Resilient communities: household, state, and ecology in south-eastern Panjab, c. 1750-1880

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Chapter 2: Household and Community, c.1750-1850

Chapter 1 has explored the ecological underpinnings of rural subsistence in south-eastern Panjab, demonstrating the advantages of mobile, agro-pastoral subsistence over sedentary cultivation. Environmental, political, and commercial factors structured a framework for subsistence within which cultivation was seldom sedentary and was usually combined with other mobile pursuits, most notably soldiering and rearing livestock. The framework of subsistence laid out in the preceding pages serves as the point of departure for this chapter, which will seek to understand how society was organized in this mobile landscape. What served to bind people together in a region where flux was the norm? And what was the nature of the communities that were forged in the midst of such changeability?

Within the South Asian context, the locus of community has frequently been sought in the anthropological units of 'caste' and 'tribes', concepts which, more often than not, have been defined in terms of one or another ritual code.[1] This in turn has confined the study of community in the region to area specialists and made it difficult to draw comparisons with other world regions. Yet, the literature on community in precolonial societies within the subcontinent and beyond suggests that there are considerable cross-regional similarities in the way that communities tended to crystallize.[2] Notably, family and household each played a crucial role in the twin processes of ethnogenesis and state formation across the premodern world. This is in itself unsurprising, given that the household was also one of the primary sites of economic production and resource management until at least the eighteenth century. Since ethnogenesis is an inherently political process, the politics of subsistence—and by extension, the politics of the household—are not only germane, but indeed central to understanding how communities developed in the precolonial context.[3]

In this chapter, therefore, I follow a handful of South Asianists in placing resource management and, by extension, the household, at the centre of an analysis of community in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century south-eastern Panjab. I argue that, communities might be better understood as hierarchical lineages of households that are bound together by mutual interests, obligations, and an ethic of provision rather than as 'castes'. At the same time, competition for scarce resources led lineages to disintegrate, merge, and thus reconstitute themselves. The aim is to highlight the fluidity, as well as the brittleness, of kinship in late precolonial Panjab, as households responded to the imperatives and opportunities of resource control. Contrary to the argument, however, that community boundaries were endlessly elastic and carried little weight in the precolonial context, I suggest that this elasticity was the product of specific conjunctures.[4] Broad community boundaries could be politic when a group needed to consolidate its ranks, but not when an elite sought to establish its privileged right to rule. Nor did flexibility and adaptation always win the day, even when politically and economically expedient, as

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[1] See Introduction.

[2] Jack Goody, *The Oriental, the Ancient, and the Primitive Systems of Marriage and the Family in the Pre-Industrial Societies of Eurasia*, Studies in Literacy, Family, Culture, and the State (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); introduction, *passim*. For a recent plea to reintroduce the subcontinent into world history by rethinking categories of community, see Sumit Guha, 'States, Tribes, Castes: A Historical Re-Exploration in Comparative Perspective', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 2015, 50–57.

[3] Indrani Chatterjee, 'Introduction' to Indrani Chatterjee, *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (New Brunswick, N.J [etc.]: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 26; Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste* (Brill, 2013), 3; chapter 4.

[4] As is implied by the argument that supralocal religious and ethnic identification is a product of the colonial experience alone. Cf. Cynthia Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 4 (1995): 692–722, at 693-4. See also introduction.

discord in the household led communities to fission. As such, the affective, emotive side of domestic life also had implications for the community as a whole.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first of these uses an early nineteenth-century Persian ethnography to reflect upon locally prevalent terminologies for 'community', focusing particularly on the word *qaum* ('people', pl. *aqvam*). The attempt is to disaggregate the different strands of meaning subsumed within this word, which was commonly used across much of Panjab for all kinds of community, all of which were subsequently collapsed into the twin categories of 'caste' and 'tribe'. A closer look at the different groups which were described as *qaum*, however, indicates that few if any of them were characterized by the ritual, lineal, occupational, and religious homogeneity implied by either category. Instead, I argue that the *aqvam* of south-eastern Panjab were in fact a mixture of ethnicities, occupational categories, ascetic orders, and status markers, each of which were hybrid and internally stratified. To understand how community boundaries were drawn both within and between these *aqvam,* particularly, how boundaries were drawn, and status was determined, we need instead to look at prominent sites of resource accumulation and distribution. The remainder of the chapter therefore explores three different kinds of household, and their respective roles in fashioning community in precolonial south-eastern Panjab. These are the households of the warlord, the saintly ascetic preceptor, and the ordinary husbanding family. As we shall see, there was considerable movement across these three categories, and their analytical separation should not obscure the fact that they not infrequently overlapped.

Lost in translation: the many meanings of '**qaum**'

The development of colonial anthropological categories proceeded apace with, and as a result of, the state's need to settle and tax colonized populations. At the same time, proceeding from the assumption of the essential coherence of South Asian societies, early colonial bureaucrats tended to extend the ethnographic categories current in one part of the subcontinent to other, more recently conquered territories.[5] Early colonial correspondence pertaining to Delhi and its hinterland, the first parts of south-eastern Panjab to be annexed, reflect this continuity. Company officers referred to local populations as 'tribes' and 'castes', without reflecting too much on what these terms meant. The multiplicity of ways in which these categories were used in colonial correspondence reflects a general confusion about their meanings. By the late nineteenth century, the inadequacy of these labels would be emphasised by bureaucrats in settlement and census reports.[6] Part of this problem was a linguistic one. As local sources reveal, words in Panjabi languages which were translated as 'caste' and 'tribe', were in fact quite as internally diverse as the English 'community' and defied reduction to a single organizational principle.[7]

James Skinner's *Tashrih al-aqvam* ('An account of the peoples', ca.1825), an illustrated ethnographic work focused upon north-western India ('Hind'), provides valuable insights into the elasticity and polyvalence of the term *qaum*.[8] The *Tashrih* is divided into two parts (*fasl*), the first dealing with Hindus, and the second with Muslims. It soon becomes clear, however, that the distinction between 'Hindu' and 'Musalman' is not exclusively religious, but also contains an ethnic and geographical

[5] Brian P. Caton, 'Social Categories and Colonisation in Panjab, 1849-1920', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 41, no. 1 (2004): 33–50, at 34.

[6] See Denzil Ibbetson, 'Introduction' to *Panjab Castes* (Lahore: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1916). Ibbetson outlines a 'popular conception' of caste, which he then contrasts with the many different ways in which so-called castes are in fact constituted.

[7] Caton, 'Social Categories and Colonization', 37.

[8] James Skinner, *Tashrih al-aqvam*. 1825. Library of Congress, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Manuscript/Mixed Material. See introduction for James Skinner's background.

component.[9] Many *aqvam* placed by Skinner within the category 'Hindu' are thus said to include Muslims as well, albeit these are, Skinner says, 'Hindu' converts. To this extent, what we might interpret as a denomination serves as a marker of origins, distinguishing Central Asian *aqvam* such as the politically prominent Afghans and Mughals, who came to the subcontinent as Muslims, from indigenous converts.[10] In addition, being a Central Asian Muslim is invested by Skinner with prestige, just as being a 'true' Rajput—that is, a descendant of one of the powerful Rajput houses of Jaipur or Jodhpur—is treated as a marker of inherent nobility.[11] Yet even this logic is not consistently observed, for Skinner also includes the Bhattis—whom he describes as Rajputs that converted to Islam in the wake of Central Asian invasions—in his chapter on Muslim *aqvam*. Although it is difficult to discern with certainty the principles that guided Skinner's classification, the inclusion of the Bhattis as a separate *qaum* within the *Tashrih* seems to have had less to do with their distinctiveness in terms of customs from other martial husbanding populations than with the remarkable political success of one of a Bhatti warlord, Nawab Khan Bahadur Khan, whose career is examined later in this chapter.

Each of the *Tashrih's* two parts is further subdivided into chapters according to occupation. Skinner further differentiates between those who practice worldly occupations (*duniyadaran*), and ascetics (*faqir*). The former include ritual functionaries (Brahmans, Ganaks, Bazigars), martial groups (Rajputs, Khatris, Jats, Ahirs, Gujars, Meos), merchants (Baghel, Bidhaks), low-status labouring classes (sweepers, leather-workers, slaves), artisans and service communities (potters, ropemakers, weavers), and 'miscellaneous' groups (doctors, ear-cleaners, wine-sellers, mat-weavers). Under ascetic orders, Skinner includes, amongst others, the Bairagis, Sanyasis, Jogis, Naths, Akalis, Qawwals, and Dadupanthis. The customs of dress, food, and marriage particular to each *qaum* also receive some attention, although these overlap to a considerable extent. Each ethnographic essay is accompanied by a painting of an individual of the relevant *qaum* in her or his 'characteristic' environment, this being a field or pasture for husbanding groups, the court for princes and scribes, the shop for the merchant, and so on. The paintings, which are likely the work of the prominent Delhi artist Ghulam Ali Khan, were, Skinner claims, each based upon a real subject.[12]

Nominally, Skinner uses the principle of the fourfold Brahmanical hierarchy to structure the chapter of the *Tashrih* that deals with Hindu populations, which also constitutes the lion's share of the text. As such, all *aqvam* but the four Brahmanical castes are treated as 'half-castes' (*baran-sankara*), descended from a non-marital, non-endogamous union somewhere in mythological time. Such unions are usually between a man of higher rank and a slave, widow, or otherwise destitute woman (*bewah*), who the

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[9] This is consistent with patterns of customary usage in the subcontinent, from the second millennium CE. As scholars of 'early modern' South Asia have shown, terms like 'Hindu', 'Musalman', and 'Turk' had multiple, variable meanings. See for instance, Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other'; David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, 'Introduction' to *Beyond Turk and Hindu* (Florida: UPF, 2000), 4-5.

[10] Here Skinner seems to be adopting the distinction commonly made in Islamicate South Asia between 'noble' (*ashraf*) Muslims from abroad, and 'common' (*ajlaf*) indigenous converts, even though he does not explicitly use this terminology. See Arthur F. Buehler, 'Trends of Ashrāfization in India', in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the Prophet*, ed. Kazuo Morimoto (London: Routledge, 2012), 231–46.

[11] This itself marks a departure from late-medieval and early modern uses of the terms 'Afghan' and 'Rajput', which until about the sixteenth century were simply generic labels used for soldiering communities, rather than necessarily status-markers. Cf. D. H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 57-58, 82-85 and Nile Green, 'Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Indo-Afghan History', in *Making Space. Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India.* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65–115.

[12] *Tashrih*, f.33; for Ghulam Ali Khan and James Skinner, see Yuthika Sharma, 'Art in between Empires: Visual Culture & Artistic Knowledge in Late Mughal Delhi 1748–1857' (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013), 214, 232-38.

former 'takes into his household'.[13] For example, the Dakauts, who were mendicants that carried images of the god Saturn around and begged for alms, were said by Skinner to have been fathered by a Brahman who took a menial (*shudra*) woman into his home.[14] The *qaum* of Bazigars, who were astrologers, were traced back to the union of a Brahman man and an African slave woman (*shudra afriqiyeh*).[15] Such heterodox unions served as a convenient trope for Skinner, who explains the 'mixed' occupation and character of each of his subjects as a consequence of the separate traits bestowed by the mother's womb (*shakam*) and the father's seed (*notfah*).

It is worth reflecting upon the words that Skinner uses in his account for these groups. Most often, these are generic terms such as *qaum*, *farq* ('sort'), *zat* ('kind') and *tariq* ('way'). Each of the *aqvam* that he studies are assigned a particular character (*svabhav*) and traits (*khasiyat, khasiyat-zati*), as well as a common, mythic, origin (*baramad*). By contrast, their customs (*towr, rawiyeh*), vocation (*karam*) and code of worship (*dharam*) are diverse. More specific words are employed as well. For instance, Skinner uses *baran* (from the Sanskrit *varna*), although this is only to refer to one of the orthodox 'castes' of the Brahmanical social order, rather than the actual populations of 'Hind'. Similarly, *gota* (from the Sanskrit *gotra*; 'clan', 'lineage') is used to refer to subdivisions within broader *aqvam*. Notably, with the exception of the ruling Mughal house however, none of Skinner's chapters is devoted to any lineage in particular. Instead, each *qaum* is treated as an internally diverse and stratified ethnographic 'type'.

It is instructive to explore this lexical ambiguity, as it uncovers the different formations that could constitute a *qaum*. In Skinner's usage, the word carries at least five distinct meanings. The first of these is as a synonym for the fourfold Brahmanical hierarchy (*varna,* or *baran* in Skinner's account).[16] Brahmans, Rajputs/Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras each constitute a distinct *qaum*, even though Skinner's accounts of each of these groups draws largely upon mythology. The chapter on Brahmans, for instance, ends with an account of the eighteen ascetics for whom the eighteen *Puranas* (c.350-1500 CE) were first written. Similarly, the chapter about the warrior *varna* (Kshatriyas, rendered 'Chhattri' by Skinner) concludes with the marriage of noble Kshatriya ancestors with Vaishya (merchant) and Shudra (menial) women at an unspecified point in the distant past, thereby creating entirely new *aqvam*.[17] In line with his scriptural sources, Skinner seems to suggest that *varna* purity was a characteristic of a distant, golden past; and that in the immoral climate of the *Kalyuga* a 'Dark Age' according to Puranic mythology and the one we are presently living through, there were only mixed *varnas* to be found.

A second way in which Skinner uses *qaum* is as an equivalent for an occupational group bound together by a common art or trade. These include the diverse service groups as priests, astrologers, weavers, carpenters, brick-makers, doctors, servants, musicians, panegyrists, and courtesans, discussed in the previous chapter. There are also groups that practice specific forms of pastoralism—camel-breeders (Rabari), cow- and goatherds, and shepherds (Gujars and Gadariyas respectively). Many of these *aqvam* have members of different religious backgrounds, both 'Hindu' and Muslim, and Skinner claims that their social customs therefore differed according to their faith. Notably, although Skinner

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[13] '*Dar khane andakhteh*' is the usual formulation used by Skinner. As Indrani Chatterjee has noted, the term '*bewah*' was used in eighteenth-century India for 'widow', and also implied destitution. Indrani Chatterjee, 'Monastic Governmentality, Colonial Misogyny, and Postcolonial Amnesia in South Asia', *History of the Present* 3, no. 1 (2013): 57–98, at 65. This is true of Panjab as well, see below.

[14] *Tashrih*, f.79.

[15] Ibid., f.89.

[16] See also Introduction.

[17] *Tashrih*, ff.144-45.

occasionally uses the word Hindu, when describing religious customs (*dharam*), he more often specifies an object or practice of worship. For example, the Bidhaks, who were grain carriers, were described as worshippers of Sri Bhagwan, an abstract (*nirguna*) form of Vishnu, while bards and minstrels were devotees of Devi.[18] In each case, the specific craft or service provided is the primary, if not sole, factor that binds the group together.

Figure 3. Rabari with his camels. Tashrih al-aqvam.

Skinner also uses *qaum* to refer to ascetic orders (*sampradayas, silsila*), which were structured around the relationship between disciples and spiritual preceptors. Initiates did not necessarily share a common descent, but rather were connected through the central figure of the guru, from whom they received education in certain ascetic traditions. Although Skinner describes them as discrete entities, the diversity of doctrine and practice within each order could be considerable, as preceptors travelled across and beyond Panjab, interacting with other ascetics. The poetry composed by the more prominent monastic teachers, which served as an important medium of transmission, reflects this hybridity. Regardless of their sectarian and lineal affiliations, monastic poets regularly referenced diverse deities in their verses, and indeed rejected identifying with a single denomination, whether Hindu or Muslim, Shaiva or Vaishnava. As the popular Qadiri *pir*-poet Bulhe Shah sang, 'I am not a Hindu, nor a Muslim […], I am not a Sunni, nor a Shia. I have adopted the path of peace toward all […] Bullhe Shah, the mind that is fixed on God leaves behind the duality of Hindu and Turk.'[19] This eclecticism in the more mystical poetry of the preceptor was mirrored in popular stories as well. As Christopher Shackle has shown, while class differences are a recurrent motif in Panjabi love verse (*qissa*), bringing tension to the narrative by making love forbidden, Hindu-Muslim relations are of comparatively little consequence.[20]

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[18] Ibid., f.270, 177, 274.

[19] Bullhe Shah and Christopher Shackle (ed.), *Sufi Lyrics*, Murty Classical Library of India 1 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 69.

[20] Christopher Shackle, 'Beyond Turk and Hindu: Crossing the Boundaries in Indo-Muslim Romance', in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 55–73, at 63.

The ascetic practices adopted by such monastics overlapped as well. Notably, elements of the physical discipline of *hatha yoga* found their way into the practice of Sufis, Sikhs and Shaivas alike.[21] Forms of worship, too, were similar, with music playing a crucial role in accessing the divine.[22] For the most part, these similarities go unmentioned by Skinner, although the diversity *within* orders is tacitly acknowledged, especially as this relates to social customs. At times, this is done by stating a principle, as well as the punishment for its violation. For example, Skinner tells us that Sanyasis were strictly vegetarian, consuming no meat, nor alcohol, breaches of this code being punished with expulsion from the fold.[23] Alternatively, those with different social customs are treated as a splinter group. Of the Sarbhangi ascetics, for instance, Skinner says that they are a type of Sanyasi, whose principal trait is their indifference to norms of purity. Thus, while the typical Sanyasi's fare was restricted to vegetables and boiled rice, Sarbhangis consumed all kinds of 'meat, and alcohol, and all things *halal* and *haram*, delicious and abominable, food that is Hindu as well as Muslim, and so on. Whatever is presented by the respectable and lowly [alike] they eat'.[24] To the extent that these monastic lineages were discrete orders, therefore, it would seem that their institutions, rather than their doctrines or practices, that were distinct. It thus follows, that to understand the local manifestations of these orders, it is necessary to consider the roles of those institutions and individuals that shaped them. These were the teacher and his shrine or refuge, his attendants and immediate household, as well as the wider circle of his disciples.

A fourth connotation of *qaum* as it is used in the *Tashrih* is as a geographically specific ethnic marker for rural husbanding populations. These include the Meos or Mewatis, who were concentrated in the outcrops of the Aravalli Hills, at the southern frontier between Panjab and Rajputana; and Ahirs, who had settled in the countryside around Rewari; Rayins, Pachhades, and Bhattis, who occupied a large swathe of territory from Bikaner north-east towards the Ghaggar Valley. Each of these groups had a hybrid religious character. According to Skinner, some Meos were patrons of Brahmans and took care of cows as an expression of their faith. Others were converts to Islam, who simultaneously were devotees of saints (*darwesh*) of other traditions such as the Paramhans Sanyasis.[25] The same is true of Ahirs, whose Muslim members, according to Skinner, called themselves 'Sheikhs'.[26] Similarly, while Bhattis had largely converted to Islam, they had retained Hindu customs of marriage, and continued to extend patronage to Brahmans.[27]

Besides their religious plurality, the husbanding populations treated in the *Tashrih* generally did not practice one single occupation. At times, Skinner suggests this is because of gradual sedentarization. Thus, while the Ahirs were nomadic cattle- and goatherds, they had also become cultivators, soldiers, and servants (*khidmatgar*). Likewise, Meos are said to be soldiers of elite birth, who had taken to cultivation.[28] Similarly, some Bhattis were cultivators, while others were brigands, soldiers, and highway-robbers. This itself is unsurprising in a rural context where occupational diversity made communities more resilient to the unpredictability of the seasons. In view of these similarities in work, all husbanding populations in the *Tashrih* are treated as more-or-less equal. Their equality is implicit in

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[21] For Sufism and yoga, see Carl W. Ernst, *Refractions of Islam in India: Situating Sufism and Yoga* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016).

