tipu Sultan,” in *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, ed. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 1999), 161-164.

standardized measurement and weight, and attempted to advance state industries, in some branches with the help of Europeans. In the mid-1780s, a legation from Mysore was sent to France. His embassies were ordered to buy European novelties and to recruit to Mysore more European engineers, specialists in mines, manufacturers of clocks, glass, chinaware and mirrors, and so on, to improve local manufactures. Also, astronomers, geomancers, interpreters, physicians, and surgeons were requested in order to transfer European knowledges to Mysore.<sup>6</sup> Another remarkable project of Tipu was his attempt to establish a public/state company with overseas settlements/factories by imitating the organization of the European East India Companies.<sup>7</sup>

Many scholars such as B. Sheik Ali, M. Athar Ali, and Kaveh Yazdani have viewed the two Mysore sultans, especially Tipu Sultan, as the earliest South Asian rulers who transformed their polity into a semi- or proto-modern state, which involved characteristics such as centralized monarchy, monopoly of violence (i.e. standing armies), systematized and stable revenue organization and bureaucracy, etc. Some scholars have considered Tipu Sultan as “modernizer,” “modern thinker,” or at least, “a transitional figure.”<sup>8</sup> Another eighteenth-century polity which came close to Mysore in developing a true regional state with proto-modernized direction was Travancore. Its ruler Marthanda Varma (r.1729-1758) successfully developed large modernized standing armies and stabilized state revenue by state monopoly of trade.<sup>9</sup>

Some aspects of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan’s trajectory were comparable to the projects of the above rulers, especially his efforts to embrace European military technologies, establish a modernized standing armies and centralize his power. It can even be argued that the Nawab of Karnatak inspired Tipu Sultan in recruiting diverse European novelties and specialists to the court and learning from European knowledges and expertise, as these were the practices of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan from as early as the 1760s. However, I would argue that it would be going too far to view Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan along the line of a “modern thinker” who had a desire to drive his polity in the direction of a regional proto-modernized state. Despite his unrestricted worldview and openness to foreign cultures and his quick adoption of new developments and technologies of the age, he seemed to have no

---

<sup>6</sup> Yazdani, “Foreign Relations and Semi-Modernization,” 395, 397, 400, 403.

<sup>7</sup> Yazdani, “Foreign Relations and Semi-Modernization,” 398; Yazdani, “Haidar ‘Ali and Tipu Sultan,” 108; Iftikhar A. Khan, “The Regulations of Tipu Sultan for His State Trading Enterprise,” in *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, ed. Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 1999), 148-149.

<sup>8</sup> B. Sheikh Ali, *Tipu Sultan: A Study in Diplomacy and Confrontation* (Mysore: Rao and Rhagavan, 1982), 68, 71; M. Athar Ali, “The Passing of Empire: The Mughal Case,” *Modern Asian Studies* 9, no. 3 (1975): 390-392; Menon, “Houses by the Sea,” 162, 168, 182; Yazdani, “Haidar ‘Ali and Tipu Sultan,” 101.

<sup>9</sup> Menon, “Houses by the Sea” 172, 174, 182.

progressive ideas of reforming Karnatak's political system, bureaucracy, economy or industries beyond the conventional frame of the old-style imperial Mughal Empire he had known. The Nawab's worldview, like many of his contemporaries (e.g. the Nizams of the Deccan and the Nawabs of Awadh), was still much entrenched in the pre-modern world. The Nawab was still a ruler who viewed his subjects and polity as his private household and saw himself as the successor of the authority of those he had replaced. As I have argued earlier, it was the revival of Mughal glory in his micro-cosmos of Karnatak that constituted the core of Nawab's policies and actions. The concept of universal king could explain his inclusive policies as well as his embrace of diverse European elements and the most advanced European military technologies of the time. This also comes back to my earlier criticism of Western historiography in which the framework of modern state institutions has often been anachronistically applied to the study of pre-modern polities. At least for eighteenth-century Karnatak, a model like that of Ibn Khaldun that focuses on households and its personal relationships rather than on states and its institutions seem to provide a more suitable model approach to study the region's developments.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the journeys made by Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan. He traveled, in spatial terms, from northern India through Delhi and the Deccan to the southern tip of the peninsula; temporally speaking, from the early to the late eighteenth century; and, metaphorically, from the Mughal to the British Empires. His family background and his early life provide opportunities to explore the late Mughal Empire from the standpoint of a petty imperial servant. While some high-ranking Mughal nobles and earlier generations of scholars may have perceived this period as a dark age, for obscure retainers such as the Walajahs, this was a period of new opportunities, one in which talented people could advance their careers and improve their prospects. Over the course of around fifty years, from the end of the seventeenth century to the 1740s, his family transformed itself from unknown religious scholars in a rural part of Awadh into imperial civil servants, then a military warband, provincial governors, and, eventually, the semi-autonomous rulers of Karnatak.

In 1749, Muhammad Ali Khan became the Nawab of Karnatak, at the height of a war between the Walajahs and the Nawayats that cost almost everything his family had previously won: territory, imperial posts, military power, and wealth. To make this difficult situation even harder, their Nawayat rivals had formed a coalition with the French, who possessed the most formidable European troops ever known in South Asia. While Muhammad Ali Khan could employ his diplomatic skills in order to win some local support, his most likely hope of matching the French army came in the form of the troops of the British EIC. The Madras Presidency also found itself potentially losing everything on the Coromandel Coast. The upstart Nawab and the British were thus almost forced to create an alliance at the beginning of the 1750s. The constant threat from the Franco-Nawayat alliance and the Nawab's other local enemies through the 1750s and the early 1760s, continued the Nawab's debt to the EIC, and increasingly fastened the fate of the two parties.

Throughout the 1750s, the Nawab's situation was too weak to control the state. All he could do was negotiate and compromise with the existing powers and institutions in the region. However, his position improved after French aggression was halted for a long period from 1761. In that year, the Nawab started a major centralization drive. The state's form—centered on collective warbands based on kinship groups, companions, and self-autonomous jamadars—was gradually re-oriented. The Turko-Mughal practice of dividing the kingdom was abolished. One after the other, all male members of his family were deprived of

independent political and economic power. Large numbers of zamindari-like, hereditary governors who showed signs of revolting were replaced by servants sending from the capital and appointed for short periods only. As time passed, changes in the roles and characteristics of the Karnatak's provincial governors took place. The officers who were able to stay in their provinces for long periods were those who were able to keep revenue from their lands flowing into the Nawab's treasury; military skill was no longer required. From the beginning of his reign, the Nawab pursued a policy of inclusiveness and religious tolerance in his recruitment of servants and when dealing with local society in general. Pluralism and cultural synthesis were, therefore, central characteristics of the Karnatak court throughout this period. The relatively egalitarian elite society that his predecessors had followed was partly maintained; the Nawab still gave the highest respect and most intimate affection to numerous pre-existing servants and local nobles. However, many new majestic and dynastic protocols—which were derived from the Perso-Islamic, Indic, and even European worlds—were increasingly embraced to underline the Nawab's high status as a dynastic sovereign. Acknowledgement of his position as sovereign ruler of Karnatak at the interstate level was always one of the Nawab's prime concerns and, by the beginning of the 1770s, he had managed to get official recognition from a wide range of sources, such as the Mughal emperor, the Deccan Nizam, the Ottoman sultan, the caliph, the sharifs, various other Muslim rulers, and the British kings. It can be said that, by the 1770s, the Nawab had transformed Nawabi Karnatik into a different polity from how it had been during the time of his predecessors—a patrimonial kingdom under dynastic rule.

It cannot be denied that the Nawab's success in gaining military cooperation from the EIC during the first two decades was a key reason for his achievements in state-formation more widely. However, following the 1763 Paris peace treaty and after the Nawab had paid large sums of money to the Company as compensation in the early 1760s, the tie between the two could have been loosened. However, the Nawab prevented this from happening by innovatively proposing the establishment, at his own expense, of a great Nawabi-EIC joint force. This project, which began in the year 1764, created a permanent bond between the Nawab and the Madras Presidency. To firmly link his interests with those of the British, the Nawab further complicated the debt situation by borrowing money from hundreds of Company officers and private British traders to pay for these troops. The Nawab's decision can be explained by his experiences in the previous fifteen years, in which he had gained the support of one of the most advanced military forces in the mid-eighteenth-century South

Asian market. The EIC had also proved to be a much more stable ally than all other South Asian collaborators of his, since the goals of the British and the local warriors were still different. A modern scholar, Peter Marshall says that even after their revolutionary victory at the Battle of Plassey (1757), in general the British still maintained an “extremely conservative” view towards affairs in South Asia. They only wanted to restore the situation as it had been before the wars so that they could continue their lucrative trade; they were not concerned with territorial or political expansion.<sup>1</sup> However, while the Bengal Presidency was gradually transforming itself into a regional political power only a few years after Plassey, Marshall’s statement is still applicable to the Madras Presidency up to the late 1760s. Although the EIC had made the Nawab pay part of his debts through territorial concessions (the Jagir-lands), the British had never showed any eagerness to have more. Moreover, immediately after the EIC’s victory at the Battle of Buxar in 1765, after which it became the *de facto* ruler of Bengal, as the Company’s old friend, the Karnatak Nawab was able to gain many benefits on the interstate level, such as official confirmation of his position from the Mughal emperor and the Deccan Nizam, and promises from the British to give him territory in Mysore, or even its throne, and trading benefits in the Northern Circars, if such should become Company possessions. By the late 1760s, the Nawab also began to see the EIC—who were increasingly dominating South Asian markets—as potentially able to assist him in entering the mercantile world and to share lucrative trading interests. Although the EIC’s cooperation had been very expensive, with all these military, political, and financial benefits it should still be seen as the best path for Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan to have followed.

