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

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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.¹ 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.² 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.³

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:

¹ 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.
² See, for example: Rajayyan, Administration and Society in the Carnatic, 1-16.
³ 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. The Karnataka 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 Karnataka 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 Karnataka 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.

4 “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.