[22] Christopher Shackle and Arvind Mandair, *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from the Sikh Scriptures* (Routledge, 2005), xxiii.

[23] *Tashrih*, f.657.

[24] *'Sharab o gosht o hame cheez halal o haram matbu' o makruh o ta'am hanud o musalman vagheereh. Aqvam sharif ta khakrub harche amad mikhorand'.* Ibid., f.673.

[25] Ibid., f.177.

[26] Ibid., f.205.

[27] Ibid., f.847.

[28] Ibid., f.164.

the fact that most of them appear to have embraced the same heterodox social practices, estranged from the respectable (*sharif*) code of elites. The most frequently mentioned of these practices was widow-remarriage (*karewa*), as well as eating meat and consuming alcohol.[29] Overt expressions of social difference, such as eating separately, are correspondingly absent. Of the Gujars and Ahirs, for instance, Skinner says that their '*hukka*, food and water are one', that is, that they ate, smoked, and drank together without fear of 'pollution'.[30] Conversely, there are also distinctions of status evident within a single *qaum*. For example, Skinner implies that some Meos are of higher rank than others, although he does not elaborate on why such was the case, instead falling back upon the trope of mixed descent.[31]

Apart from an ethnic and occupational label, at least two of the *aqvam* in the *Tashrih* also serve primarily as indicators of status in the hinterland. These are 'Jat' and 'Khatri'. Each of these terms appear to be used by Skinner to designate a motley group of rural clans that were settled in south-eastern Panjab. Jats are described by Skinner as upwardly mobile landholders of common origins, descended in antiquity from a Kshatriya named Jattu, and a concubine of lower rank. Occupationally, they are as diverse as any other rural population, cultivating land, trading, and engaging in 'all kinds of service'.[32] Like most other *aqvam*, they could belong to any religion. Moreover, Jats were found almost everywhere, taking the name of the country where they settled. Thus, Jats in the so-called 'Jangal' and 'Hariana' lands, both of which were savannah, were known as 'Jangli' and 'Harianeh' respectively. Jats from the Indus lands were known as 'Panjabi', those from the arid 'Bagar' tract between Sirsa and Bikaner as 'Bagris', and so on. Effectively, Skinner suggests that the only thing that Jats had in common were their aspirations for wealth and status. Their sole aim, he wrote, was to become a landed magnate (*raja*). Correspondingly, their 'way' was to establish settlements, to take care of their subjects (*ra'aya*), and to carry arms.[33] They did not marry inside their own *qaum*, and recognized no difference between themselves, and groups like Gujars and Ahirs.[34]

If 'Jat' was used to describe almost any upwardly mobile 'man of the soil', then Khatris are portrayed by Skinner as inferior, even spurious, nobility, in contrast with the 'true' Rajputs allies of the Mughal state.[35] Like the Jats, Skinner traces their descent to a warrior father, and a mother of low rank. They also practiced a number of trades, serving as shopkeepers, soldiers, and cultivators.[36] Some bought and sold cattle; others were administrators, and by virtue of their ability to read Persian, served as scribes at the court of the nobility. Skinner describes the Khatris as both Hindu and Muslim. Regardless of their faith, both are said to wear the sacred thread that is the mark of the three highest castes, indicating once again, that at least some external markers of social rank traversed denominational boundaries. Geographically, too, the Khatris are spread out over a wide area, from Panjab to Afghanistan. According to Skinner, this was because some of them were taken to Central Asia (*walayat*) by the Afghan warlord

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[29] *Karewa* was used in a more general way to refer to non-heterodox unions as well. See below.

[30] '*Hukka-o-nan-o-ab-e-ahir-o-jat ek-ast*', *Tashrih*, f.202.

[31] Ibid., 163.

[32] '*Chakri-ye-har-qesam*'. *Tashrih*, ff.214-216.

[33] Ibid., f.215.

[34] Ibid., f.202.

[35] For the evolution of the term Rajput from an occupational designation to an elite status marker, see Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*, 110-117.

[36] By the late nineteenth century, however, the term 'Khatri' would primarily be associated with those who were merchants, due largely to the successes of *gotas* like the Aroras, who identified as Khatri. Skinner's usage of the term predates this economic rise, and indicates an older usage, in which mercantile, cultivating, and martial activities merged with each other as exemplified by the Sikh gurus, all of whom were Khatri. This diversity continued into the nineteenth century. For a detailed, personal account of how Khatri identity changed over the latter half of the nineteenth century in particular, see Prakash Tandon, *Punjabi Century, 1857-1947*, [New ed.], CAL 164 (Berkeley [etc.]: University of California Press, 1968)

Muhammad Ghori in the twelfth century, and only returned when Raja Man Singh of Jaipur annexed Kabul on behalf of the Mughal Emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century. Like the Jats, they took the name of the site at which they settled. Those based at Ror, near Hoshiarpur north of the Satlaj River, were called Roras; those settled at Kapur, possibly the town of Kapura (near Ambala), were known as Kapurias.[37]

Skinner highlights the inferiority of the Khatris to the 'true' Rajputs in different ways. As with all non-elite *aqvam*, he attributes 'lower' origins to them, by inventing a non-marital, mixed-caste (*baran-sankara*) union from which he claims they descended. He also claims that before their conversion to Islam under pressure from Muhammad Ghori, all Saraswat Brahmans (a high order of Brahmans) would eat their food without fear of pollution. After they embraced Islam, however, no *real* Saraswat would accept food from them for fear of being ostracized; only lowly functionaries of shrines (*purohits*), who were greedy and had few scruples, would accept their offerings.[38] Conversion had thus further lowered the status of Khatris, and though they wore the sacred thread and recited the Gayatri Mantra (a Sanskrit hymn to the elements), they were not of the same stature as Rajputs. At the same time, Skinner's insistence upon their inferiority suggests that at least some Khatris were not only influential, but respected, too. One of their traits, which Skinner rationalizes in terms of their part-elite heritage, was to perform charity (*daan*).[39] Since small acts of gift-giving were common across social ranks, the fact that Skinner mentions *daan* in relation to the Khatris suggests that he is referring to donations of a larger order, indicative of influence and status.

Reading Skinner's account of the Jats and Khatris, we are able to glean the cultural code according to which he measures a group's *sharafat* ('respectability'). This code is a mixed bag and seems to have varied somewhat from group to group. For Hindu populations, for instance, *sharafat* was partly assessed in relation to Brahmanical mores such as abstinence from meat and liquor. The Jats are therefore not truly *sharif* since they disregard these dietary norms. Similarly, Skinner reveals the 'common' origins behind the Khatris' *sharif* (respectable) façade by mentioning their conversion. This not only makes them pariahs amongst their former orthodox Hindu brethren (of whom, the *Tashrih* suggests, there were but few in south-eastern Panjab); it also implicitly differentiates them from the noble Muslims of Central Asian origin such as the Mughals and Pathans. So doing, Skinner appears to be invoking the well-known rhetorical dichotomy between elite foreign Muslims (*ashraf*), and common converts (*ajlaf*).[40] Yet, while the codes of *sharafat* applicable to Hindus and Muslims may have differed on some points, they also overlapped significantly. Arduous manual labour was incompatible with *sharafat*, while military service was considered distinctly superior. Similarly, widow remarriage was looked down upon, while keeping one's womenfolk in seclusion (*parda*) was a mark of respectability.

The code of *sharafat* was a language through which status was expressed, and was therefore at least as important as birth and descent in determining one's effective position on the social ladder. It is the varying ability of families to emulate this code that explains the variations of rank between different lineages of the same *qaum*. Of the Jats, for instance, Skinner writes that 'amongst this sort [of late,] such men have acquired the leading posts [and become] chieftains, who do not practice *karao* [heterodox marriage] and wear rich and elegant clothes, and who veil their women. Their customs of dress and food are in the manner of the noble Brahman and Vaishya *qaum*. They are no longer the equals of their

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[37] *Tashrih*, f.151.

[38] Ibid., f.150.

[39] Ibid., f.149.

[40] See Arthur F. Buehler, 'Trends of Ashrāfization in India', in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the Prophet*, ed. Kazuo Morimoto (London: Routledge, 2012), 231–46.

peers.'[41] Amongst the Khatris, Skinner distinguishes three social layers. There were those lineages that married within their own status group, of which he names only the Roras.[42] The inferior Khatri lineages are not named individually, and instead assigned the disparaging moniker *haddi-phod* ('bone-breaker'), to indicate their low, mixed birth. They had liaisons with women of lower status and so (Skinner claims) all Rors who married widows or otherwise destitute and low-ranking women automatically became *'haddi-phod'*. Third and last were those who *claimed* to be Khatris and Rajputs, but were in fact Shudras by virtue of their mother's rank. Skinner mentions that these 'spurious' Rajputs, who were indeed called *Chhattri khurd* ('little Kshatriyas'), were great in number at the time of his writing. They had much land in their possession as a result of grants from various kings and chieftains, which they used to bolster their claims to status.

It is worth highlighting that Skinner generally does not equate *qaum* with creed. As we have seen, many of the *aqvam* in the *Tashrih* have a mixed denominational character. The only exception to this rule are the Sikhs, to whom a short essay is devoted. Yet, even though Skinner terms them a *mazhab* (generally translated as 'religion'), his description of the Sikhs is in fact much closer to a loose congregation of disciples, which is also consistent with his usage of the terms *tariq* (path) and *goruh* (band).[43] All Sikhs, wrote Skinner, were followers of Baba Nanak, who 'praised the divine in the manner of their *pir*'.[44] This included 'the study of poetry of their guru, which they chant to music, making a lovely humming, and themselves make listeners tremble.'[45] The object of their worship is described using the generic term, *khuda* (lord, master, god), and everyone, from the Brahman to the sweeper, could join their ranks.[46] The martial character of the Sikhs is also highlighted, and the portrait accompanying the essay depicts an anonymous Sikh chief, sword in full display, attended to by a servant. A book, presumably the Guru Granth Sahib, is placed on a stand before him. In Skinner's telling then, we see a reflection of the eighteenth-century character of the Sikhs, which combined the attributes of a warband and a pastorate under the ministration of martial-gurus.[47]

Besides demonstrating the elasticity of the term *qaum,* Skinner's *Tashrih* yields at least three important insights into the nature of communities and their boundaries in early colonial Hind, including south-eastern Panjab. The first of these is that although a *qaum* could crystallize around any number of nuclei, from an occupation or an ascetic tradition, to a region, these shared traits did not themselves suffice to bind the group together.[48] By extension, segregation and stratification could, and indeed did, occur within the limits of the same *qaum*, as the examples of the various kinds of Khatris demonstrates. Such stratification was both manifested in, and fuelled by, the emergence of particular lineages around

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[41] *'Dar in tayfeh kesanike be-darje-ye-riyasat o sardari resideh-and karao nemimanid o poshak-hayi-ye-amdeh o nafis miposhand o zanhayi-ye-khod mastur midarand. Raviyeh-e-parastesh o khworsh o pushesh-e-anha be-towr-e-sharfayi-qaum-e-brahman o bis ast. Misl-dehatqan nemi-estadand.'* Ibid., f.218.

[42] Possibly an earlier name for the Aroras, just as Rayins were likely the same as the Arains mentioned in later colonial sources.

[43] Indeed, the word *mazhab* can be translated more loosely as 'way' or 'course', which is etymologically closer to its (Arabic) root verb, *zahb*, which means 'to walk'. Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature*. Accessed online via the Digital South Asia Library, 21 May 2020.

[44] '*Be tariqeh-e-pir-khod be niyayesh o satayesh-e-khoda mipardazand.'* *Tashrih*, f.221.

[45] '*Motalleh-e-sha'ir-e-murshid khwayish, ke be sarod o naghme mikhonand o zamzameh-e-dilfarib misazand o khod-ra o mastema'an be-hareh misazand.'* *Tashrih*, f.221.

[46] *Tashrih,* f.222.

[47] Purnima Dhavan, 'Sikhism in the Eighteenth Century', in *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Louis E. Fenech and Pashaura Singh, 1st ed. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[48] Or, to borrow from Brubaker and Cooper, identification as a *qaum* did not necessarily imply the 'strong notions of group boundedness or homogeneity'. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond 'Identity'', *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (1 February 2000): 1–47, at 10.

an influential family. This is well-illustrated by the account provided in the *Tashrih* of the Bhattis, an assorted rural population subsisting off husbanding and raiding, to be found largely in the vicinity of Bhatner, Hisar and Bhiwani. Skinner, who bases his narrative on the information provided by 'reliable men' (*mardom saqqeh*) of that *qaum*, distinguishes three populations that identified themselves as Bhattis. These were the lineage of Khan Bahadur Khan, descended from the Bhatti Rajputs of Jaisalmer; their tributaries, the Pachhadas, who were from the same area, but were husbandmen (Jats); and the Rayins, who were likewise cultivators, but from Uchh, on the banks of the Chenab River.[49]

Skinner's snapshot of the Bhattis captures this mixed population at a significant moment. After fifteen years of successfully defying the East India Company's attempts to curtail their raids, the warlord family of Khan Bahadur had had its forts seized by the former, and had become pensionaries of the colonial state. Their soldiering and raiding careers largely behind them, Khan Bahadur and his son, Zabita, nonetheless retained their status as political elites. Indeed, the latter was even included by Skinner in his companion political history of Hind, the *Tazkirat al-umara*.[50] The centrality of Khan Bahadur's family to the narrative of the Bhattis is apparent, as it is allegiance to them that distinguishes this *qaum* from other husbanding groups, and indeed from yet other groups that also identified as such. As Denzil Ibbetson remarked later in the nineteenth century, Bhattis were scattered across Panjab; but it is to those settled in the stretch between Bhatner and Hisar, the stronghold of the family of Nawab Khan Bahadur, that Skinner is concerned with, and whom he is at pains to identify as the 'true' Bhattis.[51]

The case of the Bhattis demonstrates that shared cultural traits alone were not sufficient to generate 'bounded groupness', to once again borrow Brubaker and Cooper's formulation.[52] Such cohesion, as well as the clearly-defined group boundaries that were its natural counterpart, were the outcomes of patronage, service, and provision, behaviours motivated not simply by cultural similarity, but by economic and political interest as well. The importance of material factors over cultural codes is further highlighted by the possibility of social mobility, both upward and downward, within the rural landscape sketched by the *Tashrih al-aqvam*. As the case of Skinner's *arriviste* Jats demonstrates, non-noble groups could make their way up the social ladder by expanding their network of patrons, clients, and allies. Cultural codes provided them a language through which to stake a claim to elevated status.[53] Likewise, communities of elite status might find themselves in reduced material and political circumstances, which could in turn diminish their status and privilege. Examples of such relative losses of influence and prestige abound in the nineteenth century, when the East India Company's interventions curtailed the military and political ambitions of a variety of princely patrons (and their clients) in south-eastern Panjab.[54]

A final insight to be drawn from Skinner's *Tashrih*, is that both coherence and stratification need to be placed within their particular political contexts in order to be understood. Consider the three ranks of Khatri mentioned by Skinner, the broad spectrum of occupations they practiced, and their geographical dispersal. On the one hand, they were scribes, administrators, and donors. On the other, they were relatively modest soldiers (*sipahi*). The fact that Rajput descent and rank were being claimed

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[49] *Tashrih*, ff.843-48.

[50] See the following two sections below.

[51] Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes*, 144.

[52] Brubaker and Cooper make the important point that the use of an identity label (identification), even by powerful entities such as the state, does not itself generate internal cohesion and sameness. Brubaker and Cooper, *Beyond Identity,* 14. See also Introduction.

[53] As we shall see below, such claims could not be made lightly; a weaver claiming to be a prince would be shown his proper place. For status claims to be tenable, therefore, communities had to possess the wherewithal to defend them.

[54] A theme that is examined at length in Chapters 3 and 5.

by such disparate communities, suggests that each of these claims was being made within specific local contexts. Moreover, each claim corresponded to a different rung of the political ladder, and was shaped by competition with different political rivals, rather than necessarily with each other. Just as the Jat Rajas of Patiala would never consider competing with a poor Jat clan that owned a village or two in their domains, so was it also unthinkable for Khatris of the first or even second ranks to compete with the *Chhattri khurd*, whose political dominance was restricted to the level of the village or locality.

It therefore becomes necessary to seek out the sites of resource consolidation and competition, as these served simultaneously as the sites where community boundaries were drawn. Within the mobile world of late precolonial Panjab, perhaps the most important of these sites were the husbanding household, and the web of rural households to which it belonged, and which together constituted a lineage, or *gota*. The *gota*, however, was not independent of external influence; it was tied, in various degrees of willingness, to states (*riyasats*) that sought to extract its produce in return for some degree of protection. Simultaneously, it also constituted part of a pastorate, whose nucleus was the shrine or refuge of a preceptor or *guru*. Conflict amongst *gotas* could be given decisive shape by the interventions of one or both of the other two sites of influence and power. At the same time, both the *guru* and the chieftain were dependent upon the husbanding household, which paid dues as revenue, labour, or tithes. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I explore the relationship between these three sites of economic and political consolidation, and how their interactions shaped the boundaries of community.

Husbanding households and dominant gotas

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the historical trajectory of settlement in south-eastern Panjab was not uniformly linear, as subsistence in the region was susceptible to drought and famine. Rural settlements were established and abandoned, and the frontier of cultivation extended and receded by turns. Yet even within this context of frequent scarcity, the *Chalisa* famine of 1783 appears to have been exceptional in its severity, temporarily paralyzing both colonization and state formation in the region. The demographic impact of the famine was felt well into the 1810s, compounded no doubt by more localized bouts of scarcity in the two decades that followed. Nonetheless, by the early 1790s, settlements in the region began to be repopulated, in shifts and bursts.