Nevertheless, one should note that the Nawab did not view this Anglo-Karnatak relationship simply in idealistic terms, and several of his acts during the 1760s may be seen as him displaying caution. Supposedly learning lessons from the fate of Bengal Nawabs in the late 1750s (who had been eliminated by a coalition of the EIC and other local rivals), the Karnatak Nawab asked the EIC to sign the first Anglo-Karnatak treaty in 1760, the essence of which was to prevent any direct contact or relationship between the British and his siblings or local subjects and to stop the EIC meddling in the internal affairs of Karnatak. The great lengths that the Nawab went to in order to become the land revenue-farmer of the EIC’s Jagirs from 1763 and his eagerness to be the Company’s textile broker from the late 1760s had similar political aims (as well as increasing his revenues). From this time on, the Nawab also began to recruit British advisors and local Telegu Brahmin scribes who used to work for

---

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, 78-79.

the Company and its officers into his court in order to educate him about European ideas and customs and to facilitate his contacts with the British. Furthermore, he began to attempt to gain direct access to the British king, government, and other British nobles via channels other than the EIC. Moreover, the Nawab also constructed his palace in Madras and moved to live there, next to the British headquarters, in 1767. While he claimed that he had chosen to live near this friend for his own safety, many Company servants felt that the Nawab's move was aimed at keeping a close eye on them and interfering in their affairs.

Although, sometimes, there were quarrels between the Nawab and the Madras Presidency on the issue of debt, the 1760s can also be seen as the best period in their relationship, when most of their wishes could be accommodated. But tensions between the two parties rose dramatically from the beginning of the 1770s, when the events of the first Anglo-Mysore War and the two attempts to conquer Tanjore revealed conflicting expectations related to the leadership and use of the joint force. The fact that, by the early 1770s, both the Nawab and the British in South Asia saw themselves as the political and social superior in the relationship also made compromise more difficult. At this time, the Nawab discovered that he had been too optimistic about the joint force and had almost handed over full control of the strongest force within his own lands to the Madras Presidency, which would also have meant a significant loss of independence in both internal and regional matters. The main challenges faced by the Nawab from the beginning of the 1770s to the end of his reign were thus how to reverse the situation and prevent further dominance over his affairs by the Madras Presidency while at the same time still reaping the variety of benefits of this powerful ally to support his power locally. From his long experience working with the British, as well as his knowledge of the fate of various contemporaneous rulers, the Nawab knew perfectly well that any firm measures taken against them, such as armed force, would only bring destruction upon himself. He thus could only react through other, "softer" policies. His methods included: arrears of debt payments; bringing prominent Company servants into his service and patronage; diplomatic missions and secret negotiations with various British parties in Britain and South Asia; playing off rival British factions or individuals against one another; and competing with the EIC in the mercantile world, in social prestige, and in cultural refinement. Although the Nawab was never able to regain full autonomy in the Karnatak's affairs, on many occasions he was able to get the Company's servants in South Asia to follow his political, military, or financial wishes. This caused both bewilderment and frustration for many senior EIC officers, who then had to find new and stricter rules to

prevent conspiracies between its local servants and the Nawab. The fierce competition between the EIC and the Karnatak Nawab throughout the 1770s and into the next decade played a crucial role in leading to the intervention of the British government in the Company's affairs, which finally led to the government taking control of the EIC in the mid-1780s, at the expense of both of the old players. Most scholars have, in the past, stopped their investigation of Karnatak's history at this time, thereby implying that the Nawab had been reduced to a British puppet with no role worthy of attention. But this study has followed his life up to its final decade (1785-1795) and has thereby revealed that the Nawab was still making great efforts to adjust to the new order so as to maintain his political power, wealth, and social status as far as the new circumstances allowed. As late as 1790, the Nawab still made the British feel that they were his mercenaries. In the mercantile world, while the EIC's other local competitors had all disappeared, the Nawab was able to maintain his own investments to such an extent that he caused frequent frustration to the Company.

Christopher Bayly's *The Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, published in 1988 in the series *New Cambridge History of India*, is a pioneering and impressive attempt to synthesize the history of the most prominent eighteenth-century South Asian states, which had been studied separately by various revisionist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, and to provide a comparative discussion. First published at the end of the 1980s, his work was a good concluding report that reflected the progress made thus far in the historiography after two decades of revisionist effort. The book has been reprinted frequently ever since, up to its eighth and latest edition in 2010, and it has always been near the top of lists of authoritative works on the history of eighteenth-century South Asian states and society from their formation to their transition into British colonies. As such, it is not an exaggeration to view the contents of that book as representative of the "grand narrative" on the development of eighteenth-century South Asian states that has been created by the collective efforts of earlier revisionist scholars and which has continued to dominate our understanding right up to today. In this work, Bayly shows how eighteenth-century South Asia has been progressively brought out of the old colonial frameworks. The states are no longer placed within the unitary structure of the declining Mughal Empire nor considered, in the words of one scholar, to be the "formless clay that the British could mold as they wished."<sup>2</sup> A number of previously-neglected local institutions, systems, classes, and groups of subaltern people have been rehabilitated into the historiography as active players and

---

<sup>2</sup> Parthasarathi, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy*, 4.

agents of change. Nevertheless, when it comes to discussions of the approach of each individual post-Mughal state and the roles of their rulers during this transformative period, my detailed analysis of Karnatak and its Nawab has suggested that many points in the dominant narrative await further revisions.

With regard to the second half of the eighteenth century, Bayly divides South Asian rulers (and their states) into two groups. The first consists of those labeled “the subsidiary alliances” of the British, i.e. those with whom the EIC engaged in order to maintain troops in their territories so as to support them against both internal and external enemies; prime examples are the rulers of Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, and Karnatak. The second group consists of those who remained a strong challenge to the British, namely the sultans of Mysore and the Marathas. Under these binary and clearly-structured frameworks, the roles of all parties are clearly and neatly fixed. Within the first group, due to various circumstances, these local states were lured by the British into making agreements that made them subordinate to the EIC, and which turned out to be tools by which the British were able to control them. After such agreements were made, the role of the local ruler was restricted to providing money to pay for troops, while the EIC was the supplier, owner, and manager of these troops and the protector of the state. But, because of problems inherent in the local revenue system, the income of these governments was unpredictable from month to month, and arrears of payment created conditions for the British to be able to annex territory. Of all the subsidiary allies, Bayly seems to view Karnatak as having been the feeblest. As he states: “[t]he question then arises as to why the Company allowed the semi-independent state of Arcot to exist so long [...] The answer [...] seems to lie in the weakness of the Arcot regime.”<sup>3</sup> For him, the Karnatak state survived only because “Company servants had an interest in keeping the state formerly independent.”<sup>4</sup> In sharp contrast, the second group is described as containing the rulers of “more powerful and determined states.”<sup>5</sup> In the dominant narrative, only these rulers were fighters and expansionists, ones who were able to create effective systems and policies to control the direction their state took, to significantly challenge British dominance, and to shape the early British Empire. Tipu Sultan of Mysore, for example, is praised in Bayly’s work for his success in centralizing power, maintaining effective fiscal and military organization, and benefiting from the mercantile world. Both the Mysore and the Maratha leaders are commended for their ability to draw on the strength of

---

<sup>3</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 93.

<sup>4</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 94. See also 58, 89-95.

<sup>5</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 5.

the local military while at the same time employing the new military technology that had been introduced by the Europeans.<sup>6</sup> I quote Bayly here to illustrate how the Mysore sultan is viewed as the polar opposite of the Karnatak Nawab: “Tipu died fighting Wellesley’s armies at the gates of Srirangapatam [Srirangapatina] true to his adage ‘better to live a day as a lion than a lifetime as a sheep.’ His realm was not a decaying eastern despotism, but an attempt to face European mercantilist power with its own weapons.”<sup>7</sup>

These structural frameworks are clearly problematic on the basis of my investigation into Karnatak’s history. As this dissertation has shown, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan played a much more varied and active role in consolidating his state, influencing local politics, and shaping British expansion in South India than the framework of subsidiary ally of the British permits. In fact, the Karnatak case reveals that the establishment of the Nawabi-EIC joint force (which in Bayly’s view is a classic example of a subsidiary agreement) was initiated by the Nawab and the improvised responses of the EIC. Throughout its existence, issues relating to its possessions, controls, salaries, and the role of each contracted party resulted in complex negotiations and inch-by-inch bargaining between the Nawab and the Company. When the project did not go as planned, the Nawab was also far from being one of the “hypnotized victims of the cobra’s strike”<sup>8</sup>: instead, he fought constantly over the next three decades to reverse his position. It seems that something that is at the core of Bayly’s categorization is the idea that only rulers who had military prowess and who fought against the British in real military encounters should be considered as “powerful” and “determined” players in this period of transition. This framework should be discarded because it cannot embrace other “soft” and more implicit tools that local rulers, especially those from “subsidiary alliances,” employed to improve their position and struggle against British dominance over their territory.

