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

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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.[1]

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.[2] 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.[3] 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."[4] 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

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[1] 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.

[2] Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, 41.

[3] 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.

[4] 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.[5]

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.[6]

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.[7] 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

[5] 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.

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

[7] 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.[8] 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

[8] 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.[9] 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."[10] 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).[11] 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.[12] 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.

[9] Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 22-37
[10] Nainar, *Tuzak-i Walajahi, Part I*, 59.
[11] 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.
[12] 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.[13]

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.[14] 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.[15] As a result, the half-century long campaign of Aurangzeb, from 1660 until his death in 1707,

[13] 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.
[14] For an in-depth discussion of Mughal camps, see: Gommans, *Mughal Warfare,* 100-111.
[15] 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.[16] 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.[17] 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."[18] Before going on to discuss the links between this process and the emergence of Nawabi Karnatak, we should first explore

[16] Richards, *The Mughal Empire,* 246.
[17] Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 8-10.
[18] 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.[19] 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 care-takers 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

[19] 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.[20]

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.[21] 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.[22] 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.

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[20] See, especially: Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 31, 34, 42-43; Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 37-97.
[21] Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, 79-88, 89, 92.
[22] 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.[23]

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.[24] 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,

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[23] Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 264-273.

[24] 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.[25]

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.[26]

[25] 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.

[26] 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.[27]

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.[28] 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

[27] 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.

[28] Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral 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.[29]

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.[30]

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.

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[29] Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral 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.

[30] 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.[31] 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.[32]

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.[33] 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.

[31] 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.
[32] Husain, *The First Nizam*, 128-129, 132, 147; Munis D. Faruqui, "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 1 (2009): 16-17, 22.
[33] 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.[34] 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. [35]

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

[34] 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.
[35] Ramaswami, *Political History of Carnatic*, 39-40.

Tirunelveli were liquidated and those regions incorporated into the Nawabi state.[36] 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.[37] 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.

[36] Husain, *The First Nizam*, 131, 147, 207-208; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 152-154.
[37] 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.