It is difficult to tell in what measure this gradual resettlement represented the return of old inhabitants who had emigrated in distress, as opposed to colonization from neighbouring tracts. In all likelihood, settlements thinned out by scarcity opened their doors to new immigrants in an attempt to enhance their manpower and bring land under cultivation.[55] Skinner's *Tazkirat al-umara* ('Biography of the nobility', c.1830), the political-historical complement to the *Tashrih al-aqvam,* mentions a number of Jat *gotas* that had established themselves as important landholders in the region. These included a few names that are to be found in Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* (c.1595) as well, viz., the Punia, Sangwan and Sowaran/Sheoran, at approximately the same sites as in that text. In addition, Skinner mentions the Kharkhawal clan near Hansi, the Phogat near Gohana, the Jakhars and Gadans near Jhajjar, the Garewals near Safidon, and the Dhals near Jind. Apart from these, he also identifies three Rajput clans, viz., the Jatu, Chauhans and Panwars, all of which are also mentioned in the *Ain*, although their distribution in the nineteenth century seems to have changed somewhat since the sixteenth.[56]

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[55] An interpretation supported by early colonial correspondence; a report from the 1830s on the settlement of Rewari, for instance, mentions the role of landlords in attracting 'refugees' to the land. 'Pergunnah Rewaree', in *Selected Reports on the Revision of Settlement under Regulation IX of 1833 in the Delhie Territory, No.1* (Agra, 1846), 15.

[56] James Skinner, *Tazkirat al umara*, AD MS 27254, Oriental Manuscripts, the British Library, https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_27254_fs001r, ff.268v-271r.

Central to the lineage was the settlement (*abadi, deh*), or base, which even itinerant communities that spent several months of the year grazing their herds in different pastures would return to periodically. The Bhatti pastoralists led by Nawab Khan Bahadur Khan and his son Zabita Khan, for example, had forts in Sirsa, Fatahabad, and Rania, where they would return after cattle raids, and where they would remain during the monsoon. Similarly, the Ahirs affiliated with Tej Singh regarded Rewari as their base, and their settlements in south-eastern Panjab were mostly concentrated around this one site. From its base, a lineage's domains would extend to wherever its members settled in sufficient numbers to establish a position of dominance. This was partly ensured through reproduction and colonization. Communities would multiply and migrate, with husbanding households from the 'parent' site establishing new villages. The affiliation between old and new settlement was often expressed by giving the latter the same name as the former, with the addition of '*khurd*' (younger, smaller) to indicate the chronology of migration. The base and lineage alike might be named for a common ancestor. Thus, according to Skinner, the Punia Jats were named for their patriarch, Punar; the Jakhars for Jakhi, the Phogat for Phugi, and so on.[57] Alternatively, lineages might derive their name from the site chosen as a base. The Kalsia Jats who established a state at Chhachhrauli in the late eighteenth century, were named after Kalsian Kalan and Kalsian Khurd, the two settlements just north of Ferozepur, whence they migrated eastwards.[58]

Rural settlements usually crystallized around the access to a particular resource, whether a raiding or pasture ground, a market, or arable land. Water, too, was a cherished resource in this arid landscape, and settlements often sprang up near reservoirs or watering holes, as attested by the many settlements whose names are prefaced by '*tobha*' (Panjabi for 'reservoir').[59] Even in the late nineteenth century, Denzil Ibbetson wrote that settlements tended to cluster close to drainage lines.[60] As settlements grew larger, they also became more divided internally, with individual households banding together to form alliances. These intra-settlement divisions were known variously as *patta*, *thola*, *mohalla* and *panna*, each of which would elect a headman (*muqaddam*) to plead its cause at the level of the village. This meant that large villages often had many headmen, which took Company officers by surprise, and significantly complicated their task of nominating one headmen per rural settlement.[61] Such intra-village alliances were replicated outside the settlement as well. The lands of rural *gotas*, sometimes called a *khap*, would often be split up into sub-divisions known as *thappas* or *zails*, which were often encircled by a fence.[62] These alliances were meaningful, and if disputes broke out within a *gota*, then villages would align themselves with the other settlements in their *thappa*. Gifts were given to the head village of the *thappa*, that is to the original or 'elder' settlement (*thappedari mauza, tika gaon*).[63]

If lineages crystallized around the need to manage resources, they were sustained by the labour of their members. Three kinds of labour were particularly vital: reproductive, productive, and military labour, each of which was organized at the level of the husbanding household, and the division whereof was gendered. Broadly speaking, while military labour was predominantly male, women played a central

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[57] *Tashrih al-qvam*, ff.214-15.

[58] See below.

[59] Letter from Capt. Thoresby to Thomas Metcalfe, 26 February 1838. IOR/F/4/1795/73785. British Library, London.

[60] Denzil Ibbetson, *Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Panipat Tahsil and Karnal Parganah of the Karnal District* (Allahabad, 1883), 74.

[61] 'Pergunnah Paneeput' in *Selected Reports on the Revision of Settlement under Regulation IX of 1833 in the Delhie Territory, No.2* (Agra, 1846), 20.

[62] *Thappa* is likely derived from the more generic use of the word, to designate a bounded space; *zail* is Persian for 'retinue'.

[63] Ibbetson, *SR Karnal*, 75; 'Pergunnah Rohtuc Beree' in *Selected Reports*, *No.1,* 57.

role in both organizing and executing labour within the household. Although elite lineages might pride themselves on keeping their womenfolk secluded (*pardanashin*), even distancing themselves from productive labour, for many husbanding families this code of *sharafat* was too restrictive to be practicable. When men were away fighting or raiding, it was the women and children of the household that took charge of the labour in the fields and of grazing the animals. Into the late nineteenth century, songs and proverbs that praised the labour performed by women underlined their crucial role in the husbanding household, regardless of the respectable code of seclusion practiced by elites. In Sirsa district, Wilson noted a popular Bagri song, that contrasted the freedom of the Jat daughter, who was out grazing her father's cattle, to the unhappiness of the lord's wife, locked up inside a high tower.[64] In Rohtak, a popular saying lauded the industrious Jat woman, who, 'hoe in hand, helps her husband/master in the fields'.[65] As such, there was often a lack of distance between men and women within non-elite populations. Of the Bhattis, for instance, Skinner notes that their 'men and women are immodest and without shame, such that they bathe naked in lakes and tanks, and perform their ablutions together at the same site, and live together, side-by-side, as many as four men with their wives, [and] even unmarried men in their midst.'[66]

Women were naturally equally vital to the reproduction and growth of a lineage. Once again, the need for heirs more often than not overshadowed concerns of orthodoxy in 'bride-acquisition'. As such, while endogamy—specifically, marriage to a woman within one's status group, or preferably, of higher birth—was a valued principle, in practice, it was frequently neglected. As Skinner suggested, widows were commonly remarried within the kin group, to retain possession of their labour, as well as the share of the family property that they rightfully inherited through their deceased spouse. Such marriages, known as *karewa,* were not considered on a par with the marriage to a virgin bride (*shadi*). They were not celebrated, and the ceremony entailed no more than placing a veil (*orhni*) over the woman's head in the presence of family, which gave the rite its other name—*chadar dalna* (literally, 'placing a sheet').[67] If the dead man had no brothers or near male relatives to whom his widow could be given, Skinner says 'a true caretaker' was found from within the extended family.[68] However, although widow remarriage was the 'true' *karewa* according to Skinner, the term was used more broadly to describe non-endogamous, heterodox unions. The 'commonest' Khatris, for example, were born of father who had taken the widows (*bewah*) of traders into their households.[69] Likewise, Skinner alleges that 'the widows of many cultivating [classes, as well as] Brahman and Vaishya widows insensible of their *qaum*, are given into [Jat] homes'.[70] In other words, brides could be acquired from other *aqvam* as well. It is also probable that *karewa* was not restricted to widows alone, but that other dependent women, whether daughters from poor, but high-status families, as well as from the households of servants, were taken into wealthier households as sexual partners for its men. The position of these women was inferior to

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[64] J. Wilson, *Final Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Sirsa District of Punjab*, (Calcutta, 1884), xxxiv.

[65] *'Bhali jat Jatin, ki khurpi hath, khet nirawe apne khawind ke sath'*, H.C. Fanshawe, *Report on the Revised Land Revenue Settlement of the Hisar Division in the Punjab, effected by Messrs. W.C. Purser and H.C. Fanshawe, 1873-4.* (Lahore; W. Ball, 1880), 54.

[66] *'Mard o zan basiyar bi-sharm o bi-hiya-and, ke dar talab o abgir-ha barhane shodeh, ghasl dar ek-ja minamayand, o dar ek makan, chahar-chahar kas ma'u zowjeha-i khod barabar pehlu-be-pehlu mi-khaspand o mard majard dar miyan-e-anha mi-khwabad'. Tashrih*, ff.847-848.

[67] *Tashrih*, f.216; Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Law of Inheritance to Chiefships as Observed by the Sikhs Previous to the Annexation of the Panjab* (Lahore Punjab Print Co, 1869), 18-19.

[68] Ibid.

[69] *'Dar qaum-e-Ror, har kas ke zan-e-bewah-e-qaum-e-bis be-zowjiyat-e-khud avard walad-e-o yahabhare o bhabhare (and).' Tashrih*, ff.152-3.

[70] *'An basi kisan zanha-yi-ye bewah-e-qaum-e-brahman-o-bis bi-itla-e-qaum dar khane mi-darand.' Tashrih*, f.216.

that of the wife, but their status did not necessarily affect their sons as well, especially if the first wife bore no heirs.[71]

Widow remarriage clearly had distinct advantages from the perspective of the household into which a woman had been wed, as it ensured that her labour, as well as her husband's property, remained within the family. From the woman's perspective too, remarriage was preferable to remaining a widow. The latter was a condition of greater dependence, and aspersions were apt to be cast upon an unwed woman's morality. A popular couplet put it thus: 'Lucky I am that my husband didn't die; I would've been a whore/widow [*rand*], people would have talked, and the ruler would have made me pay.' The dishonour associated with widowhood is inherent in the term '*rand*', which in Hindi could be used both for a widow, as well as for a woman considered promiscuous.[72] The misfortune of widowhood extended to the person of the widow, too, who was considered inauspicious, the purveyor of ill luck. *Karewa* therefore saved women the humiliation of such dependence; it also gave her the chance to bear more sons, a potential source of relative status.[73] Thus the popular saying, 'come circle the marriage fire, daughter; if this one [husband] dies, there are many more'.[74]

In a context wherein a household was only as strong as its members, and what has been termed 'wealth-in-people' preceded control over resources, it is unsurprising that a premium was placed upon fertility, particularly the fertility of women.[75] A verse of the Sikh preceptor Guru Nanak, for instance, which Mandair and Shackle identify as a 'key text for the Guru's teaching on gender', emphasizes the role of women as vessels or carriers of life.[76] At the same time, and precisely because it was so highly valued, female fertility had to be guarded and tethered to a male overseer. Women were correspondingly valued, but an unwed or infertile woman was shunned. This tension rendered women's position within the husbanding household complex. As the sites of precious reproductive and productive capital, they had to be protected and provided for. They received a share of their husband's wealth at his death, and in fact sons received their share of the inheritance through their mother. This matrilineal practice, known variously as *chundavand* and *ma-bant*, entailed a division of a man's property amongst his wives and partners. Upon their death, the share of each woman would be equally subdivided amongst her sons.[77] Yet, precisely because their value stemmed from their productive and reproductive capital, the position of women fell upon the same continuum as that of servants, and obedience was expected of both. 'Servants and women/wives should never make excuses', ran the verse of Waris Shah, the eighteenth-century poet and saint.[78]

The parallels between the servant and the woman's lot can also be extrapolated from one of the most famous and popular stories in Panjabi literature, the story of the doomed love of Hir and Ranjha.

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[71] Griffin, *The Law of Inheritance*, 19. This custom was, like all customs, subject to change. Indeed, Skinner's claim that some Jats had given up the practice of *karewa* seems improbable; it is likelier that instead the sons born of such unions were not recognized as legitimate heirs.

[72] '*Bhali hui man, pi muan nahin, hoti rand; duniya deti mahani, hakim leta chand*'. Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, xxxiii.

[73] 'Mothers are worthless without sons, though they be wealthy.' ('*Puttan bajh mawan na sondhi, sattar daulat bhariyan*'). Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, xxxi. This is repeated in various poems; in the epic of Hir and Ranjha, discussed below, Hir tells Ranjha, that just as mothers are worthless without sons, so is she useless without him. Temple, *Legends of the Panjab*, II, 542.

[74] '*Aja beti, lele phere; yeh mar jawe, aur bahutere*'. Fanshawe, *SR Rohtak*, 53.

[75] Indrani Chatterjee, 'The Locked Box in 'Slavery and Social Death'', in *On Human Bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, ed. John Bodel and Walter Scheidel (Somerset, United States: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016);

[76] Mandair and Shackle, 84; n.7 explains that the word used by the Guru for woman is *bhand* (vessel).

[77] See Chapter 5.

[78] '*Chakar auratan sada be-azar howen*' Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, xx.

The most well-known version of this tale is the telling by Waris Shah.[79] Hir was the daughter of a modest landlord, who took Ranjha, the son of a farmer, who had run away from home after a dispute with his brothers over the family land, into his household as a cattle-herd. Hir and Ranjha fell in love, but given the difference in status, their marriage was out of the question. Eventually, though, the two were allowed to marry. Their joy was fleeting, as both were poisoned on their wedding day. Throughout their courtship, the difficulty of the situation for each of them was mirrored by the position of the other. Distraught at his helplessness as a lowly cattle-herd in a rich household, Ranjha sings, 'I, the son of Pathans, am [now] called a servant, and who thinks of a servant?'[80] Meanwhile, Waris Shah's Hir, although defiant in her love for Ranjha despite parental threats and admonitions, is nonetheless, as Jeevan Deol has argued, a submissive figure. She does not deny the transgressive nature of her relationship with Ranjha, rather 'pleads her own servitude to the paradigm of love'.[81] This love, it is implied, is a particularly feminine weakness, and serves as a cautionary tale against wilful women, as much as against ungoverned female sexuality.

Hir's steadfast—or stubborn, depending upon one's perspective—pursuance of this relationship, and the grief that it brings the couple, as well as her family, are meant to demonstrate just how much havoc a woman could wreak on a household. It is little wonder, then, that popular wisdom warned of quarrelsomeness and beauty in a wife, who was at the same time the jewel in the familial crown.[82] This same worldview extended all the way down from elites who could afford to keep their women in *parda*, to husbanding households who could not. The non-veiling of women, their proximity to men, and non-orthodox marital practices should therefore not be interpreted, as Skinner and later colonial observers were sometimes wont, as a sign of 'lax' sexual norms.[83] To the contrary, like servants, women were regarded as the property of their marital family, even though their status within the household might be considerably higher, depending upon the kind of marriage they had entered into, and to whom. Affairs like that of Hir and Ranjha, as well as adultery, abduction, and rape, were therefore viewed as violations of a most sacred kind of property and could spark off a cycle of feuds. On the other hand, rape could also be weaponized by communities to inflict shame and disgrace upon their rivals.[84]

The counterpart to the prominent role played by women in the household, was the military role of the men in protecting the resources of the village ad lineage, and adding to them, whenever possible or necessary, by raiding neighbouring settlements. Into the early decades of the nineteenth century, each household in a village was called upon to provide men for such expeditions. Moreover, as we shall see in the following section, the share that the leading households of a settlement and lineage had in its resources was proportionate to the numbers of horsemen that it supplied in battle. The frequent competition over resources amongst rural populations, as well as the ever-present risk of raids, meant that at least the larger settlements were fortified and equipped with watchtowers. Watchtowers were also built outside the village walls, where men armed with matchlocks would stand guard as cattle grazed.[85]

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[79] Jeevan Deol, 'Sex, Social Critique and the Female Figure in Premodern Punjabi Poetry: Vāris Shāh's 'Hīr'', *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002): 141–171, at 142.

[80] *'Putr pathan de asi chak sadale, chak honde kaun bichare?'*, Temple, *Legends of the Panjab*, II, 542. See also Ibid., 527.

[81] Deol, 'Sex, Social Critique and the Female Figure', 156.

[82] '*Dharti ka mandal meghla, sir ka mandal sutt; ghar ka mandal astri, kull ka deva putt*' ['Clouds are the crown of the sky, a turban that of the head; the woman is the crown of the house, the son the crown of the clan']. Wilson, *SR Sirsa,* xxix.

[83] Cf. Skinner's comments on the proximity of men and women amongst the Bhattis.

[84] See below.

[85] Thomas Fortescue, 'Report on the Revenue System of the Delhi Territory (1820)' in *Records of the Delhi Residency and Agency*, Punjab Government Records Series, Vol. I., (Lahore, 1911)*,* 112.

Whenever a threat was spotted, guards would beat a large military drum called a *tamak*, to summon attention.[86] The response to the alarm could be surprisingly rapid. One Company surveyor whose proximity to a village near Patiala caused the drums to be beaten reported that within a matter of minutes, 'between 2 and 500 people appeared without the Town, stationing themselves under the protection of its walls.'[87] Unsurprisingly, an early measure taken by the East India Company soon after its conquest of the region, was to issue a declaration forbidding the beating of the *tamak*. Fortifications, too, were either razed or appropriated for use by the Company.[88]

Although armed conflict was by no means a rarity, it was not in the interest of communities to resort to violence, without attempting arbitration first. This held true both within and beyond the lineage domains. Resources such as pastures and reservoirs were, where possible, shared by communities. As Minoti Chakravarty-Kaul has shown, pastoralists would be allowed to graze their herds upon the stubble of the harvested fields of cultivators. In turn, the latter would take their cattle to the fallows kept by pastoral communities to graze, to keep them away from the ripening crop.[89] Such agreements extended to a broad range of resources and were by no means the preserve of husbanding communities alone. According to Charles Metcalfe, for instance, the rights to raid the city of Delhi were divided up per neighbourhood amongst the villages in its immediate vicinity. Sweeping rights within the city were likewise divided up between different clans of sweepers.[90] Such cooperation extended to the meting out of justice as well. When cattle was stolen, for instance, it was the task of the village to hand over the perpetrators to the aggrieved party, to reimburse the value of the property taken, or to demonstrate their innocence.[91] Similarly, in cases such as rape and murder, the cause of both victim and accused would be pled by the village.[92] In the event that discussion did not satisfactorily resolve the dispute, violence was the outcome; and in the protracted feuds that ensued, all members of the enemy village or lineage were considered fair targets. However, while the principle of collective responsibility provided individuals protection, it also gave the lineage leverage over the lives of its individual members. Villages could use the threat of social boycott (*hukka-pani band karna*, that is, to no longer smoke or share food) or even expulsion from the community to enforce compliance.[93]

Despite colonial paeans to the brotherhood and equality of the village and *gota* in much of Panjab, husbanding lineages were not necessarily egalitarian. To the contrary, as lineages grew, they tended to become more stratified. The circumstances in which outsiders gained entry to a settlement dictated the terms of their place within the village and the lineage to which it belonged. Prosperous landholders for whom allowing an outsider to cultivate a part of their grounds was an opportunity rather than a necessity, would maintain a distinction between themselves, the 'original' inhabitants (known as *pattidars*) and husbandmen (*ra'aya*) that *they* had settled. The latter would not, at least in the beginning, have the same right to representation as *pattidars*, and they would ordinarily be compelled to pay higher revenue rates. It should be stressed, however, that these rules were apt to change. In the late nineteenth century, colonial bureaucrats remarked that some villagers took cultivators into their settlements and granted them

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[86] Draft of a *parwaneh* attached to letter dated 19 March 1809. IOR/F/43/05/7014. British Library, London

[87] 18 July 1807. IOR/F/42/37/5453. British Library, London.