It was not the aim of this study to argue that one should consider Karnatak under the second rubric, of “fighter,” rather than as part of the first group. But I wish to give empirical evidence to underline that the conventional approach of searching for neat structural and functional frameworks to impose on the subjects of study, whether states or individuals, may have prevented many important historical details from being recognized. I also suggest using the recently revitalized micro-historical and biographical approaches as alternative tools to overcome the limitations of the previous methodology. As has been shown in this study, the

---

<sup>6</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 79, 95-100.

<sup>7</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 97.

<sup>8</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 79.

biographical approach allows one to be freer in exploring and embracing various aspects of the Nawab's life and activities simultaneously without being confined to one or just a few aspects of Nawabi Karnatak's institutions. Combining this method with more sensitivity in reading historical sources, various new perspectives on this state can be brought forth and new interpretations made. The results of this study may also lead one to question the roles and activities of other contemporaneous rulers and states within the current dominant narrative. When the current binary and structural frameworks are removed, alternative views of these states may be uncovered and more fruitful comparative discussions between each eighteenth-century state put forward. As this study has already provided several preliminary examples, many of the Karnatak Nawab's political, military, mercantile, and cultural policies can be used in various comparative or interconnected discussions related to expansionist rulers such as the Mysoreans and the Marathas, as well as the rulers of Bengal, Hyderabad, Awadh, and Travancore.

In my attempt to restore the role and agency of a local ruler during the period of transformation to British colonial rule, I am more or less following the approach of many previous revisionist scholars, such as Christopher Bayly, Burton Stein, David Washbrook, and Peter Marshall, whose works have looked for the indigenous roots of the early British Empire. However, it is not my intention to repeat similar discussions related to continuity or to make Nawabi Karnatak another example to further understanding of the early colonial era. Instead, I view the late eighteenth century as a unique time, one which may provide many interesting observations on the nature and characteristics of South Asian states and societies outside the British expansion paradigm, and I wish to encourage scholars to pay more attention to it. First of all, the subcontinent seems to have been a meeting point where elements from at least three different politico-cultural worlds—the Turko-Perso-Islamic Mughal, the Indic, and the European—encountered one another from the sixteenth century, yet it was during the late eighteenth century that their interactions became more intense than they had been at any time previously. The processes of zamindarization and state formation in various areas of the subcontinent caused large numbers of Muslims and Hindus—from different castes and classes and from various geographical backgrounds—to come into closer contact with each other, either as competitors or collaborators. To consolidate power, the ruler of each eighteenth-century state, who was usually an Indo-Muslim, had to find the means to implant themselves deeply into local society, which, up to then, had been dominated by Indic elements. Meanwhile, the British, who had been confined to coastal port-towns as

merchants in the previous two centuries, were now increasingly expanding their power into the hinterlands and transforming themselves into a regional power, making close contact with indigenous elements inevitable. Moreover, during this period the Mughal imperial center was too weak to enforce its political, economic, and cultural supremacy, although British dominance was yet to come. The resultant power vacuum allowed regional rulers to be freer and more innovative in expressing their identities and in dictating how they ruled. Furthermore, in the absence of a single hegemony, many interesting aspects of cross-conventional boundaries and cross-cultural encounters were observable. The Karnatak court was one of the intersectional points where the three politico-cultural worlds intensively overlapped, and it has proved to be an excellent case study. This dissertation has shown that various forces from the three worlds impacted the development of the region and that the Nawab attempted to adjust to the challenges he faced by innovatively combining useful elements from all three spheres. Multiple conflicts and collaborations between different groups of people, exchanges of ideas and practices, and cultural exchange can be observed in each of the state's pillars (dynasty, military, civil, and religion) and all aspects of the Nawab's activities, (political, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and so on).

It was an aim of this dissertation to draw different cultural aspects into the discussion in order to balance the political and economic aspects that dominate literature on eighteenth-century states more widely. The study also intended to make a contribution to ongoing debates about the social and cultural boundaries of pre-modern South Asia. There is an old perception that the rigid social and cultural boundaries of religion and communal conflict are components that have dominated the subcontinent from at least medieval period up to the present day. With this view is the implication that South Asian society has been stagnant and inert, and that it has had little capacity to adapt to new forces of change.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, many revisionist scholars have suggested that such conventional perceptions are the products of the colonial and modern periods and have been imposed upon the past anachronistically. My study of Karnatak has helped to reinforce the latter argument through the example of one Muslim ruler, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, who possessed an impressively unrestricted cultural worldview. He was always ready to and flexible in crossing conventional boundaries if there were practical benefits to gain. His case also reflects the fact that a member of the South Asian elite could quickly integrate new or foreign elements into his world. There is, however, one important aspect in which this study departs from previous literature, and this

---

<sup>9</sup> For a good introductory discussion on this debate, see: Cynthia Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practices: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-3.

should be underlined. Other scholars usually end “the harmonious period” of South Asia at some points in the seventeenth century or, at the latest, in the first half of the eighteenth century, and either explicitly or implicitly depict later decades as the formative period of all rigid boundaries and times of communal conflict. But this study has revealed that, in Karnatak at least, a harmonious atmosphere was strongly promoted right up to the end of the eighteenth century (and even, perhaps, to the early nineteenth century). This study, again, encourages scholars to treat the late eighteenth century with more empirical analysis rather than simply leaving it as an unclear transitional period.

This examination of cross-cultural encounters within the Karnatak court also feeds into broader debates on cultural (in)commensurability between East and West in the early modern world. Through many examples, this study has shown that, during this period, ideas and practices between South Asians and Europeans were more commensurable than is usually imagined. When differences did occur, people from both sides were able to learn and make use of the foreign elements almost perfectly. The cross-cultural conflict that happened in the Nawab’s court was mainly the result of deliberate choices rather than one-sided or mutual misunderstandings. The results of this discussion reveal another problem with the dominant grand narrative that is seen in the work of Bayly and many others (including Parthasarathi). Too often, the eighteenth-century British are presented as a political power that, from its first appearance in South Asia, operated in a totally different political and cultural systems that was incommensurable with the South Asian ones. This assumption has led to zero-sum interpretations that put the British and the South Asian states in complete opposition, i.e. the qualities that the British had are those which the South Asian rulers lacked and vice versa. For example, Bayly mentions that, on many occasions, the Marathas were nearly able to defeat the British. However, their ultimate failure was due to the fact that the British were able to exploit nonconformity among the Maratha elites who always “proceeded by ‘faction’ and apparent ‘treachery’.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the Marathas could not split the British officers as they had done the hostile Mughal warriors. However, as the Anglo-Karnatak relationship in this study has shown, at least until the mid-1780s, fractures between British parties involved in South Asian politics did occur, and their rivalries were exploited by the Karnatak Nawab. So the statement of Bayly becomes applicable only after the EIC was merged into the British government, which proved to be a true game-changer in the South Asian play of fitna. I suggest that, by being more aware of the problems with binary

---

<sup>10</sup> Bayly, *Indian Society*, 100-101

framework of British versus locals, eighteenth-century South Asia will become an important arena in which to review complex new aspects of the East-West relationship, as much as it is for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Lastly, I have to admit that the more I investigate Karnatak's history, the more I see my dissertation is merely a preliminary outline. All the new aspects of Karnatak history that have been developed in this study await further investigation. I believe that, with the help of various sources that are beyond the scope of this study (see the Appendix), there are many more important elements and aspects of this state and eighteenth-century South Asia more widely to be revealed and reviewed.



## Appendix

This appendix provides selective lists of some primary sources related to late-eighteenth-century Karnatak that—due to limitations of time—have not been used in this thesis but which are useful for further research.

### Persian Sources

Published sources:

1. The *Ruqaat-i Walajahi* (Epistles of the Walajah), edited by T. Chandrasekaran (Madras, 1958). This is a large collection of approximately a thousand letters produced during the period 1774-1775, which were published in 1958. Many of these documents were written by the Nawab's revenue collectors and officers, while others were replies and orders issued by the Nawab related to day-to-day administrative matters such as land grants, taxes, agricultural activity, public welfare, art and crafts, and military organization.
2. The *Nishan-i Hydari* (Hydari Signs), by Mir Husain Ali Khan Kirman, written in 1802. This is actually a history of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, the rulers of Mysore. However, it also recounts relations between the Mysore ruler(s) and Nawab Muhammad Ali. It was translated into English by Colonel William Miles and published for the first time in 1864.

Unpublished manuscripts:

1. The *Tahrik al-Shifah bi-Ausaf Walajah* (Mobilising Cure in the Description/ Characteristics of Walajah [?]), by Amir al-Umara (the Nawab's second son), written ca. 1772-1773. It recounts the life of his father, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan.
2. The *Tadhkirat al-Ansab* (Memoirs of Genealogy), by Mustafa Ali Khan Walajahi (Khayr al-Din Khan), written ca. 1778. The author was probably a member of the Walajah royal family. The book contains descriptions of the Walajah's ancestors, among whom were many scholars, poets and famous men.
3. The *Asas-i Riyasat-i Karnatak* (Foundation of the Karnatak State), by Muhammad Khair al-Din Khan Mahmud Jang. The author is said to be a member of the royal family who lived in Hyderabad, and the work was a historical account of his ancestors

4. The *Ruqaat-i Amiri* (Epistles of the Prince), by Saiyid Muhammad Muyiddin, written ca. 1793.
5. The *Tuhfat al-Akhbar* (Gift of Chronicles), by Ghulam Husain Khan (1819). It is a general history of Karnatak, the Walajah dynasty, and events in the reign of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan.
6. The *Qasr-i Walajahi* (Fort of the Walajah), by Muhammad Husain Tamanna (d. 1860), which is said to be a general history of the Walajahs and historical developments from the reign of Nawab Anwar al-Din Khan until ca.1790. Its author is said to have been a literary company of Nawab Ghulam Ghaus Khan (r. 1825-1855).
7. The *Nishan-i Walajahi* (Walajahi Signs) of Haidar Nawaz Khan, written ca. 1832/1834. It is said to be a dynastic history of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan and his successors.
8. The *Haqiqat-i Asim Khan* (Truth of Asim Khan), by Syed Asim Khan, who was one of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan's diwans.
9. The *Waqai-i Amir al-Umara* (Correspondences of Prince Amir al-Umara), by Muhammad Inayat Khan. Prince Amir al-Umara was the second son of Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan.

John Gurney, who did his research in the 1960s, mentions that some of these documents are kept in a private library in Madras, known as the Saeida Library (Diwan Sahib Bagh, Royalpettah, Madras).<sup>1</sup> According to Shaikh Allauddin, in 1992 many of these manuscripts were in a library named Daftar-i Diwani, in Hyderabad.<sup>2</sup> I have no information about their current status and accessibility.

### **English Sources:**

#### Collections of private manuscripts:

1. IOR, BL, London: Paul Benfield's Mss, George Macartney's Mss, Alexander Davidson's Mss, Robert Orme's Mss
2. SOAS Library, London: John Macpherson's Mss
3. Devon Record Office, Exeter: Robert Palk's Mss
4. National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh: Henry Dundas's Mss
5. Tamilnadu Archives: Francis Jourdan's Mss
6. Deccan College, Poona: George Macarney's Mss

<sup>1</sup> Gurney, "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot," 221.

<sup>2</sup> Allauddin, "Libraries and Librarianship during Muslim Rule in India," 348-354.

7. National Archives of India, New Delhi: George Macarney's Mss.<sup>3</sup>

The EIC's records, kept in the Madras Record Office in the Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai:

1. Records of the Public Department, 1749-1795
2. Records of the Military Department, 1749-1795
3. Records of the Revenue Department, from 1774
4. Records of the Mayor's Court, 1749-1795.

### **Dutch Sources**

For the study of Nawabi Karnatak, the VOC documents which are particularly concerned are those which related to two Dutch factories (settlements) in South Asia: 1) Coromandel (aka Negapatnam), and 2) Ceylon (including its sub-factory in Tuticorin), between 1749-1795. They were produced by and sending between the two factories, the Batavia Governor-General and Council, and the Gentleman XVII in Amsterdam and other chambers. The following lists are some prominent VOC series in NA in which should be explored:

Archives of the Gentlemen XVII and the Amsterdam Chamber (Access no. 1.04.2)

1. Proceedings of the ordinary and the extraordinary meetings of the Gentlemen XVII
2. Copybook of letters, instructions, and other papers sent by the Gentlemen XVII and the Amsterdam Chamber to the Government of the Indies and the Cape
3. Duplicate proceedings of the Governor-General and Council (of Battavia)
4. Duplicate diaries of Batavia
5. Batavia's outgoing letterbook
6. Letters and Papers Received from Asia by the Seventeen Gentlemen (OBP):
  - 6.1 Final reports, written by the chief factors of each factory to instruct their successor upon their departure
  - 6.2 Proceedings of the meetings of the highest official and the council at a particular factory
  - 6.3 Diaries, describing on day-to-day basis all important events of each factory
  - 6.4 Missions to Indian states, i.e. documents concerning incidental missions to South Asian courts (particularly Arcot and Ramnad)
7. Duplicate translations of treaties concluded with Asian rulers
8. Commercial Department

---

<sup>3</sup> Phillips, "The Development of British Authority in Southern India," 488-490.

9. Miscellaneous

Archives transferred from Asia: High Government of Batavia (1.04.17)

Archives from the Zeeland, Delft, Rotterdam, Enkhuizen and Hoorn Chambers (1.04.02)<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> For further details of these VOC collections, see: Jos J. L. Gommans, Lennart Bes, and Gijs Kruijtzter, *Dutch Sources on South Asia, c. 1600-1825, Biography and Archival Guide to the National Archives at the Hague (the Netherlands)*, vol. I (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 94-115; particular lists of VOC documents concerning the Ceylon factory see: 221-229; for the Coromandel factory see: 301-333.

## Glossary

Note: The transliteration of Persian, Arabic and Urdu terms used in this study follows the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, but with some modifications. Firstly, although the glossary provides full transliterations, throughout the text diacritical marks are only used when necessary for proper pronunciation (e.g. *na'ib* and *Da'ud Khan*). Secondly, for the letter ج , “j” is used instead of “dj” (e.g. *fawjdar* instead of *fawdjdar*, and *Hajj* instead of *Hadjdj*). Thirdly, for the letter ق , “q” is used instead of “k” (e.g. *qādī* instead of *kādī*). For the names of persons, groups or people, places, conventional English spellings and common usage in historiography are followed (except for the term “Karnatak” as explained in the introduction, footnote 1), and, therefore, they do not form a consistent system. For the titles of literature (when translated), in both references and text I have used the existing titles of published translations, but excluded the diacritical marks.

<i>ādāb</i>	manners, etiquette, and moral standards, following a rather strict interpretation of Islamic law
<i>akhlāq</i>	manners, etiquette, and moral standards, following a more liberal interpretation of Islamic law
<i>‘amildār (‘aumildār)</i>	chief officer for revenue collection
<i>amīn</i>	commissioner
<i>‘arḍdashṭ</i>	correspondence from a subordinate to a superior
<i>‘aṣabīyya</i>	feelings of solidarity or group cohesion
<i>(mīr) bakhshī</i>	(chief) military paymaster and inspector
<i>cowle</i>	land rental contract
<i>dār al-islām</i>	the House of Islam, i.e., territories of the world under Muslim sovereignty
<i>dār al-khilāfa</i>	land or territory of the caliphate
<i>darbār (durbār)</i>	royal court; the presence or attendance of servants at the court of a ruler
<i>dargāh</i>	tomb of an Islamic religious figure, term often used for the grave of Sufi saints
<i>dārōgha</i>	superintendent of any office or department
<i>dīn-i ilāhī</i>	religious cult promoted by Emperor Akbar

	emphasizing tolerance and syncretism
<i>dīwān</i>	chief civil minister of state particularly for finance and revenue; comparable to the role of Prime-Minister in the eighteenth-century South Asian provincial state
<i>dīwān-i buyūtāt</i>	supervisor of roads and buildings, imperial stores, and other state workshops
<i>dīwān-i khāṣ</i>	chief civil office
<i>dīwānkhāna</i>	imperial male guest room
<i>dubash</i>	secretary- <i>cum</i> -interpreter
<i>fawjdār</i>	chief military officer of province or district
<i>farmān</i>	official command or decree issued by sovereign (in the Mughal Empire, they usually referred to a decree issued by the emperor)
<i>fitna</i>	act of shifting allegiance; rebellion; sedition
<i>gumāshṭa</i>	commercial agent
<i>ḥajj</i>	pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>ḥākim</i>	governor
<i>ḥaramayn</i>	the two holy sanctuaries of Islam, i.e. the cities of Mecca and Medina
<i>hundi</i>	(merchant's) note of credit, bill of exchange
<i>in'ām</i>	hereditary, tax-exempt or rented-free land
<i>jāgīr</i>	land assigned to nobles and officers with the right to collect revenue from the domain to compensate for their services in Mughal system of revenue distribution (to compensate their military services)
<i>jāgīrdār</i>	holder of a jagir
<i>jama'dār</i>	chief or leader of group or war band
<i>jihād</i>	religious war
<i>jizya</i>	Islamic poll-tax imposed on non-believers
<i>karāma (plu.karāmat)</i>	saintly ability to perform magic
<i>khānaqāh</i>	Sufi hospice or lodge
<i>khān-i sāmān</i>	chief steward; chief officer supervising roads and buildings,

	imperial stores, and other state workshops
<i>khāṣṣ-maḥall</i>	chief consort; queen consort
<i>khilāfat (khalīfa)</i>	religious successorship granted by a Sufi master to one or a few chosen disciples
<i>khil'at</i>	ceremonial robe of honor
<i>killadār</i>	fort commander; district governor
<i>kōtwāl</i>	chief police officer; commander of town
<i>lakh</i>	unit of one-hundred thousand (1,00, 000)
<i>manṣab</i>	Mughal numeric rank of honor granted to nobles and high-ranking officials
<i>manṣabdār</i>	holder of a mansab
<i>mīrzā</i>	prince
<i>muḥarram</i>	chief religious ritual of Shia Muslims mourning for martyrdom of Imam Husain
<i>mukhtār</i>	manager
<i>(mīr)munshī</i>	(head) clerk or scribe
<i>musnud</i>	a royal seat in the Indo-Persian style
<i>mutasaddī</i>	superintendent or manager
<i>murīd</i>	inner-circle or prominent disciple of a Sufi saint/order
<i>nadhīr</i>	a symbolic gift (usually small gold or silver coins) offered to express respect, vow, or dedication
<i>nā'ib</i>	deputy
<i>nā'ib-wazīr</i>	deputy of the wazir
<i>nawāb</i>	honorific of Mughal provincial or regional governor
<i>nāznāma</i>	correspondence between people of equal rank
<i>nikāḥ</i>	marriage
<i>pādshāh</i>	emperor
<i>peshkāṛ</i>	agent; deputy
<i>peshwa</i>	Prime-Minister (of the Maratha state)
<i>qāḍī</i>	judge or judicial officer in an Islamic court (i.e. court based on the Sharia and other Islamic laws)
<i>qānūngo</i>	district revenue official responsible for keeping records of landed property