[88] See following chapter.

[89] Minoti Chakravarty-Kaul, *Common Lands and Customary Law: Institutional Change in North India over the Past Two Centuries* (Delhi [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1996), 42.

[90] Judicial report by Charles Metcalfe, 12 December 1815. IOR/H/776. British Library, London.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] The theme of excommunication as punishment for a violation of communal (mostly marriage) norms is common in Skinner's *Tashrih*, just as the above example of the commensality of the Jats, Ahirs and Gujars demonstrates proximity.

identical privileges as older inhabitants, just to be able to meet its revenue payments, and there seems no reason that this tactic was not deployed in times of need in the precolonial period as well. It is likely that periods of drought and famine led to periodic reconfigurations of the terms upon which households lived and worked within a village.

Attracting *ra'aya* was only one way in which a village could multiply its population. Another way was for *pattidars* to absorb outsiders into their households, as dependents, servants, or even as adopted kin. The boundary between servant and kin was not always very clear. In Skinner's *Tazkira*, for example, Dulcha Singh, who eventually became the founder of the principality of Radaur, is described as being 'kept as [a] servant in service of the house and the labour of cultivation' by Krora Singh, a landowner in the village of Dalli, near Ferozepur.[94] However, having quarrelled with his sons, it was to Dulcha, and another servant, Khel Singh, that Krora Singh gifted part of his conquests to, including the town of Radaur.[95] Similarly, in the *Ravi Prakash*, the official history of the Kalsia state, the author Inayatullah uses the term *rishtedar* (relatives) interchangeably with subordinates (*tabedar*), suggesting that relations (*rishte*) were understood in a broad sense, encompassing service, subjecthood, and allegiance as well as descent and marriage. That such informal 'adoptions' of dependents and servants were routine is evidenced by the number of property disputes that were brought to colonial courts later in the nineteenth century, as blood kin and adoptive heirs each established a claim to the estate of a deceased relative or master.[96]

As the need for people was generally a constant for husbanding households, the exact relationship of outsiders absorbed into its folds would change as a settlement grew. While *ra'aya* might be accepted within the settlement at first, as more land was acquired, the distinction in status and rights between the *pattidar* households and that of new settlers, might be given spatial expression as well. Especially rural elites who, as Skinner notes of the Khatris, acquired large land grants from their politically powerful patrons, might choose to settle cultivators from outside within their domains, but at a distance from their own homes: a settlement that would eventually develop into an independent, if subordinate *abadi*. As we shall see in the following section, this was a method often resorted to by warlords and chieftains attempting to establish a state of their own. It was likewise adopted by a number of landholding *gotas* in south-eastern Panjab, to designate differences of status between themselves and their subjects. The Mandhar Rajputs, for example, who had bases at Karnal, Safidon, and Gharaunda, appeared to have settled Rors and other non-elite husbanding populations in their domains to do the work of cultivation.[97] Likewise, the Gujar communities scattered amongst the Afghan settlements between Karnal and Jhajjar seem to have worked the land as the latter's tributaries. In each of these instances, a clear distinction was maintained between the overlord and subordinate populations, even though the latter might take on the clan affiliation of the former, a practice that persisted into the late nineteenth century. Roy Maconachie, settlement officer of the Delhi district, wrote that although the Dahiya *gota* was avowedly a Jat lineage, even Gujar villages in areas where Dahiyas were dominant identified themselves as Dahiya Gujars, as did all other non-Jat villages in the area. Such identification seems to point towards the resilience of these tributary bonds, even after many dominant clans had been shorn of their rights over their former clients by the colonial state.[98] It also underscores the amalgamate and stratified quality of rural lineages.

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[94] Skinner, *Tazkira*, f.228r.

[95] Skinner, *Tazkira*, ff.228v-229r.

[96] See Chapter 4.

[97] Ibbetson, *SR Karnal*, 76.

[98] R. Maconachie, *Final Report on the Settlement of Land Revenue in the Delhi District* (Lahore, 1882), 86 (henceforth, *SR Delhi*).

Besides subordinate husbandmen, landholding lineages depended upon settlers from outside to provide a variety of different services. Collectively, these groups were referred to as '*kamin'*, which meant both 'worker' and 'menial'*,* and they were separate from wandering performers and artisans, who would peddle their services across their countryside.[99] The number and specialization of these groups depended upon the size and means of the village. Usually, however, a village would require the services of leatherworkers ('*Chamar'*), blacksmiths (*Lohar*), a potter (*Kumhar*), a barber (*Nai*), a weaver (*Dhanuk*) and perhaps a few performers, such as bards, musicians, and dancers, all of whom were referred to with the collective term *mirasi*. In addition, village shrines to ancestors and various godlings of the quotidian would be maintained by a priest (*purohit*). Depending on the size of a settlement, one so-called '*kamin*' household might serve only a few families rather than the entire village. Such relationships had to be respected; a '*kamin*' could not simply 'choose' another patron in the event of a dispute, and such solidarity amongst patrons helped preserve the subordinate position of service providers. In the nineteenth century, colonial officers noted that the lineages of husbanding communities were mirrored by those of service communities; in other words, the division of client communities into clans followed the fault lines of their patron lineages.[100] Similarly, in Ludhiana district, Walker observed that a 'Chamar' (casual labourer) who chose to flee his own village, would have to travel far to find another settlement that would admit him.[101]

Despite their subordinate position, dependents in or bound to a household, whether male or female servants, wielded considerable influence due to their proximity to their patron. The dependent position of servants made them trustworthy, their loyalty being to the one who provided for them. For instance, in much of Panjab, when a marriage was to be arranged, it was the family barber (*nai*) who was entrusted with the first talks between families.[102] Their ubiquity made servants excellent informants; and in fact, in the wake of its conquest of the region, rather than relying upon policemen, the Company used sweepers to keep abreast of developments in the city of Delhi. This 'outcast tribe', wrote Metcalfe, were present in every street, and enjoyed 'access to all the Houses, the males to the Male Apartments, and the Females to the Female Apartments [They] are assembled every morning at the Police Office of their Quarter, and are bound to give intelligence of everything of consequence that may have happened on the preceding day.'[103] At the same time, this position of trust and the access it provided lent a certain power over their patron. It is perhaps partly for this reason, that Skinner's *Tashrih* ascribes servants and most service communities the traits of deceitfulness and treachery (*doghebazi*).[104] Likewise, proverbs and folk-wisdom advised against showing too much kindness to one's dependents; rather, a persistent awareness of their precarity was likelier to keep them loyal and well-behaved.[105]

Hierarchies, whether between clients and patrons of the same *gota*, and between different socio-economic classes in general, were maintained through a combination of overt, ritual gestures. Challenges to these hierarchies, expressed in either a rejection or appropriation of these gestures, were met with

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[99] See Chapter 1.

[100] Fanshawe, *SR Rohtak*, 58.

[101] T. Gordon Walker, *Final Report on the Settlement (178-88) of the Ludhiana District in the Panjab* (Calcutta; Calcutta Central Press, 1884), 51 (henceforth, *SR Ludhiana*).

[102] Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, 109; Ibbetson, *SR Karnal*, 126.

[103] Judicial Report by Charles Metcalfe on Delhi,12 December 1815. British Library, London, IOR/H/776.

[104] Slaves and prostitutes/courtesans.

[105] 'The Jat, Bhat, caterpillar and widow, these four things are best hungry; when fed, they do damage.' [*'Jat, Bhat, Katira, chauthi bidwa nar; yeh charon bhuke bhale, dhape kare bigar'*]. The widow and the Bhat are the dependents best kept hungry. Fanshawe, *SR Rohtak*, 54. There were variations of this: in Sirsa, for instance, the saying was that 'The barber, the dog, and the falcon are useless when full' [*'Rajje kam na awande, Nai, kutta, baj'*]. Wilson, *SR Sirsa,* xxi.

violence. Dress is perhaps one of the most evident ways in which status could be expressed, and sartorial codes were therefore policed. This explains Skinner's indignation and disgust when the *nouveau riches* of 'low' birth, such as Jats and Khatris appropriated the style of the high-born, such as the sacred thread, or the unspecified 'fine clothes' of the wealthier Jats and Ahirs.[106] Instead, the dress considered appropriate to non-elite husbanding seems to have been a variation of a loincloth (*langot*), perhaps with a sort of shawl or rug (*chadar*, *kalim*) around the shoulders, a turban (*dastar*), and a staff or baton (*chub-dasti*). However, given the limited, localized context within which subordination could be enforced, there is likely to have been some variation in the codes of dress corresponding to social rank. For instance, Skinner noted that Ahirs 'in the west', by which he presumably means west of their headquarters at Rewari, wore a particular kind of turban not worn by Ahirs in the east.[107] Similarly, in Karnal, where the Mandhar Rajputs were powerful, they claimed the exclusive right to wear a red turban. Given the importance of this turban to them, when the rivals and social inferiors of the Mandhars, the Ghatwal *gota* of Jats, eclipsed them in political influence, they appropriated the red turban as a sign of their newfound clout. According to Ibbetson, 'to this day, a Jat with a red *pagri* [turban] is most probably a Ghatwal.'[108]

The rural *gota*, then, was in effect a stratified community of households. For a *gota* as a whole, power was acquired by extending its control over resources, whether this be grazing grounds, or people. People were acquired variously, through marriage, through acknowledged kinship, as well as through patronage. By extending patronage to the landless, the dominant households of a *gota* could swell its ranks with dependents and clients of various sorts, some of whom might eventually be accepted as kin, while others remained a part of a retinue. There was no single, blanket rule that governed whether or not a dependent might be recognized as kin. Instead, each acknowledgment of kinship was shaped by particular circumstances, and invariably entailed an appraisal of the need for labour, and the relative disadvantages—jealousy and discord—that such an acknowledgment might entail. Kinship was, however, a flexible bond, one that could be extended to a servant or dependent partly because of the complex meanings of servitude. Both within and beyond *gotas* social status was an expression of power. However, power was not solely concentrated in the hands of the *gota's* dominant landholding households (*pattidars*). Clients and dependents, aware of the value of their labour, could use it to their advantage. Moreover, the access that power bestowed upon a dependent was itself a form of leverage. Besides information, it could also be a source of prestige if the patron household was powerful.

Ruling lineages and their riyasats

Even though settlement and agrarian expansion in much of Panjab were often followed by emigration and agrarian contraction, from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, an uptick in the frequency of these cycles becomes discernible. Two mutually reinforcing factors would seem to explain this growing tumultuousness. First, the increasing political and military assertiveness of ordinary husbanding populations in neighbouring regions; and second, the growing autonomy of Mughal governors and vassals, who sensed that the imperial centre at Delhi was weakening.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the control of states based at Delhi over the rural populations in the city's immediate hinterland was historically imperfect, if only because the mobility of these communities made it difficult to keep track of them. Imperial authority was therefore only as strong as imperial relationships with the 'big men' that represented these communities. If the Mughal state managed to project the image of near-subcontinental supremacy, this was a testament to their alliance-

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[106] See above.

[107] *Tashrih*, f.204.

[108] Ibbetson, *SR Karnal*, 82.

building and myth-making alike.[109] When even this incomplete Mughal authority began to visibly wane in the late seventeenth century, it was, to some extent, a result of the state's considerable success in keeping local potentates happy, and therefore loyal. Using the 'lateral perspectives' offered by Marathi sources from the Deccan, Sumit Guha illustrates how this process unfolded:

> 'In villages where the hereditary chiefs (*mirasidar*) collected one or two thousands [rupees], they paid only two or three hundred as a lump-sum assessment. As a result the *mirasidars* grew rich and built mansions, towers, and forts in the villages, posted infantry and musketeers in them, and grew powerful. They would not wait on the revenue officers, and if the latter suggested an increase in the revenue, the *mirasidars* became belligerent and prepared to fight. In this way they became refractory and took forcible control of the country.'[110]

In other words, the state's patronage of influential chieftains allowed the latter to strengthen their position locally. Thus reinforced, these imperial allies became progressively less inclined to obey the commands of their overlords.

A similar process to the one outlined by Guha was underway in Panjab from the seventeenth century onwards. During this period, many Afghan and Rajput warlords, some of them former Mughal clients, sought to establish independent states in our region. Prominent amongst the Afghans were the Baluch chiefs of Farrukhnagar near Gurgaon, the Rohillas, who eventually settled east of the Yamuna River, and the Nawab of Kunjpura, who founded a town by that name on the banks of the Yamuna. Simultaneously, various chieftains claiming to be Rajput, many of whom were dependants of the states of Bikaner and Jaipur, began moving north-east from the arid Thar Desert, establishing seats of power in south-eastern Panjab. These included the rajas of Khetri, Tori, and Alwar.

The disintegration of the Mughal alliance system also led, Purnima Dhavan has argued, to a growing assertiveness amongst husbanding populations. Dhavan explains the consolidation of the Sikh *Khalsa* in Panjab in the early eighteenth century as, in part, a response by non-Muslim husbanding (Jat) populations to the political mobilization and autonomy of groups such as the Afghans and Bhattis.[111] Such alliances were, however, temporary, and Dhavan also highlights the many splinters and factions that existed within the Khalsa and which manifested themselves more clearly from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. By this time, several independent Sikh warlords had established principalities in south-eastern Panjab. Besides the larger states of Patiala, Jind, Nabha and Kaithal, there were a host of smaller states founded by Sikh chieftains at sites such as Ladwa, Thanesar, Radaur, Chhachhrauli, Rupnagar and Ambala. Other, non-Sikh husbanding communities likewise produced political entrepreneurs who carved out independent states for themselves in this period. Notable amongst these were the Ahir Rao Rajas of Rewari, the Jat lords of Ballabhgarh, and the Bhatti Nawabs of Rania.

A rich account of these various princes is to be found in the *Tazkirat al-umara*, James Skinner's political history of 'Hind', which focuses largely on south-eastern Panjab and Rajputana. Skinner made little secret of the *parvenu* origins of many of these chiefs, and their individual political careers usually follow a similar trajectory. Each narrative begins with a popular and skilful military commander, whose success in often quite localized conflicts and rebellions draws soldiers to his ranks. In this way, military success reproduces itself, leading a chieftain to acquire fame and honour, and a reputation as a worthy

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[109] As Sumit Guha observes, the historiographical position that the Mughal state was highly centralized takes imperial propaganda on the power of the Emperor at face value rather than contrasting it with sources that tell a different story. Sumit Guha, 'Rethinking the Economy of Mughal India: Lateral Perspectives', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58, no. 4 (9 July 2015): 532–75, at 546.

[110] Ibid., 560.

[111] Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799* (New York, New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54-55.

patron and leader. Once a chieftain crossed a certain threshold of success, he would often be recognized by the Mughal court, which throughout the eighteenth century continued to seek out new allies through acts of patronage to replace its rebellious erstwhile clients. This imperial recognition and patronage could take the form of a rank, coupled with a prebend or revenue-collecting rights. Often, warlords did not wait for imperial sanction to collect taxes or tribute, and the bestowing of these 'rights' was in fact more of an acknowledgment of an existing state of affairs. Nonetheless, affiliation with the Mughal court was a powerful symbol, conferring prestige and enhancing a warlord's credibility as a patron and a 'big man'. Let us explore this trajectory from rebel to autonomous warlord more closely, using a couple of concrete examples.

One of the most able commanders in south-eastern Panjab in the early nineteenth century was the Bhatti leader Nawab Khan Bahadur Khan. Bahadur Khan and his son, Zabita (Fig. 4), were to be a persistent thorn in the side of the East India Company for the first fifteen years of its rule in south-eastern Panjab. They were also, however, embroiled in conflicts with the states of Bikaner and Patiala, the roots of which stretched back into the eighteenth century. The first Bhatti commander to emerge as an autonomous warlord was a man named Sher Muhammad, a professional soldier who served Maharaja Zorawar Singh of Bikaner (r.1735-46). Zorawar Singh was so impressed by his valour and military skill that he rewarded Sher Muhammad with a robe of honour and made him the superintendent of the fort of Bhatner (*qiladar*). He was further given a *jagir* of the three *parganas* of Sirsa, Rania, and Fatahabad; and when Zorawar Singh went to the court of the Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar, he took Sher Muhammad with him. The emperor, impressed by the tales of Sher Muhammad's bravery, further conferred him with honours, and invested him with the title of *nawab*.[112] For a while, Sher Muhammad's son Amin continued in service of the state of Bikaner; however, when Zorawar's successor Gaj Singh began to show signs of complacency (*susti*), Amin seized the opportunity to establish himself as an independent chieftain, and became, in Skinner's words, 'a disciple of the doctrine of *namak-harami* [treachery]'.[113] He broke away from his former patron, and became a warlord in his own right. Thereafter followed a prolonged dispute with the house of Bikaner that did not truly cease until the Bhattis were stripped of the last of their forts by the East India Company in 1818.

There is much that is instructive in the rise of the Bhattis, providing insights into the components of successful political entrepreneurship. First, there is a crucial difference between the careers of Sher Muhammad and his descendants. The former began as a soldier and rose in the ranks by virtue of his skill. Extrapolating from the *Tazkira*, it would seem that his success in establishing himself as a commander was at least partly due to the honours and ranks conferred upon him by his royal patrons. This seems to have lent him prestige amongst his kin; he became their acknowledged leader, a position that was inherited by his descendants. However, this leadership had its limits, too. According to Skinner, the Bhatti nawabs did not truly control the raids conducted by their followers (*hamrahi*), but they were given a share of the loot.[114] The extent of the Nawab's control over their kin was also doubted by early Company observers, who wrote that the Bhattis had 'no acknowledged head' with whom to negotiate an end to their raiding activities.[115] What influence the nawab's family did possess it sought to enhance by distancing itself from its kin and weaving a more sophisticated genealogy for itself. It is likely for

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[112] *Tazkira*, ff.254v-55r.

[113] '*salek-e-masalik-e-namak-harami*', ibid., f.255r.

[114] A state of affairs that was confirmed by Thomas Fortescue too; Fortescue, 'Revenue System of the Delhi Territory', 114.

[115] Letter from the Resident to Secretary Edmonstone, 22 Nov 1807. British Library, London. IOR/F/4/250/5607.

this reason that the *Tashrih* distinguishes between 'true' Bhattis affiliated with an elite Rajput lineage, and 'spurious' Bhattis, who were in fact no more than common brigands, herdsmen, and cultivators.[116]

It is also worth highlighting the particular language used by Skinner to describe the Bhattis' defection from their patrons at Bikaner, which invokes the metaphor of salt (*namak*). To betray one's salt (*namak harami*) was to betray one's obligations to a provider, and as such, it conveyed a sense of moral transgression. Sher Muhammad's family was, after all, bound to Bikaner not by a salary or contract, but by the deeper obligation that is generated by eating another's salt. At the same time, Skinner does not entirely absolve Bikaner of responsibility; Amin Muhammad's rebellion (*fasad*) was precipitated by the growing complacency (*susti*) of the administration. He saw not only an opportunity to become an autonomous chieftain, but also anticipated that his patron would soon lose control of his own state, and thus no longer be able to provide for him. A similar turn of events—the *susti* apparent in state

Figure 4. Nawab Zabita Khan Bhatti of Rania (Tazkirat al-umara)

(*riyasat*) of Jaipur—also led another local warlord, the Ahir Rao of Rewari, to seek his fortunes elsewhere—first at the Mughal court, and then as an independent chieftain.[117] The metaphor of *susti* is repeatedly invoked in the *Tazkira* to explain the rise of various *parvenu* kings and princes. An insufficiently watchful ruler, who either allowed fissures (*fitne*) to develop within his realm, or who failed to protect his own people, could not but expect to be betrayed.

While Skinner's account of the Bhattis illuminates the way in which ruling lineages and warlords could each use the other to personal advantage, there were also plenty of chieftains in south-eastern Panjab who rose to power without the intervention of a larger polity, as leaders of a successful warband. The *Ravi Prakash* or *Tarikh-i-Kalsia*, a three-volume history of the Sikh principality of the Kalsia family, provides us a detailed view of the patterns of settlement of a state founded on raiding. The principality of Kalsia was established in the late eighteenth century, at the site of Chhachrauli on the banks of the Yamuna River. The first, and it would seem, earliest volume of the *Tarikh*, was written sometime around the turn of the twentieth century by Banda Inayatullah, a scribe whose family had for

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[116] *Tashrih*, f.843.

[117] *Tazkira*, ff.155r-155v.

three generations been servants (*namakkhwar*) of the house of Kalsia.[118] Inayatullah's account retraces the path followed by the founders of the Kalsia dispensation (*riyasat*), the Sikh warlord Sardar Gurbaksh Singh and his famous son, Jodh, from relatively humble headmen (*chaudhari*) to princes in their own right.

The beginnings of the *riyasat* of Kalsia lie in the vicinity of Kasur, a town in present-day Pakistan. Before moving east, the Kalsia family had already been mobile in the neighbourhood of Kasur, migrating from one site to another, and establishing new villages in the first half of the eighteenth century. An ancestor of Gurbaksh Singh's had left the village of Chella, located between Kasur and Amritsar, and had founded two villages, that of Kalsian Khurd ('Little Kalsian') and Kalsian Kalan ('Greater Kalsian'). The revenues of each village each supported a different wife of the unnamed ancestor, and the separation of this inheritance led to the first split in the Kalsia lineage. The branch of the family settled at Kalsian Khurd came to be known as the Ladhupuria family, after a neighbouring site of pilgrimage. It soon died out, cursed, so Inayatullah claims, by an ascetic whose hermitage its leader had looted. Meanwhile, Gurbaksh Singh, as the eldest son of the eldest wife of the leading family of Kalsian Kalan, succeeded to the position of headman. Like his ancestors, Gurbaksh combined his headman's duties with a career in raiding, and thus came to the attention of Krora Singh, the leader of the confederacy that bore his name. Impressed by Gurbaksh's skills as a leader and organizer, Sardar Krora Singh appears to have asked the former to join his ranks as one of his comrades (*hamrah*) and commanders.

Newly absorbed into its ranks, Sardar Gurbaksh Singh spent the 1750s and early 1760s raiding the Doaba, that is, the country between the Beas and Satlaj Rivers, with the rest of the Krorsinghias. In doing so, they fought against several able enemies, most prominent of which were probably the Afghan warlord Ahmad Shah Abdali, and another peasant-turned-warlord named Adina Beg, whose successful rise had eventually led to a governorship in the Mughal administration. In 1763, a branch of the Krorsinghias, under Gurbaksh Singh's leadership, conquered a number of villages on the banks of the Yamuna River (see Map 6). These included the sites of Chhachhrauli, Hafizpur, Kapuri, Tughlaqpur (likely contemporary Tugalpur), Kot Khurd, Jawaharpur, Afghana, and a number of others. These lands were thinly inhabited, Inayatullah claims, much of its population having likely fled Maratha and Afghan raids. The rest presumably either submitted to Gurbaksh and his men, or were forcefully subdued and perhaps, enslaved. The conquered territory was then divided into three parts, one of which Gurbaksh claimed as his own personal estate, giving one each to his fellow commanders as revenue assignments (*jagir*). Rather than a monetary value, each *jagir* was assigned an equal value in cavalry, and was supposed to provide 206 horsemen (*sawar*) in battle. Gurbaksh then proceeded to settle his own retinue (*zail*) on his estate, while he and his fellow Krorsinghia commanders settled the chief village of that confederacy, Chhalaundi, near Thanesar.

At this point, there is some ambiguity in the *Tarikh* about the conditions that precisely applied to this threefold division of the lands of Chhachrauli. Nominally, Inayatullah refers to each estate interchangeably as a *jagir* and a *zail* and implies that these were each subordinate to the authority of Sardar Gurbaksh Singh. Yet, the fact that all three shares had an equal cavalry value suggests that there was some parity between Gurbaksh and his two fellow chiefs. Inayatullah himself concedes that the abundance of land meant that the 'giving of *jagirs* was, at that time, not difficult.'[119] As such, 'every individual was the independent master of his own *jagir*'.[120] In other words, although Gurbaksh's fellow commanders might have accepted him as their leader, *within* their own estates, their authority as *zaildar*

[118] *Tarikh-i-riyasat-i-kalsia*, vol. I, f.2v. Haryana State Archives, Other Records.
[119] *Tarikh*, f.6r.
[120] Ibid.
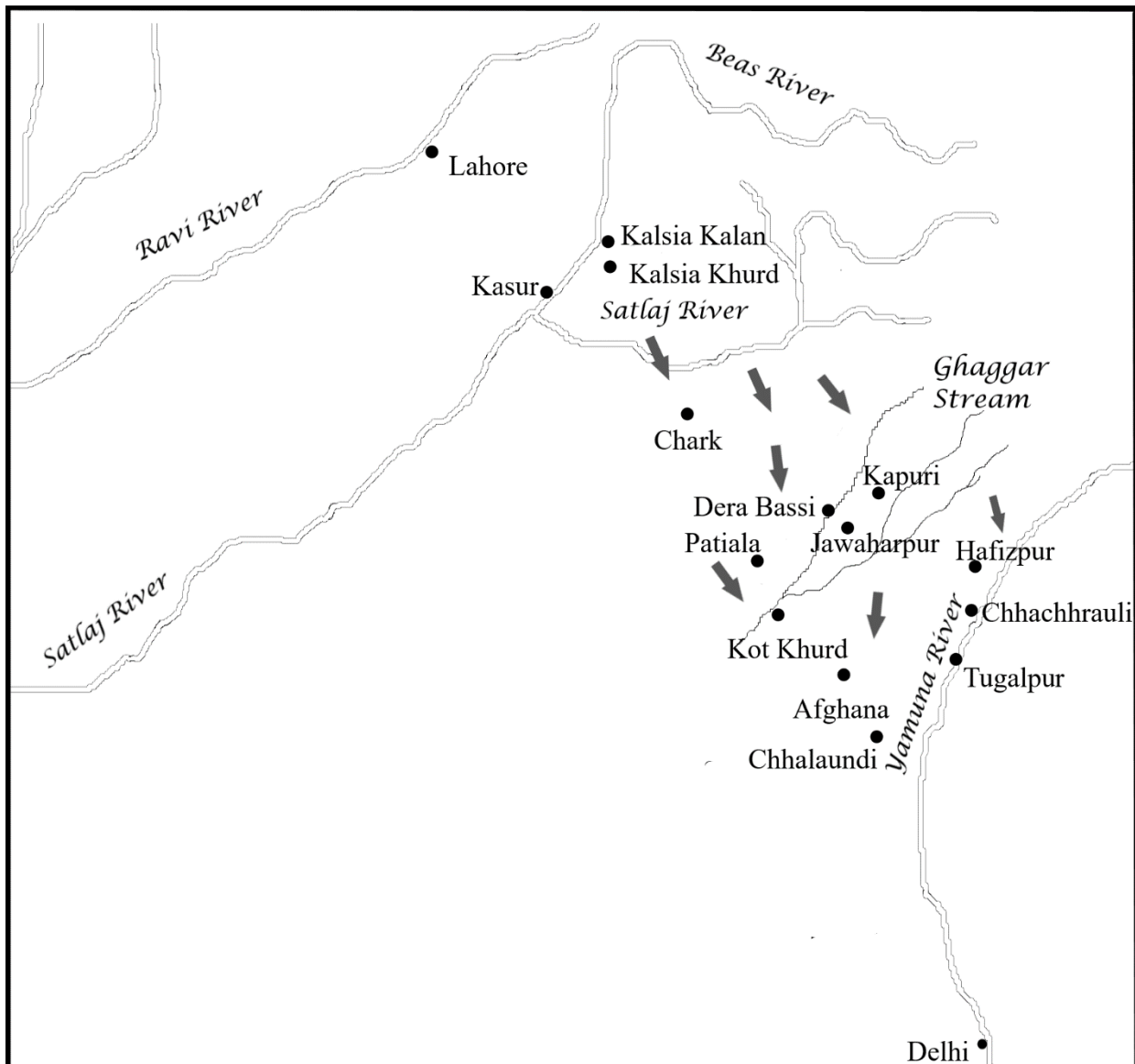
Map 6. Gurbaksh and Jodh Singh's Raiding Paths

was supreme. Disputes, though frequent, were thus adjudicated within the boundaries of the *zail*, and power was effectively highly decentralized. This itself is unsurprising, as the *riyasat* of Kalsia, like many of its contemporary South Asian chieftaincies, was the territorial counterpart of the warband, a highly fissiparous entity, in which leaders were recognized as first amongst equals, rather than as kings. Internal segmentation of the *zail* therefore usually proceeded apace with disputes and emigration, and new members recruited to replace the old occupied a distinctly lower position than their predecessors.

The corollary to this centrifugal tendency was the considerable social mobility that was available to military and political entrepreneurs. Gurbaksh Singh exemplified this potential. During his lifetime, he travelled from one end of our corner of Panjab to the other, and grew in rank from a parochial headman (*chaudhari*) to a commander and *zaildar* ('retinue-holder') in one of the Sikh confederacies. Besides the two villages of Kalsian, he had acquired an estate of several settlements. His son, Jodh Singh (b.1751), followed in his father's footsteps, crossing the Yamuna as a commander in the Krorsinghia army, and raiding the area around Meerut. When Sardar Krora Singh was killed in battle by the Afghan warlord Gholam Qadir Khan Rohilla, he was succeeded by Sardar Baghel Singh. Jodh fought under Baghel Singh's command as well, all the while earning himself a reputation for bravery and leadership,

and even capturing a Maratha cannon in a campaign against Daulat Rao Shinde's armies. In 1800, he captured the village Dera Bassi, and the neighbouring settlements of Dhanauni, and such was his fame that, upon Baghel Singh's death, he became the leader of the Krora Singh *misl*, and moved northwards from Chhalaundi to his late father's estate at Chhachhrauli. The villages in and around the original settlement of Kalsian in the west nonetheless remained in their possession.

Jodh Singh's career as a warlord was cut short soon after his conquest of Dera Bassi. The East India Company established itself at Delhi in 1803 and began issuing declarations of friendship to all chieftains and states in the region, on the condition of mutual respect for boundaries, and Jodh seems to have been wary of this new neighbour. Independently hereof, Jodh Singh's incursions into the territory of Patiala (where Dera Bassi was located), sounded alarm bells with the ruler of that state, who gave Jodh his daughter in marriage to put an end to Kalsia's relentless expansion. With this, the boundaries of the young *riyasat* of Kalsia seemed to have stabilized; at any rate, hereafter, its domains would only shrink, as the colonial state began to encroach upon its domains on various pretexts. In 1834, for instance, Chark was confiscated by the Company on the grounds that Jodh Singh had 'illegally' seized it from its original possessor, a pair of Afghan chieftains. Kalsia's dependents, too, much like those of other Sikh states, would face the prospect of gradual dispossession, as the colonial state increasingly intruded in the affairs of its princely 'allies'.[121]

The network of kin, comrades, and dependents that the chiefs of Kalsia had relied upon in their raiding expeditions, were equally crucial to their ability to settle their conquered domains. The internal division of Kalsia, which had begun with the demarcation of three distinct *zails* under Gurbaksh Singh, continued in the decades thereafter, even after the stabilization of the boundaries of the *riyasat*. Inayatullah reproduces the details of these divisions in the *Tarikh*, with the caveat that not all information was available to him as some records were not kept, and others were in *raqa'i*, an everyday Persian handwriting that he appears not to have been fully familiar with. Even so, if the details of the division of lands he provides are broadly accurate, it would seem that Gurbaksh subdivided his own *zail* into eight parts (*patti*) (see Table 1). Seven of these he gave to comrades who had participated in the 'acquisition' (*mulkgiri*) of the Kalsia domains, on the condition that they provide him horsemen as and when the need arose. The remaining *patti* counted as his *jagir*, and encompassed more than 30 full villages, as well as shares in the revenues of two more. Within his own *patti,* Gurbaksh established a base at Chhachhrauli, settling eighteen of his most trusted horsemen in eight of the closest villages. The distribution of these villages to his followers in lieu of a paid post tied his interests in creating a consolidated nucleus of power for the fledgling state of Kalsia to their interests in finding colonists for their revenue assignments, and bringing them under cultivation. A similar division proceeded in the other *pattis*, given by Gurbaksh to his comrades (*hamrah*), where they settled their own retinues. Each individual, from lowly horseman to commander, who thus received a share in the revenues of the land became, at least in principle, an agent of settlement and agrarian expansion. The strategy seems to have been successful; Inayatullah includes an overview of the increase in the Kalsia domains between Gurbaksh and his son Jodh's reigns. The latter's territories appear to have been augmented not only through a successful raiding career, but thanks also in part to the establishment of several new settlements (*nav-abadi*).

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[121] See Chapter 3 for the fate of princely states and their descendants after colonization.

		Details of the horsemen (sawars) along with their brothers		Name of the jagir, *that is the hamlet (*mauzah*) by which name it is known*	Name of the Sardar Sahib	Number of the Patti	Serial number
Total revenue value of villages in Rupees, Paisa, Ana	*Division of villages*	*Grand total*	*Name of holder*				

	1.Chachhrauli 2. Birpur 3. Lodhipur 4. Naubarpur 5-9 illegible	18 *sawars*	Sardar Sahib	Chachhrauli Khas	Khas Sardar Sahib Gurbaksh Singh	1.	1.
40,0,4	Raianwala Himmatpur Salimpur Bagar	15	Dalwan Singh	Dalwan Singh Salimpur	Ditto	2.	2.
40, 9	Half of Balauli, Mirpur ---, --- Salimpur, ---	15 15 *sawars*	*blank*	*blank*	Jhab Singh/Jabbar Singh	3.	3.
40, 10	Malikpur, ---pur, Mahmudpur, Muzafat, Kabarwale, Kurehwale, Leedi/Lidi/Ledi, Bakat/Bankat, ---, ---	204 *sawars*	*blank*	Sobha Singh Malakpuria and Gandha Singh Ganwandwale	Khas Sardar Sahib	4.	4.
40,0,3 40,0,3	Muttarak (consisting of) Dhakuwale, Saradwal, half of Darpur, Rasulpur, Sagri, Afghana, Deh Hazrabad, Zafrabad Ibrahimpur, half of Darpur	9 *sawars* 9	Dayal Singh to his own kin (*zat*) Badhe Singh, the 'true brother' (baradari-	Dayal Singh Kurwale Badhe Singh ditto (i.e. same gota?)	Patti Dayal Singh Ditto	1. 2.	5. 6.

			haqiqi) of Dayal Singh				
20	Hafizpur	10 *sawar*s	Amar Singh, 5 *sawar*s Dan Singh, 20 *sawar*s	Hafizpur	Ditto	3.	7.
	Amar Singh 5 *sawar*s / Dan Singh 20 *sawar*s						
40,0,7	Kapoori Kalan Kapoori Khord And a hissa of Khanpur	9 *sawar*s	Gabur (Kapur?) Singh Gauhar Singh	Kapuriwale	Sardar Gurbaksh Singh	4.	8.
24	Khas Tughlaqpur, Tajewala, Jaffrabad, ---, ---.	28 *sawar*s	Sewa Singh, 53 *sawar*s Dalsu Singh, 54 *sawar*s Balmar Singh, 20 *sawar*s Kapur Singh 54 *sawar*s	Tughlaqpur and Biswa Singh ---	Ditto	5.	9.
blank	Hafiz Majhe, ---, ---, Kot, Ahmad Majhe, ---, -----.	10 *sawar*s	Moja Singh, 3 *sawar*s; Gaja Singh, 7 *sawar*s; Madsar Singh, 10 *sawar*s; Ala Singh, 1 *sawar*; Gubar Singh, 1 *sawar*	Kot Khurd	ditto	6.	10.
27	Joharpur ----, Afghana ----bad, Zahirpur Khord	10 *sawar*s	Bhagu Singh and Bardabar Singh, 5 *sawar*s Share of the lady wife of Dandar Singh (*manal-e-sar-mosmi biwi mussammat-*	Jauhar Singhpur Dandar Singh	ditto	7.	11.

			e Darand Singh), 57 *sawar*s				
	Salwan, Salimpur (its appendages are shared/*muzafat mushtarik*) A hissa of Manapur	33 *sawar*s	Gurbaksh Singh, Rs.1½ --- Singh, 8 *sawar*s Jassa Singh, 8 *sawar*s	Migharan	Ditto	8.	12.

Table 1. Internal division of the principality of Kalsia under Sardar Gurbaksh Singh, c.1780[122]

Much as in the case of Khan Bahadur Khan, the relationship between Gurbaksh Singh, as *zaildar* and chief of the *riyasat* of Kalsia, and the various *pattidars*, is ambiguous. Inayatullah provides a history of these families, which is perhaps inclined to emphasize their obedience to Gurbaksh and his descendants. Yet, even so, it provides an insight into the relationship that a chieftain and his household maintained with his comrades and their respective network of kin and followers. Let us take the example of the family of Larha Singh, who fought alongside Gurbaksh and whose sons Badhe Singh and Dayal Singh were comrades of Jodh Singh (see Table.2). Larha Singh's original *patti*, from which he was to maintain a supply of eighteen cavalry to the Kalsia army, consisted of eleven villages. Notably, these villages were situated at opposite ends of the Kalsia domains. A few were clustered around Ferozepur, not far from Kasur, and were acquired by Gurbaksh in his early days as a warlord. The others were in the vicinity of Chhachhrauli. On Larha Singh's death, the obligations and revenues of his *patti* were split evenly between the two sons. However, rather than one son inheriting all the villages in the west near Ferozepur and Kasur, and the other inheriting all those in the east, near Chhachhrauli, the brothers' shares were each split across both parts of the Kalsia domains. Although Inayatullah does not say as much, it seems possible that this division was overseen by Jodh Singh, to keep both brothers tied to Chhachhrauli and thus prevent the cession of the lands near Kasur and Ferozepur.