<i>qaṣaba</i>	a chief town
<i>sahukar</i>	Hindu banker; money lender
<i>saiyid (fem.saiyida)</i>	honorific title for Muslims claiming direct descent from Prophet Muhammad's family, especially through his grandson Husain
<i>sanad</i>	official decree issued by a high-ranking official (issued in the Mughal Empire by provincial governors titled Nizams or Nawabs)
<i>sardār</i>	captain, military commander
<i>sarishtādār (sheristadar)</i>	head clerk; deputy responsible for receiving and investigating pleas or petitions, and reporting on the regional governor to the central government
<i>sharīf (of Mecca)</i>	traditional steward in charge of protecting the holy cities of Meccan and Medina and their surroundings.
<i>sharīfa (sharifate of Mecca)</i>	state or domain under the jurisdiction of Sharif of Mecca
<i>shaykh</i>	honorific title for Muslim leaders, nobles or prominent religious scholars
<i>sibandi</i>	low-quality soldier mainly used for revenue collection and police duties
<i>sipāhdār</i>	military commander
<i>ṣūba</i>	chief Mughal province
<i>ṣūbadār</i>	holder or governor of a suba
<i>t'aluq</i>	subdivision of a province or district that is smaller than a suba
<i>t'aluqdār</i>	holder or governor of a taluq
<i>tasbīḥkhāna</i>	chamber for praying
<i>'ulamā'</i>	scholars specially trained in orthodox Islamic law and theology
<i>'urs</i>	ritual or celebration to commemorate the anniversary of a Sufi saint's death (literally meaning: [spiritual] wedding)
<i>wakīl (vakīl)</i>	representative or ambassador
<i>waṭan-jāgīr</i>	hereditary land holding of a zamindar
<i>wazīr</i>	Prime-Minister; chief minister
<i>zamīndār</i>	hereditary landholder or landed gentry

## Bibliography

### Unpublished Manuscripts

#### British Library, London (IOR)

MPP, 1749-1795

MMSC, 1749-1795

DM, 1749-1795

HOME

Letter Book of James Buchanan (Mss Eur E56), 1788-1790<sup>1</sup>

DGP (Mss Eur E379/1-9), 1769-1775 (9 vols).<sup>2</sup>

#### Tamilnadu Archives, Chennai (TA)

Persian Records, bundles 65-68 (the *Ruznama*)

English Catalogue of Persian Records, bundles 65-68.

#### Dutch National Archives, the Hague (NA)

Mission to Arcot by Pieter Sluiysken, September-December 1770 (inv. 1.04.02, VOC 3292, ff. 705-738).

### Published Sources

Aitchison, Charles U. *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*. Vol. II. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1973

———. *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*. Vol. IX. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1973

———. *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*. Vol. X. Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1983

---

<sup>1</sup>The full title is *Letter Book of James Buchanan Containing Copies of his Correspondence as Agent to the Nawab of Arcot on Transactions with the Dutch Concerning the Pearl and 'Chank' Fisheries, and Relations with the English, Dutch and French*.

<sup>2</sup>I.e. *The Diary of George Paterson, who was Secretary to the Naval Commander-in-Chief, East Indies 1769-1774*.

- Calendar of Persian Correspondence: Being Letters, Referring Mainly to Affairs in Bengal, Which Passed between some of the Company's Servants and Indian Rulers and Notables, 1759-1795.* 11 vols. Calcutta/New Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing/The National Archives of India, 1911-1969
- Handi, Burhan Khan Ibn Hasan. *Tuzak-i Walajahi*, edited by T. Chandrasekharan. Madras: The Superintendent Government Press, 1957
- Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, translated by Franz Rosenthal. 3 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958
- Nainar, Muhammad H., trans. *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz of Muhammad Karim, Part I.* Madras: University of Madras, 1940
- Nainar, Muhammad H., trans. *Sawanihat-i Mumtaz of Muhammad Karim, Part II.* Madras: University of Madras, 1944
- Nainar, Muhammad H., trans. *Tuzak-i Walajahi of Burhan Ibn Hasan, Part I: From the Early Days to the Battle of Ambur (1162 A.H.).* Madras: University of Madras, 1934
- Nainar, Muhammad H., trans. *Tuzak-i Walajahi of Burhan Ibn Hasan, Part II: From the Battle of Ambur 1162 A.H. to the Capture of Pondicherry, 1174 A.H.* Madras: University of Madras, 1939
- Pillai, Ananda Ranga. *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai (1736-1761)*, edited by Frederick J. Price, K. Rangachari, and Henry Dodwell. 12 vols. Madras: Superintendent, Government Press, 1904-1928
- Shah Nawaz Khan, Sam Sam al-Daulah, and Abdul Hayy. *The Maathir al-Umara, Being Biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu Officers of the Timurid Sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D.*, edited by Bains Prashad, translated by H. Beveridge. 2 vols. Patna: Janaki Prakash, 1979.

### **Books and Journal Articles**

- Alam, Muzaffar. *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-1748.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986
- . *The Languages of Political Islam in India: C. 1200-1800.* London: Hurst, 2004
- Alam, Muzaffar, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. "Introduction." In *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, edited by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 1-71. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014

- . *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012
- Alavi, Seema. "Introduction." In *The Eighteenth Century in India*, edited by Seema Alavi, 1-56. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014
- Ali, B. Sheik. "Developing Agriculture: Land Tenure under Tipu Sultan." In *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, edited by Irfan Habib, 161-164. New Delhi: Tulika, 1999
- . *Tipu Sultan: A Study in Diplomacy and Confrontation*. Mysore: Rao and Rhagavan, 1982
- Ali, M. Athar. "The Passing of Empire: The Mughal Case." *Modern Asian Studies* 9, 3 (1975): 385-396
- Allauddin, Shaikh. "Libraries and Librarianship during Muslim Rule in India: An Analytical Study." Doctoral Dissertation: Sambalpur University, India, 1992
- Arasaratnam, Sinnappah. *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986
- . "The Dutch East India Company and Its Coromandel Trade 1700-1740." *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 123, 3 (1967): 325-346
- . "The Rice Trade in Eastern India 1650-1740." *Modern Asian Studies* 22, 3 (1988): 531-549
- . "Trade and Political Dominion in South India, 1750-1790: Changing British-Indian Relationships." *Modern Asian Studies* 13, 1 (1979): 19-40
- Asher, Catherine B., and Cynthia Talbot. *India before Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006
- Ayalon, David. "Mamlūkiyyāt." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 321-349
- Barnett, Richard B. *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720-1801*. Berkeley-London: University of California Press, 1980
- Barua, Pradeep. "Military Developments in India, 1750-1850." *The Journal of Military History* 58, 4 (1994): 599-616
- Bayly, Christopher A. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998
- . *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014
- Bayly, Susan. *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989

- . “The South Indian State and the Creation of Muslim Community.” In *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, edited by Peter J. Marshall, 203-239. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013
- Bellenoit, Hayden. “Between Qanungos and Clerks: The Cultural and Service Worlds of Hindustan’s Pensmen, 1750-1850.” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, 4 (2014): 872-910
- Benson, Janet E. “Politics and Muslim Ethnicity in South India.” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39, 1 (1983): 42-59
- Bes, Lennart. “The Heirs of Vijayanagara: Court Politics in Early-Modern South India.” Doctoral Dissertation: Radboud University, The Netherlands, 2018
- Brackenbury, C. F. *Gazetteer of the Cuddapah District*. Vol. I. Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1915
- Brittlebank, Kate. “Assertion,” In *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, edited Peter J. Marshall, 268-292. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013
- . “Introduction.” In *Tall Tales and True: India, Historiography and British Imperial Imaginings*, edited by Kate Brittlebank, 1-6. Clayton: Monash University Press, 2008
- . “Piety and Power: A Preliminary Analysis of Tipu Sultan’s Dreams.” In *Tall Tales and True: India, Historiography and British Imperial Imaginings*, edited by Kate Brittlebank, 31-41. Clayton: Monash University Press, 2008
- Brosius, Maria. “Court and Court Ceremonies in Achaemenid Persia.” In *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, edited by Antony Spawforth, 17-57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007
- Brown, Richard. “Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge.” In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, 119-128. Leiden: Brill, 2014
- Buckler, Francis W. “The Oriental Despot.” In *Legitimacy and Symbols: The South Asian Writings of F.W. Buckler*, edited by Michael N. Pearson, 176-187. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1985
- Calkins, Philip B. “The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal, 1700-1740.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29, 4 (1970): 799-806
- Campo, Juan Eduardo. *Encyclopedia of Islam*. New York: Facts on File, 2009

- Chancey, M.K. "The Making of the Anglo-Hyderabad Alliance, 1788-1823." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 29, 2 (2006): 181-214
- Chandra, Satish. *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1972
- Cohn, Bernard S. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996
- . "The Initial British Impact on India: A Case Study of the Banaras Region." In *The Eighteenth Century in India*, edited by Seema Alavi, 225-248. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014
- Cole, Juan R.I. *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988
- Dale, Stephen F. *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010
- Dirks, Nicholas B. *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987
- Dodwell, Henry. "Warren Hastings and the Assignment of the Carnatic." *The English Historical Review* 40, 159 (1925): 375-396
- Duindam, Jeroen. *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016
- Eaton, Natasha. "The Art of Colonial Despotism: Portraits, Politics, and Empire in South India, 1750-1795." *Cultural Critique* 70 (2008): 63-93
- Eaton, Richard M. *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2011
- Faruqui, Munis D. "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India." *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 1 (2009): 5-43
- . "The Forgotten Prince: Mirza Hakim and the Formation of the Mughal Empire in India." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, 4 (2005): 487-523
- . *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012
- Fisher, Michael H. *The Politics of the British Annexation of India, 1757-1857*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993

- Fox, Arthur F. *North Arcot*, edited and revised by Harold A. Stuart. Madras: Superintendent, Government Press, 1894
- Frykenberg, Robert Eric. *Guntur District, 1788-1848: A History of Local Influence and Central Authority in South India*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965
- Furber, Holden. *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976
- Geevers, Liesbeth, and Mirella Marini. "Introduction: Aristocracy, Dynasty and Identity in Early Modern Europe, 1520-1700." In *Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Liesbeth Geevers and Mirella Marini, 1-24. Burlington: Ashgate, 2015
- Ghobrial John P. "The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory." *Past & Present* 222, 1 (2014): 51–93
- Ghose, Sailen. *Archives in India: History and Assets*. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963
- Gilbert, Arthur N. "Recruitment and Reform in the East India Company Army, 1760-1800." *Journal of British Studies* 15, 1 (1975): 89-111
- Gommans, Jos J.L. *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire, 1500-1700*. London-New York: Routledge, 2002
- . *The Indian Frontier: Horse and Warband in the Making of Empires*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2018
- . *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c.1710-1780*. Leiden: Brill, 1995
- . "The Warband in the Making of Eurasian Empires." In *Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives*, edited by Maaïke van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam, 297-383. Leiden: Brill, 2018
- Gommans, Jos J.L., and Dirk H.A. Kolff. "Introduction." In *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia, 1000-1800*, edited by Jos J.L. Gommans and Dirk H.A. Kolff, 1-42. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003
- Gommans, Jos J.L., Lennart Bes, and Gijs Kruijtzter. *Dutch Sources on South Asia, c. 1600-1825, Biography and Archival Guide to the National Archives at the Hague (the Netherlands)*. Vol I. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001
- Gordon, Stewart. *Robes of Honour: Khil'at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003
- . "The Slow Conquest: Administrative Integration of Malwa into the Maratha Empire, 1720-1760." *Modern Asian Studies* 11, 1 (1977): 1-40

- Green, Nile. "Geography, Empire and Sainthood in the Eighteenth-Century Muslim Deccan." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 67, 2 (2004): 207-225
- . *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2006
- . *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012
- Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983
- . "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency." In *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, edited by R. Guha, 1-42. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983
- Gupta, Satya P. *The Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan, c. 1650-1750*. Delhi: Manohar, 1986
- Gurney, John D. "Fresh Light on the Character of the Nawab of Arcot." In *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History Presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland*, edited by Anne Whiteman, J. S. Bromley, and P. Dickson, 222-241. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973
- . "The Debts of the Nawab of Arcot, 1763-1776." Doctoral Dissertation: Oxford University, the United Kingdom, 1968
- Habib, Irfan. *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707*. London: Asia Publishing House, 1963
- Hadi, Nabi. *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995
- Hartung, Jan-Peter. "Enacting the Rule of Islam: On Courtly Patronage of Religious Scholars in Pre-and Early Modern Times." In *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, edited by Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung, 295-325. London-New York: Routledge, 2011
- Harvey, Robert. *Clive: The Life and Death of a British Emperor*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998
- Hasan, Saiyid Nurul. "Zamindars under the Mughals." In *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, edited by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 284-98. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014
- Hermann, Kulke, and Dietmar Rothermund. *A History of India*. London-New York: Routledge, 2016

- Ho, Engseng. *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006
- Husain, Mahmud. "Regulations of Tipu Sultan's Navy." In *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, edited by Irfan Habib, 174-181. New Delhi: Tulika, 1999
- Husain, Yusuf. *The First Nizam: The Life and Times of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah I*. London: Asia Publishing House, 1963
- Jacobs, Els M. *Merchant in Asia: The Trade of the Dutch East India Company during the Eighteenth Century*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2006
- James, Lawrence. *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India*. London: The Softback Preview, 1998
- Kaminsky, Arnold P., and Roger D. Long. *India Today: An Encyclopedia of Life in the Republic*. Vol. I. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011
- Keay, John. *India: A History*. New York: Grove Press, 2000
- Khan, Iftikhar A. "The Regulations of Tipu Sultan for His State Trading Enterprise." In *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, edited by Irfan Habib, 148-160. New Delhi: Tulika, 1999
- Kinra, Rajeev. *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015
- Kokan, Muhammad Y. *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic, 1710-1960*. Madras: Muhammad Yusuf Kokan, 1974
- Konrad, Felix. "Global and Local Patterns of Communication at the Court of the Egyptian Khedives (1840-1880)." In *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, edited by Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung, 235-258. London-New York: Routledge, 2011
- Kruijtzter, Gijs. *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009
- Leonard, Karen. "Hyderabad Political System and Its Participants." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 30, 3 (1971): 569-582
- . "The 'Great Firm' Theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire." In *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, edited by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 398-418. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014

- Levi, Giovanni. "On Microhistory." In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, edited by Peter Burke, 93-113. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991
- . "The Uses of Biography." In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, 61-74. Leiden: Brill, 2014
- Loriga, Sabina. "The Role of the Individual in History: Biographical and Historical Writing in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Century." In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, 75-93. Leiden: Brill, 2014
- Love, Henry D. *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800: Traced from the East India Company's Records Preserved at Fort St. George and the India Office and from Other Sources*. 3 vols. New York: AMS Press, 1968
- Marshall, Dara N. *Mughals in India: A Bibliographical Survey*. Vol. I. London: Asia Publishing House, 1967
- Marshall, Peter J. *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740-1828*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987
- . *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976
- . "Presidential Address: Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century: III, Britain and India." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 10 (2000): 1-16
- McGilvray, Dennis B. "Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32, 2 (1998): 433-483
- Menon, Dilip. "Houses by the Sea: State Experimentation in Malabar, 1760-1800." In *Mapping History: Essays Presented to Ravonder Kumar*, edited by Neera Chandoke, 161-186. Delhi: Anthem, 2000
- Metcalf, Barbara D., and Thomas R. Metcalf. *A Concise History of Modern India*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006
- Mines, Mattison. "Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity in South India." *Man, New Series*, 10, 3 (1975): 404-419
- Mizushima, Tsukasa. *Nattar and the Socio-Economic Change in South India in the 18th-19th Centuries*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1986

- More, Jean B.P. *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras, 1930-47*.  
Telangana: Orient Blackswan, 1997
- Mukherjee, Rudrangshu. "Trade and Empire in Awadh 1765-1804." *Past & Present* 94  
(1982): 85-102
- Mukund, Kanakalatha. *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant  
Capitalism in the Coromandel*. Chennai: Orient Longman, 1999
- Munavarjan, H., and T. Shafeeque Ahmed. "Sources for the Study of Nawab Muhammad Ali  
Walajahi." *International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences*  
4, 7 (2016): 26-30
- Muthiah, Subbiah. *Tales of Old and New Madras: The Dalliance of Miss Mansell and 34  
Other Stories of 350 Years*. New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press, 1989
- Neild-Basu, Susan. "The Dubashes of Madras." *Modern Asian Studies* 18, 1 (1984): 1-31
- Nightingale, Pamela. *Fortune and Integrity: A Study of Moral Attitudes in the Indian Diary of  
George Paterson, 1769-1774*. Delhi-New York: Oxford University Press, 1985
- . *Trade and Empire in Western India, 1784-1806*. Cambridge: Cambridge University  
Press, 1970
- Oak, Mandar, and Anand V. Swamy. "Myopia or Strategic Behavior? Indian Regimes and  
the East India Company in Late Eighteenth Century India." *Explorations in Economic  
History* 49, 3 (2012): 352-366
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind. "Contested Conjunctions: Brahman Communities and 'Early  
Modernity' in India." *American Historical Review* 118, 3 (2013): 765-787
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind, and Christopher Minkowski. "What Makes People Who They Are?  
Pandit Networks and the Problem of Livelihoods in Early Modern Western India."  
*The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 45, 3 (2008): 381-416
- Pais, Alex. "The Navayats: An Account of their History and their Customs." *Quarterly  
Journal of the Mythic Society* 10, 1 (1919): 41-58
- Parthasarathi, Prasannan. *The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants, and  
Kings in South India, 1720-1800*. Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press,  
2001
- Peltonen, Matti. "What Is Micro in Microhistory?" In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography:  
Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and  
Binne De Haan, 105-118. Leiden: Brill, 2014