Jodh also appears to have played the role of mediator between the two brothers' families. For instance, when Dayal Singh and his only son, Mehtab, died, Jodh was approached by Mehtab's mother Rajan for permission to succeed to her late husbands' *jagir*. Furthermore, she arranged for her son Mehtab's widow, Bhagan, to be given in *karewa* to one of Badhe Singh's sons, Golab Singh. Jodh appears to have specified that the shares of Rajan and her two daughters were intended for their subsistence alone, and that even in the absence of men in Dayal Singh's branch of the family, these lands were nevertheless to remain in the hands of Rajan, her daughters, and their dependents. From this point onwards, animosity between the two branches of the family began to grow, even leading to murder. When Jodh Singh's successor Sobha nonetheless confirmed his father's orders that Rajan and her descendants be allowed to maintain their estates, one of Badhe Singh's disgruntled grandsons appears to have asked the East India Company to intervene. The latter declared Rajan's daughters' shares 'without owner/legatee' (*la-waris*), whereupon these were subsumed into the colonial state's domains.[123]

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[122] This table has been adapted from a similar table provided in vol. I of the *Tarikh-i-Kalsia*. In places, the text is illegible, which has prevented me from transcribing all the names of the hamlets mentioned. These gaps have been indicated with dashes (----).
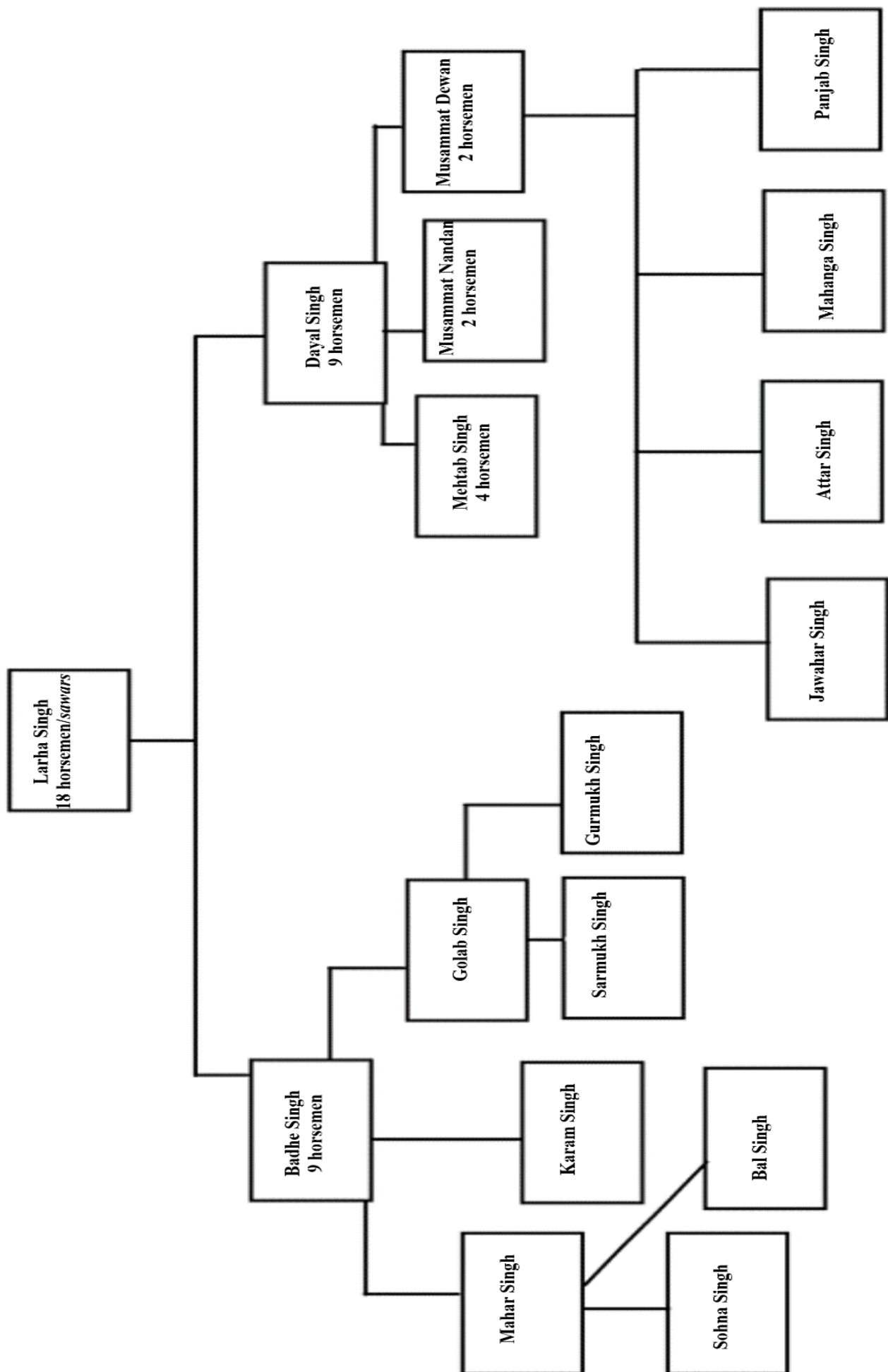
[123] *Tarikh,* f.70.

Table 2. Excerpt from the genealogical table of Larha Singh, a 'comrade' (hamrahi) of Gurbaksh Singh

While the level of detail afforded by the *Tarikh* about the *riyasat* of Kalsia may not be available to us for all states, the trajectory followed by Gurbaksh and Jodh Singh was by no means exceptional. The landscape of south-eastern Panjab was peppered with states whose founders had transitioned from tilling the soil to collecting its revenues within a couple of generations. It needs emphasizing that in each such case, the warband that served as a vehicle of conquest and colonization was itself an extension of the warlord's household and became the nucleus of a new lineage and a new state alike. The more power it accumulated, the more the core of the warband crystallized into a distinct elite, a status that was then underlined through various overt gestures. In the case of Kalsia, for example, Jodh Singh son Hari's marriage to the daughter of the Raja of Patiala, a much larger and slightly older state, was a recognition of his rapid rise, as much as it was a pragmatic concession to stop his raids on the Patiala territories.[124] This elite position was further consolidated by the chiefs of Kalsia declaring themselves *rajgan*, or princes, even if in reality, their position was no more than of 'first amongst equals'. Hari Singh's marriage to the daughter of the Raja of Patiala stood in sharp contrast to Gurbaksh and Jodh's own marriages, even though the conquests of the latter two constituted the basis of the Kalsia state. Gurbaksh's wife, Mai Jassi, is mentioned by Inayatullah without any specification of her *gota*. A slight generational shift towards nobility is already visible by the time of Jodh Singh, whose two wives are mentioned along with their *gota* and their father's names. Jodh's first wife, Sahiba, was the daughter of a Charan Singh of the Siddhu *gota*—the same *gota*, incidentally, as that of the Raja of Patiala, although given the variable size of *gotas,* this did not necessarily indicate proximity. Jodh's second wife, Musammat Dipan, seems to have been the daughter of a minor chieftain, a Sardar Kusm Singh of a *gota* identified as 'Rudakha'. Whereas the Siddhus were well known, I have not been able to find any mention of a 'Rudakha' *gota* amongst the Sikhs. It is possible that this was a minor lineage, swallowed up subsequently into a larger *gota*. On the other hand, the name 'Rudakha'—an adaptation of the Sanskritic 'Rudraksha', or rosary—could indicate a Brahmanical connection, a 'Hindu' priestly family that had become Sikh and established themselves as a family of note.

Apart from these two wives, however, we also know that Jodh Singh had a third partner named Musammat Sadan. There is no lineage mentioned for Sadan, and her father's name is likewise absent from the *Tarikh*. Nor is there any mention of her having been *wedded* to Jodh; whereas Dipan and Sahiba are mentioned as having been taken in '*shadi*' (marriage), his union with Sadan appears to not to have been celebrated. The reason for this appears to be that Sadan was a bondswoman, a *kaniz*; her only kin was Jodh Singh, her master, and her son, Karam Singh. Yet, Sadan's position, and that of her son Karam, is complex. On the one hand, they are both included within the genealogical table sketched by Inayatullah, even as he explicitly mentions Sadan's enslavement. However, unlike his two half-brothers born to Jodh's 'proper' wives, Karam is not given the title of 'sardar' (chief); nor is there further mention of *his* wives and children. While he and his mother, in all likelihood, were provided for as the dependents of Jodh Singh, Karam was not, at least in Inayatullah's telling, on an equal footing with his half-brothers, Hari and Sobha Singh. Once again, there was no hard-and-fast rule for the disadvantage of the offspring born of a heterodox union. In fact, it seems that Sobha Singh, Jodh Singh's elder son, having had three daughters, contracted a *karewa* union, one of which produced a son who went on to succeed him as the king of Kalsia state. Indeed, it is also possible that Jodh himself was the child of an irregular marriage, which would explain why Inayatullah maintains a tactful silence about his mother's lineage.[125]

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[124] Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab*, 472.

[125] Lepel Griffin, keen contemporary observer of the Sikhs, asserted that Jodh Singh was 'the issue of a *chadardalna* marriage contracted by Gurbuksh Singh with a widow, of his tribe, but not previously connected with him. It is however also asserted that Jodh Singh was illegitimate, and that his mother was never married to Gurbuksh Singh.' Griffin, *Law of Inheritance*, 25.

The changing norms observed by families as they rose in status and influence could also lead to tensions; and in fact, fragmentation and fissure played just as significant a role in the emergence of distinct lineages. At every stage of Gurbaksh and Jodh's political careers, they were confronted with the cession of their comrades and kin. It is likely that such fragmentation was exacerbated in the nineteenth century, proceeding in tandem with the growing power of the East India Company. In the absence of collective raiding, and with the possibilities of territorial expansion severely curtailed by presence of the colonial state, lineages like that of Jodh Singh struggled to maintain their bond with their former 'comrades'. The latter tended to eventually become all but autonomous lords of their own domains. Similar tendencies characterized most of the states of south-eastern Panjab in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Disagreements over the sharing of power led the Bhatti Nawab Zabita Khan to separate temporarily from his father's *riyasat*; Alwar, which itself was an offshoot of the state of Jaipur, was likewise divided; so, too, was Kishengarh.[126]

The disputes that led to such fragmentation were not infrequently a reverberation of friction between the women of the ruling household. Both the *Tazkira* and the *Tarikh* provide numerous examples of powerful women who influenced the political decision-making of their husbands and/or sons. Inayatullah mentions, for instance, that a famous Sikh governor named Hari Singh Rasulpuria, who served variously under the Mughals, the Sikh Raja Ranjit Singh of Lahore, as well as independently, was always strongly steered by the opinions of his wife, Musammat Diwan.[127] In fact, she remained influential even after his death, and was eventually murdered. A similarly strong personality is ascribed to the wife of Sardar Gurbaksh Singh, Mai Jassi. When her husband's men and extended kin once looted the hermitage of a *faqir*, she returned the booty to the latter, whereupon he blessed her and predicted the birth of a famous and noble son to her, a prediction that Jodh Singh's illustrious career validated.[128] Whether such stories were individually true or not, the narrative function of strong women as forces of good and evil alike suggests that the female relations of powerful men could be very influential.

It was therefore unsurprising that competition, friction, and jealousy amongst wives and partners and their respective kin, as well as between wives and mothers-in-law, translated into ruptures in the state. In Kalsia, the differential treatment of the sons of Lehna Singh, born of different wives, appears to have led to disputes, with one of the sons—Man Singh—seeking the intercession of the colonial state on his behalf. According to Skinner, at the death of Dulcha Singh of Radaur, tensions between his mother and wife appear to have led to civil war within the state, providing the East India Company a pretext to intervene and confiscate those dominions. In Alwar, the differential status between the Raja's wives was used by two rival factions as a means to champion a different heir to the throne. The Raja had no sons from his queen, the highest-ranked woman of his extensive harem. He did, however, have a son by another partner, a courtesan named Musi. At his death, the latter burnt herself upon his funeral pyre, thereby immediately acquiring the status of a revered *sati*.[129] Known thereafter as Musi Maharani (Queen Musi), her son was allowed, for a while, to share the throne with a distant cousin of his, the closest male kin left by the Raja. Soon, however, tensions grew between the two princes, and the East India Company was once more petitioned to intervene.

The frequency of such disagreements and the subsequent fission of households that they could cause led to corresponding fissures in states, highlighting that the fate of a *riyasat* was very much tied to the fate of the princely household. Needless to say, bonds of biological kinship could not ensure the integrity of the ruling lineage. Conversely, the ruling household was not confined to those related to the

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126 *Tazkira*, ff.256r-256v; ff.98r-98v; ff.66r-66v.
127 *Tarikh*, f.11v.
128 *Tarikh*, f.5r.
129 Ibid., ff.97v-98r.

ruler by blood, even if claims of an antique, exalted genealogy were maintained by some lineages to emphasise their elite status. This is clearly visible in the house of Kalsia, which was less preoccupied with questions of descent than some of the older Rajput and Afghan lineages. In his account, Inayatullah repeatedly uses the term *rishtedar* (relative) to refer to those who were either comrades (*hamrah*) or dependents (*tabedar*) of the chiefs of Kalsia. A paid functionary, Inayatullah refers to himself not as an officer in the *riyasat* of Kalsia, but as its 'salt-eater' (*namak-khwar*). Here again, we see the metaphor of salt used to capture the mutual obligations that bound different members of a ruler's household or retinue to him. It also blurs the boundaries between kinship and service, and reminds us that households crystallized around bonds of provision and patronage, as much as those of blood.

The careers of the Kalsia and Bhatti chiefs both demonstrate how individuals drawn from ordinary husbanding stock could rise to the position of ruling their former brethren. However, just as the relationship between a ruler and the various kin and clients that constituted his household and extended retinue could not be taken for granted, so too did a ruler have to strive to preserve the loyalty of his subjects. Maintaining this loyalty was naturally crucial to the viability of a state that relied upon ordinary husbanding households to till the soil, pay taxes, and also serve in the army when necessary. Husbanding populations were, however, not always amenable to external political agendas. Their own patterns of settlement, migration and food production proceeded, sometimes in tandem with, at other times independently of, and even in opposition to, the interests of states. There are plentiful instances of supposedly subject, non-elite populations refusing to pay revenue to 'their' rulers, leading the latter to sometimes take extreme measures. In 1808, for example, the Resident of Delhi deployed one of his assistants to mediate in one such dispute that had escalated dangerously. There had been a standoff between a local magnate named Faiz Talab and a village near the town of Rohtak, which had refused to pay revenue. In retaliation, Faiz Talab had taken some of the villagers hostage, and refused to release them until he had been paid.[130]

Whether rural populations chose to cooperate, compete, or resist states depended upon what the latter could offer them in terms of protection, and what it expected from them in return. Rather than one-sided domination, subjecthood in south-eastern Panjab was a constant balancing act of one's interests, needs, and opportunities. External influence from a larger polity was not necessarily fended off, but sometimes actively sought for the benefits it could bestow. For instance, where leadership within a village or *gota's* domain was disputed, the intervention of an external power could be the decisive factor in determining which party prevailed. The *Tarikh-i-Kalsia* mentions one example of Jodh Singh being approached by a headman named Manzur Singh of the Gill Jat *gota*. Amongst the clan domains that Manzur oversaw was the village of Chark, not far from Ludhiana. According to Inayatullah, Manzur's *susti* (complacency) had allowed a rival headman named Tara Singh, from the nearby village of Rahon, to seize Chark, and drive Manzur out of his home. Manzur petitioned Jodh Singh to help him restore his headmanship; Jodh Singh agreed, on the condition that Manzur pay him tribute.[131]

While opportunism might have been a crucial component of politics, both the *Tarikh* and the *Tazkira* also implicitly suggest the prevalence of a general ideal of good and just governance. Central to this ideal was the principle of *ra'iyat parwari*, that is, provision for one's subject. Keeping this ideal in mind is crucial to balance out the picture of anarchy and predation painted by colonial officers in the nineteenth century. Indeed, this ideal of provision is inherent to the word *ra'iyat*, which can be used

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[130] Letter from Edward Gardner to Archibald Seton, 24 March 1809. IOR/F/4/305/7015. British Library, London.
[131] *Tarikh*, f.13v.

both for a flock as well as for 'subject'.[132] There were two fundamental aspects to provision. The first entailed guaranteeing physical protection by keeping watch and fending off attacks by rival states. Indeed, this was an extension of the same watchfulness that safeguarded a *riyasat* from rebellion and disintegration. Related to this was a ruler's ability to secure the material wants of his subjects. Famine thus diminished the prestige of a kingdom, as it revealed a ruler's inability to care for his people.[133] In poor seasons therefore, it was up to a chieftain to find a way to ensure his populace did not starve, just as it was incumbent upon him to levy reasonable taxes.

In a drought- and famine-prone region like south-eastern Panjab, many rulers sought to pre-empt the inevitable bad seasons by raiding neighbouring settlements and using the plunder to pay their troops, as well as to build up a store of grain and money for lean seasons. Such systematic raiding was common to all states who could muster an army. Sometimes, simply the threat of raids was sufficient to make neighbouring settlements pay tribute. As Purnima Dhavan has shown, the reputation of the Sikh warbands was such that some of the Afghan settlements east of the Yamuna River that were the targets of these raids regularly paid protection money (*rakhi*) to avoid being looted.[134] Likewise, the late-eighteenth century mercenary George Thomas, who for a short while was himself a warlord and ruler based at Hansi, set up various trading posts in and around his domains and forced traders to pass through them and pay taxes, on pain of being looted.[135] Begum Samru, too, established customs posts on either bank of the Yamuna River to extract high tolls from traders hoping to transport their wares from one bank to the other.[136] Such 'check-points' were far from singular; as Sumit Guha has noted, it was at these posts, rather than the threshing floor, that premodern South Asian states extracted the bulk of the revenues that kept them afloat.[137] This also explains why there was not necessarily a negative connotation attached to the terms used for raiding—*qazzaqi*, *lutna*, *gharatgiri*; they were an accepted and unavoidable component of *ra'iyat parwari*.

Ascetic households

So far, this chapter has studied the households of the warlord and the husbandman as two sites of community in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century south-eastern Panjab. Each of these was held together by ideals and practices of provision and the mutual obligations that these generated. In this section, we turn to the role played by the household of the ascetic preceptor as yet another site of community. Just as the obligation to provide for one's flock (*ra'iyat-parwari*) and loyalty to one's salt bound ruler and subject to one another, so too did the ethical and moral guidance and succour provided by the guru bind his disciples (*chela*) to him. Additionally, guru and disciple each bestowed some measure of material care upon the other, although the magnitude of such gestures was naturally subject to the means available to each party. To consider the preceptor's function in community formation,

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[132] As Waris Shah put it, 'He is a king, who provides succour in famine, who watches everything […] He is an emperor who is watchful in the night.' [*'Shah sohi jo kal vich dukh kate; kul bat da jo nigahban howe […] Badshah sohi jo shaban howe'*.] Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, xx.

[133] 'The chiefs fear hunger, and so does the king. The glory of the state is lessened by hunger, and hunger confounds the discernment of the saint. Workers toil less from hunger, and hunger leaves the maiden unwed. Girdhar Rai, disciple of Kabir says, hunger falls outside all four Vedas.' [*'Bhukh se darte hain rao raja, aur bhukh se darte hain chhattardari. Bhukh se raj ka tej ghat jata hai, bhukh se sidh ki budh hari. Bhukh se kamni kam tajdet hai; bhukh se kanya rahe kawari. Kahe Girdhar Rai Kabir ka balaka, charon hi Bed se bhukh niyari.'*] Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, ix.

[134] Dhavan, *Sparrows*, 124-5.

[135] Letter from Edward Gardner to Archibald Seton, 24 March 1809. IOR/F/4305/7015. British Library, London.

[136] Thomas Fortescue, 'Report by Mr. T. Fortescue, Civil Commissioner Delhi, on the Customs and Town Duties of the Delhi Territory, 1820' in *Records of the Delhi Residency and Agency*, Punjab Government Records Series, Vol. I, (Lahore, 1911), 183.

[137] Guha, 'Rethinking the Mughal Economy', 569.

within the locality and beyond, I follow Indrani Chatterjee in treating the ideal of service (*seva*, *khidmat*), that, as we shall see, is integral to all strands of devotion, as the glue that bound disciples and devotees to monastic preceptors.[138] The centrality of service also explains why creed was of relatively little weight in the creation of a 'pastorate of souls'.[139] Although it is not my primary intention to enter into a discussion of doctrine, an outline of the ideological foundations of the guru's authority serves to explain the significance of the monastic household in community formation.

The landscape of south-eastern Panjab was dotted with the refuges (*math, asthal, dharamshala, khanqah*) of holy men. Each of these sites was, to a greater or lesser extent, integrated within a larger monastic lineage (*silsila*) or order (*sampradaya*). Some orders, such as those of the Sanyasis (Shaiva), were more centralized, authority being, at least nominally, concentrated in a handful of principal monasteries (*maths*), each of which was further linked to a total of 52 *mandhis* or recruitment centres, distributed across the subcontinent.[140] Yet, given the sheer geographic spread of this order, across most of South Asia, it was internally highly segmented. There were thus ten sub-orders of the Sanyasis, whence they derived the name 'Dashnami'; and each *mandhi* was further affiliated with a variable number of *akharas*, the bands into which Sanyasis divided themselves to cultivate their ascetic practice, part of which included martial training. The Sanyasis also regularly lost members, as men of their number established themselves in other professions, serving variously as bankers, traders, and ritual functionaries.[141]

Orders were thus fluid entities, and their members were often on the move. The life-cycle of a Sanyasi, for instance, entailed periods of seclusion and rigorous ascetic practice, routine trips to the principal fairs at Benares, Allahabad, and Hardwar, as well as numerous local fairs. These trips would combine pilgrimage with trade; Sanyasis would use bills of exchange (*hundis*) issued against the wealth of a monastery to enable the safe passage of grain and goods across long distances.[142] As we shall see, they also received patronage from subject populations and ruling houses, which often took the form of grants of land and labour. Through itinerancy, pilgrimage, and clientelage, Sanyasis thus integrated their patrons within supra-regional geographies of devotion.[143] Amongst the more influential orders in south-eastern Panjab were the Ramanandis (Vaishnava/Bairagi), the Sanyasis and Kanphat Jogis (Shaiva), the Nanakpanthis or 'Udasis' (followers of Guru Nanak), and the Qadiris and Chishtis (both Sufi). Not all these orders were organized in the same way as the Sanyasis. Most, however, were at once grounded by their circle of patrons and disciples within a local geography, as well as integrated within a larger spiritual landscape by virtue of their partaking of a common language of worship (*bhakti*), and common sets of ascetic and devotional practices. This mobility of ideas was underpinned by political, military, and trade connections between different parts of South Asia, as well as between the subcontinent and Central and Eastern Asia. Sanyasis and Bairagis, for example, served in various armies, besides participating in overland trade. The same is true of Sufis. As Nile Green has shown, migrant Sufis travelled to the Deccan from Central Asia in considerable numbers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, drawn by the military opportunities offered by state formation in the region. Many of these Sufis were affiliated with prominent orders, such as the Naqshbandiyya and Chishti. Others

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[138] Indrani Chatterjee, 'Pastoral Care, the Reconstitution of Pastoral Power and the Creation of Disobedient Subjects under Colonialism', in *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings.*, ed. Stephen Legg and Deana Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 58–80.

[139] Ibid., 58.

[140] *Tashrih*, f.658.

[141] Karen Leonard, 'From Goswami Rajas to Goswami Caste in Hyderabad', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47, no. 1 (1 February 2013): 1–32, 1-10.

[142] *Tashrih*, f.660.

[143] What Chatterjee has termed 'monastic geographicity'.

were simply unaffiliated dervishes. As Green observes, 'the number of 'full-time' Sufis' was far smaller than the number of Sufis who combined the roles of merchant, soldier, and initiate (*murid*).[144]

Preceptors were central to monasticism, their responsibility being to instruct their disciples in the ways (*tariq*) of the lineage and the path to achieving spiritual liberation. The developments in the devotional culture of Panjab in the late medieval and early modern periods, although challenging many aspects of orthodox Brahmanism and Islam, in no way questioned the authority of the guru. If anything, these reformist devotional movements (collectively designated 'Bhakti') only reified the centrality of the preceptor. Many of the Bhakti poet-gurus, such as Namdev, Kabir, and Guru Nanak, were elevated to the position of saints (*sant*). This pattern was also mirrored within Islam, with cults springing up around famous Sufi teachers such as Sheikh Nizamuddin, Baba Farid, and Abdul Qadir Gilani. The value of the preceptor is a recurring theme in early modern devotional poetry. According to the Guru Granth Sahib (or 'Adi Granth'), the anthology of verse that contains the core teachings of what was later dubbed 'Sikhism', the divine could not be accessed without the intercession of a teacher. This was not only because the guru is the only site of true learning, but also because their grace (*kirpa, barakat*) was instrumental in freeing disciples from their mortal prison. Even Guru Nanak, the founding Sikh saint, only achieved spiritual liberation through the grace of a teacher, albeit that teacher was god itself. [145] Sufi poets similarly foregrounded the role of the teacher in attaining freedom. As Bulhe Shah sang of the chasm between himself and liberation, 'my guide gets me across.'[146]

If the path to liberation ran through the guru, then how might their grace be earned? According to the mystic poets of early-modern Panjab, external piety in the form of rites and rituals was of little use. Only 'false' gurus would be pleased by such gestures; and indeed, orthodox religious functionaries, such as Brahmanas and *mullahs*, whose livelihood was to perform rites for the laity as a means of honouring god, were frequently mocked in popular verse and sayings. A verse of Bullhe Shah's claimed that 'the *mullah* and the torch-bearer both have the same intent. They spread light to people, but are always in the dark themselves.'[147] The Adi Granth likewise cautioned against teachers who had the appearance of learning, but whose ignorance was betrayed by their attachment to rituals.[148] Of the purity-conscious brahman's horror of meat, for instance, Guru Nanak sang,

> 'In former times, rhinoceros
> Was sacrificed to suit the gods.
> Now priests are vegetarian,
> They can't stand meat, but feed on men.'[149]

The popular saying, 'famine comes from the Bagar, [and] evil from the Brahman' echoed Nanak's dry mockery of the mercenary bent of the orthodox clergy.[150]

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[144] Nile Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century : Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (Routledge, 2006), 5.

[145] Shackle and Mandair, *Teachings*, xxx.

[146] From *Siharfi* ('The Thirty Letters'). Bullhe Shah, Shackle (ed.), *Sufi Lyrics*, 327. The imagery of a bridge or nautical guide is expressed by Guru Nanak in the 'Siddh Gosht' ('Debate with yogis'), too: 'Just as a lotus or a duck within the water stays untouched, So can the world-sea be traversed, through focus on the Word, by uttering the Name. Nanak is a slave to those whose minds remain completely fixed on Him alone, desireless in desires, To those who see and make others see the unperceivable, unfathomable One.' Shackle and Mandair, *Teachings*, 55.

[147] Bullhe Shah and Shackle (ed.), *Sufi Lyrics*, 347.

[148] Shackle and Mandair, *Teachings*, verse 8.1 (*Asa ki var*), 106.

[149] From *Malar ki var*. Ibid., 85.

[150] '*Kal bagar se upje, bura bahman se ho*'. Fanshawe, *SR Rohtak*, 56. Wilson found the same saying in Sirsa district, Wilson, *SR Sirsa,* xxv.

Rather than elaborate rituals, the poet-saints of Panjab identified overcoming the self as the necessary prerequisite to attaining the guru's grace, and thereby, spiritual liberation. To overcome the self was to overcome the ego, which Sufi and Bhakti teachers alike identified as a major obstacle to spiritual freedom. This was because the ego anchored the seeker to the illusion of separateness from others and from God, and obscured the divine truth of the unity of the universe. Action rooted in this egocentric worldview would only emphasise this false separateness, which was against divine truth. It would perpetuate human suffering, by entrapping the seeker within the endless cycle of birth and rebirth, and by frustrating the quest for salvation.[151] There were various ways of breaking down this individualism, and experiencing oneness with god. Ascetic practices, such as fasting, and exercising the body and breath (*yoga*) trained the disciple not to identify with the physical being, while music and meditation each brought the mind into contact with heart and soul, allowing it to experience, rather than to think.[152]

Charity, too, was a way to accrue spiritual merit, and those who could afford to, would commission public works, such as gardens, wells, prayer halls, and caravanserais. Even if such donations were not directed towards one's own guru, they were deemed acts of piety and compassion, which inched the seeker along the path to spiritual liberation. Epigraphic, numismatic, and architectural evidence are as important to reconstructing these practices of devotion and philanthropy, as is the textual evidence.[153] As with other South Asian regions, there is a long epigraphic record of these practices in south-eastern Panjab too. A few of the numerous examples might be cited. An inscription at Pinjore dating to 1169 CE commemorates a donation to 'the venerable *acharya* (teacher) Abhapya deva (and) the venerable mendicant Vimalcandra'.[154] No mention is made of what has been donated, nor of the donor, but this was exceptional. As Chatterjee observes, 'anonymous gift-giving had little value since such gift-giving had to earn 'merit', which in turn could be accumulated and transferred to the credit of particular persons, lineages, clans.'[155] It was therefore more common for entire genealogies to be narrated in such inscriptions, while those of more humble backgrounds might satisfy themselves with a mention of their family, thus: '(This) statue of the holy Samkarshana has been installed by Sahuka, son of Titara and grandson of the noble Govinda, of the family hailing from Rohtak.'[156] As in other parts of the subcontinent, philanthropy was by no means the monopoly of men, and epigraphic evidence suggests that in Panjab, women were prominent donors as well. For instance, Nur Jahan, wife of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, ordered a caravanserai to be built in the Jalandhar district in 1618, so that travellers could take rest on their journey across Panjab.[157] In Machhiwara, near Ludhiana, Bibi Fatih Malik, the daughter of Malik Machhi, the chieftain after whom the site was named, ordered the construction of a mosque in 1517.[158] Smaller acts of daily charity, such as feeding a passing mendicant, were equally significant. Indeed, the life of poverty (*faqiri*) chosen by monastics was only tenable if sustained by the generosity of the laity.

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[151] Shackle and Mandair, *Teachings*, 76.

[152] Thinking is the source of abstraction, and thus separation from the divine.

[153] See Chatterjee, 'Ādivāsīs, Tribes, and Other Neologisms', 12-27; also, Green, 'The Patronage of Saintly Space in the Early Modern Deccan', in Green, *Making Space*, 146-200; and Green, 'Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood' in ibid., 65-115.

[154] Jagannath Agrawal, *Inscriptions of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Kashmir & adjoining hilly tracts* (New Delhi : Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research ; Pratibha Prakashan, 2001), 122.

[155] Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*, 9.

[156] Agrawal, inscription from Sonipat c.7th century CE, 92-93; ibid., 110, inscription dating to the twelfth century, at Mehrauli, Delhi.

[157] Subhash Parihar, *Muslim Inscriptions in the Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1985), 2.19, 10-11.

[158] Ibid., 2.14, 9.

Yet, exercised independently of surrender to the guru, none of these practices would bring the seeker spiritual liberation. Indeed, in Sufi and Bhakti philosophies alike, the distinction between the guru and the divine is merely intellectual. Because the true preceptor has overcome their own individuality and achieved oneness with god, they are the most immediate and trustworthy vessel of the divine available to the disciple. Put simply, the guru is god.[159] This is why the Adi Granth uses the term 'gurmukh'—literally, one who has turned to face the guru—to describe one who had achieved unity with the divine, as opposed to the manmukh (egoist), who was still mired in the illusion of separateness.[160] To subordinate one's will to the will of the guru by faithfully serving them, was therefore to overcome individuality and attain union with god. In theory, this path of devotion could be trod by everyone; class, rank, gender, and creed made no difference. Of the Sanyasis, for example, Skinner writes that while they refused in earlier times to take all but Brahmans as disciples, in the present they accepted chelas of warrior and merchant origins as well.[161] In fact, the Sanyasi orders were a lot more mixed than Skinner suggests, their ranks enhanced not only by recruits and volunteers, but also by slaves, variously purchased and gifted.[162] The Sikh gurus and Sufi pirs were likewise famously indifferent to birth. As Skinner observed, everyone from the priest to the sweeper could become a follower of the Sikh gurus.[163] Bullhe Shah, himself born to a high-ranking Sayyid family, was a disciple of Shah Inayat Qadiri, whose family were Arains, that is, non-elite husbandmen.[164] A common refrain in Bullha's poetry is not to ask what god's caste is and to serve 'the humble Arain'.[165]

The path to spiritual liberation was equally open to the lay, as it was to those of lower rank. Indeed, although discipleship was formally marked by a ritual of initiation, it did not require retreating from the world, nor becoming an ordained monk. As William Pinch has observed, to the extent that ascetics distanced themselves from the laity—for instance, by undertaking intensive yogic study—this only 'presaged (and was preparatory to) their active engagement in the world.'[166] Indeed, Guru Nanak's earliest disciples were instructed to maintain a profession and a household, and all of the Sikh gurus were themselves married.[167] Similarly, Sufi saints like Sakhi Sarwar (about whom more below) and Baba Farid were family men. Bairagis, too, were often householders.[168] Even in nominally 'celibate' monastic orders in which monks would not wed, it was not uncommon for gurus to have partners, as the copious research on the Sanyasi orders demonstrates.[169] This suggests that Skinner's informant, who told him that a Sanyasi monk found to have married or 'engaged in fornication' would be expelled from the order, was stating the principle rather than reality.[170]

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[159] Christopher Shackle, Introduction to Bulhe Shah, Shackle (ed.) *Sufi Lyrics*, xvii. An illustration: 'Bullha, the lord came to live in your house, once you found Shah Inayat.' Ibid., 21.

[160] Mandair and Shackle, *Teachings*, xxix.

[161] *Tashrih*, f.657.

[162] See for instance, Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*, 136-8; Pinch, 'The slave *guru*', 65-9; Malhotra, Anshu, 'Bhakti and the Gendered Self: A Courtesan and a Consort in Mid Nineteenth Century Punjab', *Modern Asian Studies*, 46.6 (2012), 1506–1539

[163] *Tashrih*, f.222.

[164] Shackle, Introduction, viii, xxiii.

[165] Ibid., 51, 187.

[166] William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Berkeley, Calif., [etc.]: University of California Press, 1996), 2.

[167] Shackle and Mandair, *Teachings,* xiv.

[168] *Tashrih*, f.682.

[169] See for instance, Vijay Pinch, 'Gosain Tawaif: Slaves, Sex, and Ascetics in Rasdhan, ca. 1800-1857', *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 559–597.

[170] *'Shadi nemikonand. Agar ahiyana ehdi shadi nemayad ya zana konand, ya sharab o gosht khord, hangam-i-daryaft, o-ra az zamreh-e-khod bedar misazand'. Tashrih*, f.657.

Not only were monastics often not celibate, serving their households as a *chela* was the first step along the path to self-erasure and submission, and thus to liberation. Becoming a disciple of a monastic household meant participating in its upkeep, be it through donations of labour, or through monetary contributions and charitable works. The latter could include repairs to, or beautifications of, a shrine, or more practical gifts, such as tanks and orchards. Epigraphic testaments of these gifts are scattered across Panjab, as devotees whose means permitted left records of their piety. The identity of these disciples varied. Some were simply wealthy traders or administrators, paying tribute to a powerful ascetic. Take for instance an inscription left by a *qazi* or Islamic judge at the funerary monument (*samadhi*) of an leading monk of the Nath order, Mahant Tota Nath, located in Rohtak. The undated epigraph simply quotes a verse from the Quran that rejects coercion in matters of faith, followed by the name of the engraver, Muwasskhani, as well as that of the *qazi*, Bahai Khan.[171] At Bathinda, at the shrine of the Sufi *pir* Baba Haji Rattan, a Hindu devotee similarly left a record of tribute paid to the *pir* on the occasion of Muharram, in the year 1623: 'The respects of the humble slave Badi Chand, father of Girdhar Mal of the fort.'[172] The donor's son would thus seem to have been a superintendent (*qiladar*) of the fort of Bathinda.

The scale of a gift naturally varied in proportion to the wealth of the devotee. The higher the status of a donor, the more prominent the donation. Thus, while judges and superintendents might have contributed an arch, a prayer niche (*mihrab*), or simply an inscription, kings, emperors, and their immediate households might erect entire prayer halls, in addition to giving grants of land.[173] At the other end of the social scale, the poor, who could not afford to commission material testaments of their generosity, would give whatever was within their means—a meal, on occasion, small tributes of money and grain. Often, rural settlements would set aside a tract of land to be cultivated for the upkeep of an ascetic. The donations of rich and poor thus complemented each other. Of the Sanyasis, for instance, Skinner wrote in his *Tashrih*, that 'many of them are sustained by mendicancy; and many eat from the house of their *chelas* and many [have] jagirs, and the rest of them have certain established and determined tributes for their expenses from the *sarkar* of the rajas'.[174] Likewise, where Nath Jogis had no disciples, they subsisted, says Skinner, off the alms given by 'respectable' (*sharif*) homes.[175] If such donations helped disciples to gradually efface the self, they were also vital to the monastic household, which depended in large part for its subsistence upon such gifts.