- Perlin, Frank. "State Formation Reconsidered: Part Two." *Modern Asian Studies* 19, 3 (1985): 415-480
- Phillips, James. "A Successor to the Moguls: The Nawab of the Carnatic and the East India Company, 1763-1785." *The International History Review* 7, 3 (1985): 364-389
- . "The Development of British Authority in Southern India: The Nawab of Arcot, the East India Company, and the British Government, 1775-1785." Doctoral Dissertation: Dalhousie University, Canada, 1983
- Prakash, Om. *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998
- Prasad, Ishwari. *The Mughal Empire*. Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1974
- Price, Pamela G. *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996
- Rajayyan, Kunjukrishnan. *Administration and Society in the Carnatic, 1701-1801*. Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara University, 1966
- Ramaswami, Nallathagudi S. *Political History of Carnatic under the Nawabs*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984
- Rao, Velcheru, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. *Symbols of Substance. Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu*. Delhi-New York: Oxford University Press, 1992
- . *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600-1800*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001
- Regani, Sarojini. *Nizam-British Relations, 1724-1857*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1988
- Renders, Hans. "The Limits of Representativeness: Biography, Life Writing, and Microhistory." In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, 129-138. Leiden: Brill, 2014
- Renders, Hans, and Binne De Haan. "Introduction." In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, 1-8. Leiden: Brill, 2014
- Ricci, Ronit. *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*. Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 2011
- Richards, John F. *Mughal Administration in Golconda*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975
- . *The Mughal Empire*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013

- Robinson, Francis. *Atlas of the Islamic World since 1500*. New York: Facts on File, 1982
- . *The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*. London: Hurst, 2001
- Roy, Kaushik. "Military Synthesis in South Asia: Armies, Warfare, and Indian Society, c. 1740-1849." *The Journal of Military History* 69, 3 (2005): 651-690
- Roy, Kaushik, and Peter Lorge. *Chinese and Indian Warfare: From the Classical Age to 1870*. London: Routledge, 2014
- Samita, Gupta. *Architecture and the Raj: Western Deccan, 1700-1900*. Delhi: BRPUBCorp, 1985
- Sardar, Ziauddin. *Mecca: The Sacred City*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014
- Sarkar, Jadunath. *A Short History of Aurangzib, 1618-1707*. London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1930
- Shakeb, M.Z.A. *A Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Letters from Arcot and Baroda*. London: India Office Library and Records, 1982
- Sharma, Sri R. *Mughal Government and Administration*. Bombay: Hind Kitabs Limited, 1951
- . *The Religious Policies of the Mughal Emperors*. London: Oxford University Press, 1940
- Singh, Chetan. *Region and Empire: Punjab in the Seventeenth Century*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991
- Sinha, Arvind. *The Politics of Trade: Anglo-French Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1763-1793*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2002
- Spawforth, Antony. "Introduction." In *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, 1-16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007
- Sridharan, M.P. "Tipu's Drive towards Modernization: French Evidence from the 1780s." In *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, edited by Irfan Habib, 143-147. New Delhi: Tulika, 1999
- Stein, Burton. *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980
- . "State Formation and Economy Reconsidered: Part One." *Modern Asian Studies* 19, 3 (1985): 387-413
- Stoler, Ann. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009

- Storey, Charles Ambrose. *Persian Literature: A Bio-Bibliographical Survey*. Vol. I. London: Luzac and Co., 1927
- Streusand, Douglas E. "The Process of Expansion." In *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia, 1000-1800*, edited by Jos J.L. Gommans and Dirk H.A. Kolff, 337-364. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012
- . "Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51, 2 (1992): 340-363
- . "On Early Modern Historiography." In *The Cambridge World History: Volume 6, The Construction of a Global World, 1400-1800 CE. Part 2, Patterns of Change*, edited by Jerry H. Bentley, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 425-445. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015
- . *Penumbra Visions: Making of Polities in Early Modern South India*. New Delhi-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001
- . *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, and Christopher A. Bayly. "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 25, 4 (1988): 401-424
- Sutherland, Lucy S. "Lord Macartney's Appointment as Governor of Madras, 1780: The Treasury in East India Company Elections." *The English Historical Review* 90, 356 (1975): 523-535
- . "The East India Company and the Peace of Paris." *The English Historical Review* 62, 243 (1947): 179-190
- . *The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952
- Talbot, Cynthia. *Precolonial India in Practices: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001
- Trivellato, Francesca. "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?" *California Italian Studies* 2, 1 (2011): 1-24
- Turnbull, Patrick. *Warren Hastings*. London: New English Library, 1975

- Van Berkel, Maaïke. "The People of the Pen: Self-Perceptions of Status and Role in the Administration of Empires and Polities." In *Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives*, edited by Maaïke van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam, 384-451. Leiden: Brill, 2018
- Van Meersbergen, Guido. "Ethnography and Encounter: Dutch and English Approaches to Cross-Cultural Contact in Seventeenth-Century South Asia." Doctoral Dissertation: University College London, The United Kingdom, 2015
- Vink, Markus P. M. "Encounters on the Opposite Coast: Cross-Cultural Contacts between the Dutch East India Company and the Nayaka State of Madurai." Doctoral Dissertation: University of Minnesota, The United States, 1998
- Wagoner, Phillip B. "'Sultan among Hindu Kings': Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, 4 (1996): 851-880
- Washbrook, David. *Some Notes on Market Relations and the Development of the Economy in South India, c. 1750-1850*. Leiden: s.n., 1981
- . "South India 1770-1840: The Colonial Transition." *Modern Asian Studies* 38, 3 (2004): 479-516
- . "The Maratha Brahmin Model in South India: An Afterword." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, 4 (2010): 597-615
- Wibulsilp, Pimmanus. "'I Am Nawab of Arcot': Reconsidering the Political History of the Late Eighteenth Century Kingdom of Arcot through the Eye of Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah, 1749-1795." M.A. Dissertation: Leiden University, The Netherlands, 2012
- Wink, André. *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarajya*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986
- . "Maratha Revenue Farming." *Modern Asian Studies* 17, 4 (1983): 591-628
- Yazdani, Kaveh. "Foreign Relations and Semi-Modernization during the Reigns of Haidar 'Ali and Tipu Sultan." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, (2018): 394-409
- . "Haidar 'Ali and Tipu Sultan: Mysore's Eighteenth-Century Rulers in Transition." *Itinerario* 38, 2 (2014): 101-120
- Yule, Henry, and A. C. Burnell. *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, edited by William Crooke. London: John Murray, 1903.

## Online Sources

- Ansari, Muhammad Wali al-Haq. "Farangi Mahall." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Accessed July 27, 2018. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/farangi-mahall>
- Baqir, Muhammad. "Abjadi." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Accessed July 27, 2018. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abjadi-18th-century-south-indian-poet-of-persian-and-urdu>
- Gardet, L. "Karāma." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, et al. Accessed September 17, 2018. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0445](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0445)
- "King George III in Coronation Robes by Allan Ramsay." Google Cultural Institute. Accessed July 16, 2018. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/king-george-iii-in-coronation-robles/vgGv1tsB1URdhg>
- "Mohamed Ali Khan Walejah (1717-1795) Nawab of the Carnatic by George Willison." National Galleries of Scotland. Accessed July 16, 2018. <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/38236/mohamed-ali-khan-walejah-1717-1795-Nawab-Karnatak>
- "Muhammad Ali Khan, Nawab of Arcot." Victoria and Albert Museum. Accessed July 16, 2018. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O136746/muhammad-ali-khan-Nawab-of-painting-kettle-tilly/>
- "Portrait En Pied de Louis XV." L'histoire par l'image. Accessed July 16, 2018. <https://www.histoire-image.org/fr/etudes/portrait-pied-louis-xv>
- "Portrait of Catherine II by Alexander Roslin." The State Hermitage Museum. Accessed July 16, 2018. <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+paintings/38686>
- Ramanathan, M. "The Majesty of Chepauk." *Madras Musings* 19, 24 (2010). Accessed July 16, 2018. <http://madrasmusings.com/Vol%2019%20No%2024/the-majesty-of-chepauk.html>
- Schacht, Joseph. "Nikāḥ." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by M. Th. Houtsma et al. Accessed August 6, 2018. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei1\\_SIM\\_3485](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_3485)

Tuck, Raphael. "Chepauk Palace." TuckDB Postcards. Accessed July 15, 2018.

<http://www.tuckdb.org/postcards/84466>

Watt, W. Montgomery, "Ḳuraysh", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P.

Bearman, et al. Accessed September 17, 2018. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4533)

[3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_4533](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4533).

## Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek presenteert een nieuw beeld van het ontstaan en het verval van de achttiende-eeuwse staat Karnatak tijdens de regering van Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan Walajah (r. 1749-1795). In die periode veranderde Karnatak in hoog tempo van een Mogolprovincie tot een de facto onafhankelijke opvolgerstaat onder leiding van de Walajah-dynastie. Aan het einde van zijn regeerperiode kwam echter dit “Nawabi Karnatak” steeds meer onder de invloed van de Britse East India Company te staan. De studies die tot dusver over Nawabi Karnatak zijn verschenen, geven een incompleet beeld waarbij het onderzoek veelal blijft steken in het conventionele paradigma van verval en verovering dat teruggaat op de Britse koloniale tijd. Eurocentrische benaderingen en interpretaties hebben ertoe geleid dat Karnatak over het algemeen gezien wordt als decor voor de Britse expansie in Zuid-India. In het slechtste geval is de Nawab een mislukte marionet van de Britten, op z'n best is hij een ouderwetse en zwakke heerser die zonder strategie en zonder succes de Britse overheersing bestreed.

Deze dissertatie betoogt dat de eurocentrische benadering het belang van lokale actoren voor het verloop van de gebeurtenissen in deze periode heeft gebagatelliseerd, en dat daardoor allerlei facetten betreffende de Nawab en de Karnatak verkeerd zijn geïnterpreteerd. Om dit onderwerp vanuit een meer evenwichtig gezichtspunt te kunnen bestuderen is gebruik gemaakt van recente inzichten op het gebied van de vroegmoderne geschiedenis van Zuid-Azië, alsmede van een breed scala aan gepubliceerde en ongepubliceerde primaire bronnen, deels vertaald uit het Perzisch en het Tamil. Het onderzoek is echter voornamelijk gebaseerd op onuitgegeven Engelse – en hier en daar ook Nederlandse – archivale bronnen. Hierbij zijn drie benaderingen gehanteerd. Ten eerste wordt Nawabi Karnatak geanalyseerd als een driedelig grensgebied en ontmoetingsplaats waar de Perzisch-Islamitische, de lokale Zuid-Indiase, en de Europese werelden samenkomen. Ten tweede pleit deze studie voor het gebruik van gedetailleerd biografisch onderzoek (geïnspireerd door de recente opkomst van *micro-global history*) waardoor de onderzoeker in staat wordt gesteld om vroegmoderne staatvormingsprocessen meer van binnenuit, vanuit de lokale leefwereld van de hoofdrolspelers, te begrijpen. In dit onderzoek staat dan ook de authentieke stem van Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan zo veel mogelijk centraal. Ten derde worden op verschillende terreinen nieuwe vergelijkingen gemaakt tussen Karnatak en andere achttiende-eeuwse (opvolger)staten zoals die van Bengalen, Awadh, Hyderabad en Mysore. Dit geschiedt niet alleen om het karakteristieke van deze regio te benadrukken, maar ook om voor het eerst

meer nadrukkelijk Nawabi Karnatak te betrekken in het lopende debat over achttiende-eeuwse staatsvorming en de deels daaruit voortkomende Britse koloniale expansie in Zuid-Azië.

Dit proefschrift bestaat uit drie delen. Deel I, *Aurangzeb's Legacy* schetst de historische achtergrond van de opkomst van Karnatak als een Mogolprovincie die zich ontwikkelde tot een de facto onafhankelijke staat. Het bespreekt hoe de leiders van de Walajah-familie, via het bekleden van allerlei politieke en militaire posities in het Mogolrijk, zich langzaam op konden werpen tot een heus dynastiek vorstenhuis. Dit onderzoek plaatst het ontstaan van Nawabi Karnatak binnen het langdurige proces van imperialistische expansie van de Mogols naar Zuid-India en daarna, vanaf het einde van de zeventiende eeuw, de territoriale worteling – ook wel aangeduid met “zamindarisatie” – van Mogolse legerleiders in dit gebied. De combinatie van deze lange-termijn processen en de specifiek lokale, ecologische omstandigheden van het gebied maakten Karnatak tot een uiterst dynamische grenszone met een hoge mate aan mobiliteit en met een enorme culturele, etnische en religieuze diversiteit.

Voortbouwend op de politieke theorieën van Ibn Khaldun behandelt Deel II, *The Making of the Karnatak State*, de strategieën van de Nawab om de vier pilaren waarop zijn rijk gebouwd was – dynastie, zwaard, pen en religie – te versterken en daarmee zijn eigen positie te consolideren. In al deze contexten vormen de manier waarop de Nawab zichzelf presenteerde en de personen of groepen met wie hij zich omringde, de voornaamste onderzoekscomponent. Dit onderzoek betoogt dat men door het bestuderen van de relaties tussen de Nawab en diverse groepen van begunstigden, goed kan zien welke specifieke voorwaarden of problemen de Nawab tegenkwam gedurende de verschillende periodes van zijn regering. De veranderingen in de omstandigheden aan het hof weerspiegelden ook de pogingen van de Nawab om zijn staat aan te passen aan de snel veranderende politieke en economische realiteit in Zuid-India. Zo wordt niet alleen aandacht besteed aan de succesvolle culturele vermenging van Turko-Mongoolse, Perzisch-Arabische en Indiase tradities, maar ook aan de dagelijkse *Realpolitik* van militaire revoluties, en het permanent tweedracht zaaien onder politieke tegenstanders in de vorm van het door André Wink geanalyseerde mechanisme van *fitna*. Door zijn flexibele, pragmatische en open houding wist de Nawab heel effectief gebruik te maken van al deze ingrediënten om daarmee meer centrale controle over dit frontiergebied te krijgen.

Deel III, *Embracing the Europeans*, gaat verder in op de samenwerking en competitie tussen de Nawab en de Britten op economisch, cultureel en militair gebied. De nadruk ligt daarbij op het perspectief van de Nawab; op de actieve en creatieve manier waarop hij de Britten in zijn eigen microkosmos probeert te assimileren. Hoofdstuk 7 laat zien dat de Nawab, in afwijking van de verwachtingen die de traditionele historiografie van een achttiende-eeuwse Indiase vorst schetst, één van de meest actieve economische actoren aan de kust van Coromandel was. Hij maakte gebruik van verscheidene handelsnetwerken, niet alleen om zijn eigen vermogen te vergroten, maar ook voor politieke doeleinden. In hoofdstuk 8 worden de materiële en diplomatieke uitwisselingen, alsmede diverse sociaal-culturele contacten tussen de Nawab en de Britten onderzocht. Een belangrijke stelling is dat de conflicten tussen de Indiërs en de Europeanen aan het hof van Karnatak niet het gevolg waren van een diepe culturele kloof – in het Engels aangeduid met *cultural incommensurability* – tussen India en Europa, maar dat beide partijen zich zeer wel bewust waren van wederzijds zeer herkenbare ambities. Bovendien was er geen sprake van een eenzijdig Brits-Indiaas conflict, maar leidde de hevige competitie tussen de Nawab en de EIC ertoe dat de Britse centrale regering zich ten koste van beide kemphanen in het conflict stortte. Toch zijn het de Britten, als relatief gesloten front, die uiteindelijk de bestaande regels van het politieke spel veranderden door nadrukkelijk de militaire kaart te spelen waardoor de Nawab eerst zijn militaire, maar daarna ook zijn politieke en economische greep op het gebeuren moest prijsgeven. Hoofdstuk 9 laat zien dat de Britse dominantie over Karnatak vooral voortkwam uit de deels gelukke, deels mislukte militaire strategieën van de Nawab en niet op de “vicieuze cirkel van schulden” waar de aandacht van historici meestal naar uit is gegaan.

In meer algemene zin betoogt deze dissertatie dat Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan op een uiterst creatieve manier elementen uit drie cultuurzones – Mogolrijk, Europa en Zuid-India – heeft weten te combineren voor de stichting van zijn eigen dynastie en staat. Door zich toe te leggen op een politieke strategie van pragmatische inclusiviteit onder universeel koningschap droomde hij ervan om de successen van de Mogols in Karnatak te herhalen. Maar hoewel het model van het Mogolrijk in veel opzichten goed werkte, zorgde de interactie met de Engelse East India Company uiteindelijk voor onverwachte militaire tegenvallers. Gedurende zijn hele regeerperiode was de grootste uitdaging voor de Nawab het bewaren van de balans tussen enerzijds het profiteren, anderzijds het op afstand houden van de Britten. Het

was een uiterst tere balans in een risicovol evenwichtspel waarin uiteindelijk de Britten zouden zegevieren, zij het door het veranderen van de vigerende spelregels.

### **Curriculum Vitae**

Pimmanus Wibulsilp was born in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, in 1986. She obtained her BA in History at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok in 2009. Since 2009, she has participated in the Encompass Program at the History Department at Leiden University, where she received her Research Master degree in 2012. From September 2012, she has received the scholarship from Anandamahidol Foundation, Thailand. Her main interest is the early modern history of South Asia and Thailand.