Besides donations in money or kind, some disciples might also choose to make gifts of labour, either that of their own, or of their kin, or clients. Indeed, when powerful men gave revenue assignments to a hermitage, they were effectively gifting not only the land, but the labour of their subjects, to sustain an ascetic household. Such donations were made at a much smaller scale as well, from the ordinary husbanding family to the guru's household. In the late nineteenth century, Fanshawe noted of the Rohtak district that, besides the grants made to monastic institutions by entire villages, individual households also chose to earmark a part of their land for a guru, and to cultivate it for him, an arrangement known

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[171]Parihar, *Muslim Inscriptions*, 3.3, 17. The verse is Sura ii, 256: 'There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God, has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one which will never be broken. God is all hearing and all knowing.' M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[172] Parihar, *Muslim Inscriptions*, 2.8, 7.

[173] For instance, the mosque, well, and garden commissioned at the shrine of Bu'ali Qalandar in Panipat by Babur in 1528. Ibid., 3.97, 54. Jama Masjid in Samana, Patiala, constructed by a prince named Mirza Momin, in 1615. Ibid., 11, 2.22. Likewise, a gurudwara constructed by an unnamed 'Khan' (chief) in 1634. Ibid., 2.25, 12. See also chapter 4.

[174] '*Avqat-gozari-ye basi az ishan bar darwizeh ast, o basi az khane-ye mo'tqadan mikhorand, o basiyari ra jagir o rozineh-ha barayi masarif az sarkar-i-rajeh-ha mo'ayin moqarar hastand'.* *Tashrih*, f.657.

[175] *Tashrih*, f.726.

as *dohli*.[176] Similarly, Wilson noted that pilgrims would travel twice a year to the recently-established shrine to Guru Gobind Singh at Abohar, known as 'Bara Tirath' ('Great Shrine'), where they would help dig and clean the sacred tank where devotees would bathe.[177] That merit accrued through labour is also the reason that the artisan's name is sometimes mentioned on inscriptions. One epigraph at the tomb of the aforementioned Baba Rattan reads thus: 'Repaired with lime and mortar by order of the humble Nawab Shahdad Khan, by the hand of Khadim Muhammad Afzal, Zilhajja, 1131 A.H. [October 1719].'[178] Not all gifts of labour were time-bound. Where refuges received land grants in perpetuity, their claim to the labour of those settled on the land and that of their descendants, was, in principle, for eternity. Likewise, families could choose to surrender one or more of their offspring to a holy man to serve as his attendants for as long as they lived.[179] The duties of such servant-disciples varied. The *chelas* of the monastic attached to a village were expected to clean, prepare food, and maintain the premises. Those of the itinerant monk would go begging for food for their master. As mentioned, some might also serve as the sexual partners of their guru, whether married or not.

There were thus degrees of servitude, even though the language of bondage was used by all disciples, rich and poor, to describe themselves in relation to the preceptor. Not all disciples were equally subordinate to the will of the guru. To be not only symbolically and spiritually, but also physically bound to the guru's household naturally permitted a far greater degree of control over the *chela*. Indeed, as Pinch has pointed out, this overlap is nascent in the terms most commonly used for 'disciple'.[180] *Chela* is derived from the Sanskrit verb *chit*, to make a servant of someone, and *banda*, derived from the verb *bandh*, 'to fasten'.[181] As we have seen in the case of husbanding and elite lineages, however, servitude did not automatically imply dishonour.[182] To the contrary, to be the closest companion and attendant of a holy man was a sought-after honour, which brought with it not only presumed spiritual merit, but influence and reward in the present as well. *Chelas* were frequently adopted by their gurus, and often it was the most favoured disciple, rather than the blood relatives, that would succeed to the seat (*gaddi*) of a preceptor. Having studied under a well-known guru also lent disciples spiritual credibility to begin their own hermitage at another site.

The premium placed upon service on the one hand, and the association of womanhood with service on the other, partly explains why female disciples also succeeded their male teachers, and were appointed managers (*mahant, mutawalli*) of ascetic institutions in their own right. Indeed, the fact that *chelis* (female disciples) could be appointed to such positions prompted some unease amongst colonial bureaucrats in the nineteenth century.[183]As pictorial and textual evidence suggests, however, women

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[176] Fanshawe, *SR Rohtak*, 65.

[177] Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, 142.

[178] Parihar, *Muslim Inscriptions*, 2.9, 8. See also, Ibid., 3.26, 24 and 3.27, 24-25.

[179] Chatterjee, Leonard.

[180] William R. Pinch, 'The Slave Guru. Masters, Commanders, and Disciples in Early Modern South Asia.', in *The Guru in South Asia. New Interdisciplinary Perspectives.*, ed. Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 64–79.

[181] V.S. Apte. *Revised and enlarged edition of Prin. V. S. Apte's The practical Sanskrit-English dictionary.* Poona: Prasad Prakashan, 1957-1959. Accessed via Digital South Asia Libraries, 21 May 2020.

[182] Cf. Indrani Chatterjee and Sumit Guha, 'Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince: Slavery and Social Capital in Eighteenth-Century India', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 36, no. 2 (1999): 165–186; Indrani Chatterjee, 'The Locked Box in 'Slavery and Social Death'', in *On Human Bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, ed. John Bodel and Walter Scheidel (Somerset, United States: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016).

[183] Cf. 'Mussumat Munnia vs. Jiwan Das', under 'Civil Judgments', *Punjab Record, IX, 1874* (W.E. Ball; n.d.). In this case, the claim of Munnia, a *cheli* or female disciple of a *mahant* of a monastery in the Delhi district to succession was challenged by a male disciple of the deceased guru. In the face of testimony supporting Munnia's claim, her right to be declared *mahant* was confirmed by the Chief Court at Lahore.

ascetics were not uncommon. The Nath ascetic whose information Skinner based his account of that order on in the *Tashrih*, pointed out that the goddess Parvati, the wife of Shiva, was herself an ascetic, and that Nath nuns were treated as her spiritual descendants.[184] Likewise, women occupied a prominent role within the changing form of the Sikh community, too. Women warriors fought the Mughal armies under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh, and the Guru's wives also played an important part in the formal founding of the Sikh Khalsa (the military vanguard of the Sikh congregation).[185]
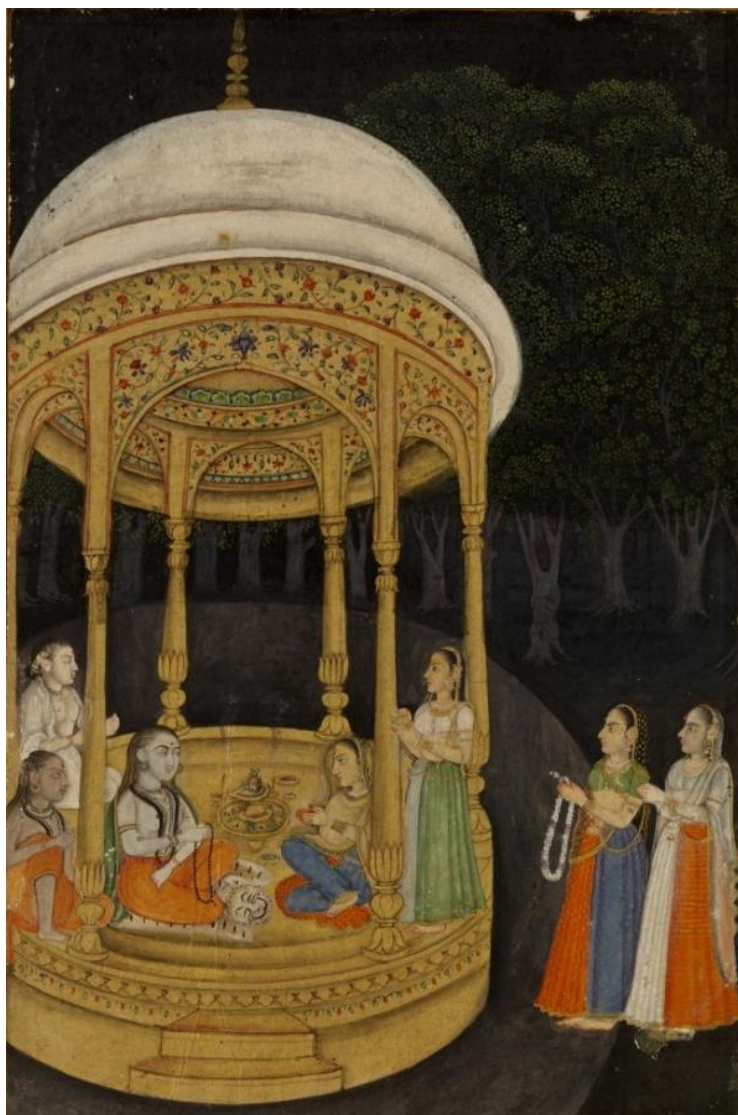

Figure 6. Ladies visiting a female ascetic by night. Delhi, late 18th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Not only women, but femininity itself was valued within the ascetic fold, because service—of god, of a guru, and of one's disciples—required the cultivation of at least some conventionally feminine attributes. Guru and *chela* alike were expected to be selflessly devoted and compassionate, extending care to those in need in whatever measure they were able. As Arvind-Pal Mandair has noted in relation to Sikhism, for instance, the masculine ego 'hinders one's ability to tap the reservoir of emotions and moods necessary for achieving a balanced state of mind'. For this reason, the Adi Granth suggests that 'women have an innately greater spiritual potential than men'.[186] Moreover, as Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh has argued, although androcentric readings of the Sikh scriptures predominate, the poetry of the Gurus, as well as the hagiographies written of them, are resonant with feminine symbolism. The sword (*kirpan*), for instance, which is one of the five articles that Sikhs are obliged to carry at all times, is invested in early Sikh writings with creative and protective, rather than destructive, energy.[187]

Male poet-saints also frequently adopted a female voice in their compositions, to better articulate their surrender to the divine.[188]

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[184] *Tashrih,* f.727

[185] Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *Birth of the Khalsa: A Feminist Re-Memory of Sikh Identity.*, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Ithaca: State University of New York Press, 2005), 14, 52-53.

[186] Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed.* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 169.

[187] Kaur Singh, *Birth of the Khalsa*, 9-10.

[188] Popular stories of tragic love, like the *qissa* of Hir and Ranjha, or Laila and Majnun, served at once as vehicles to discuss social norms surrounding gender, as well as to articulate love for the beloved divine through a variety

Despite the absence of women amongst the ranks of famous Panjabi saints, then, it was those ascetics who were renowned for their compassion and generosity that came to be deified. Although—in view of their often-localized followings—it is impossible to compile a comprehensive list of all notable Panjabi saints, Baba Farid of Pakpattan, Sakhi Sarwar Sultan of Dera Ghazi Khan, Gugga Pir of Bikaner, Nizamuddin Chishti of Delhi, Ramdeo Gosain of Runicha, and Baba Haji Rattan of Bathinda are just some of the ascetics worshipped in the region. Each of these saints had a principal shrine, usually at the site of their former refuge and tomb. In the case of the Sikh gurus, shrines developed at sites associated with pivotal moments in their lives, or in the history of the Sikh congregation. All these saints were the subjects of a rich lore of good, kind deeds. The compassion of the saint might stem either from his own misfortune, or from the rigours of his ascetic practice, or both. Take the widely revered saint Syed Ahmad, or as he was better known Sakhi Sarwar Sultan. Ahmad appears to have been an immigrant from Baghdad, who as a child travelled with his family to Panjab in the thirteenth century, eventually settling at Dhera Ghazi Khan. Although he had made a name for himself as a miracle-worker, his reputation for benefaction was traced back to his having distributed the dower he received upon his marriage to the poor of Dera Ghazi Khan.[189] He was henceforth known as 'Sakhi Sarwar' and 'Lakhdata', both names playing on his generosity and selflessness.

Another enormously popular saint was Gugga Pir, who was widely worshipped in south-eastern Panjab and parts of Rajasthan. Born to a noble Rajput family, he was said to have killed his brothers in a dispute over land. Mortified by what he had done, and shunned by his mother, he desolately wandered the countryside, praying that he be swallowed up by the earth. He came across an ascetic, who told him that his wish would only be granted if he first converted to Islam; so, he recited the Kalima whereupon he disappeared into a crack in the ground, seated astride his white horse.[190] There were variations to this story, of course; Gugga was held to be both a disciple of the adept Guru Gorakhnath, as well as a *chela* of the Sufi *pir* Baba Hajji Rattan. Elsewhere, the story of a family feud was not at all current; rather, Gugga was held to have been a snake, who converted to human form to be able to marry a princess.[191] Yet, narrative variations notwithstanding, Gugga was seen as a compassionate figure, whose devotees prayed to him to intercede in their own lives. The bond between saint and devotee was a personal one, with a strong undercurrent of reciprocity and co-dependency. Wilson wrote that he had been informed by a 'Chamar' community in Sirsa that their worship of the saint Ramdeo took the form of a bargain. Apart from periodic offerings, in times of need they would visit his shrine, and promise an offering in the future if their wish were granted or their trouble resolved. If the saint fulfilled what they regarded as 'his end' of the deal, the offering would be made; if not, 'the vow was void'.[192] Similarly, Ibbetson reported that the saying, 'if Gugga does not give me a son, he won't get anything, either!' was common.[193]

The expectations harboured by the devotees of saints, if of a higher order, were not essentially different from what was expected by *chelas* of their gurus. Not only were the latter responsible for instructing their disciples in ethical action, they were also expected to offer them material sustenance if need be. This held not only for the guru's attendants, but also for the wider pastorates that they served.

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of gendered voices. An illustration from the prolific Bullhe Shah: 'I am suffering the pain of my mad grief. Come, Sir Ranjha, grant me a sight of you. Forgive my faults. Ranjha went from Takht Hazara, the master of poor Hir. The other women's bridegrooms visit them. What fault is there in Bulha?' Shah, Shackle, *Sufi Lyrics*, 241.

[189] *Gazetteers Of Dera Ghazi Khan District, Revised Edition 1893-97*, 52.

[190] A. Anderson and P. J. Fagan, *Report of the Revised Settlement of the Hissar District, 1887-92* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, n.d.), 75 (henceforth, *SR Hisar*); Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, 142-3; Fanshawe, *SR Rohtak*, 66.

[191] Walker, *SR Ludhiana*, 60.

[192] Wilson, *SR Sirsa*, 142.

[193] *'Gugga beta na dega, to kuchh na chhin lega'*. Ibbetson, *SR Karnal*, 152.

Whatever donations were given to them, if in excess of their own subsistence needs, were intended to be used to feed and house the poor, and popular proverbs attested the fickleness of the uncared-for disciple.[194] Nor were such expectations disappointed. Since provision was the language through which disciples honoured their gurus, it is unsurprising that the monastic households frequently accumulated great wealth. As Skinner mentions in the *Tashrih*, the wealth of the Sanyasi orders was considerable, with the sums accumulated at their periodic fairs at Allahabad, Benares, and Hardwar being used to provision the monasteries and to perform charity.[195] Walker likewise noted the important role played by *dharamshalas* in the Ludhiana district, their public kitchens (*langar*) helping to ameliorate food scarcity, especially in poor seasons.[196]

The moral authority and wealth of such ascetic households translated into political influence as well, and chieftains and warlords were careful to pay tribute to charismatic preceptors, in return for their support. Angered ascetics who cursed rulers that dishonoured or displeased them are a common trope in popular stories, and just like their subjects, rulers too sought the guru's intervention in their worldly travails, which often related to the absence of an heir. Indeed, the position of the guru as the commander of the service of a pastorate meant that the boundary between preceptor and ruler was often blurred. Ascetic entourages often served as military units; the *akharas* of the Sanyasi and Bairagi monks were sought-after mercenaries, employed by the armies of various South Asian states, not least that of the British East India Company.[197] Similarly, the Sikh Khalsa was founded by Guru Gobind Singh in order to defend the wider Sikh community, who were persecuted by the Mughals. Subsequent conquests by Sikh warbands over the course of the eighteenth century were conducted, however nominally, under the banner of the Sikh Khalsa. The aforementioned chronicle of the Kalsia state, for example, is prefaced by a chronicle of the foundation of the Khalsa.[198]

Moreover, under the caption 'by way of sustenance, in the name of the teachings of the Word, assistance given for expenses etcetera to the dependents of Sardar Sahib', Inayatullah lists donations made by Jodh Singh to his circle of clients.[199] These included gifts made to various kin (*rishtedar*), and commutations of service given to dependants (*tab'edar*), as well as a separate heading, 'for the purpose of charity' (*be-wajeh-i-khairat*).[200] Amongst the latter are listed four holy men, to each of whom Jodh Singh gifted a share of land that appears to have been set aside for philanthropic purposes. The shares pertain to the produce of a village called Mathi, which, although not specified, appears to have been close to the Sikh pilgrimage site of Fatehgarh Sahib. It is possible that the four ascetics named— including a Pardhan Mahashri and a Baba Gurdas Singh Sodhi—were resident in the vicinity of Fatehgarh and had been gifted these shares in order for Jodh Singh to acquire spiritual merit. Such acts of charity by wealthy patrons in turn allowed preceptors' households to help their poorer devotees, thus completing the circle of redistribution from subject to chieftain, back to subject.

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[194] For example,*'"Guruji, chele bahut ho gaye."-"Bachche, bhuke marenge to ap chale jayenge"'* ('"Guruji, you've got a lot of *chelas*."-"Child, once they starve, they'll disappear of their own accord."') S. W. Fallon, *A Dictionary of Hindustani Proverbs: Including Many Marwari, Panjabi, Maggah, Bhojpuri, and Tirhuti Proverbs, Sayings, Emblems, Aphorisms, Maxims, and Similes* (Asian Educational Services, 1998), 94.

[195] *Tashrih*, f.659.

[196] Walker, *SR Ludhiana*, 61.

[197] Pinch, 'Who was Himmat Bahadur?'.

[198] Dhavan, *Sparrows*, Chapter 3.

[199] '*Dar wajeh-i-talab be-tankhwah be-ism-e-sikhwan ghair dast-dad khud barayi kharch wagireh be-nam-e-tab'edaran-e-Sardar Sahib*'. *Tarikh*, f.22/30. 'The Word' (*nam, Shabad*) is used within Sikh philosophy to refer to the divine.

[200] *Tarikh,* f.22/30.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to understand the way in which communities were constituted in south-eastern Panjab during the eighteenth and into the early nineteenth centuries. It has argued that the term *qaum*, which was translated by colonial scholars and officials as 'caste' and 'tribe' contained a considerable diversity of different kinds of community, organized along very different principles. These included status groupings, occupations, monastic orders, and ethnicities, each of which were constituted differently, and can hardly be reduced to a single organizational principle. If these groups can at all be treated as communities, it is evident that to understand their internal divisions and their relations to each other, we need to search for alternative principles than those of 'caste' as commonly understood. Following in the footsteps of recent scholarship that has made the consolidation of boundaries its focus, this chapter has treated 'community' as a political phenomenon, which crystallized around the need to manage resources. At least in precolonial South Asia, the fundamental unit of resource management was the household, bound together by ties of patronage, service, discipleship, marriage, and fealty, all of which were ways to constitute kinship. By focusing upon three different kinds of household—that of the husbanding family, and the respective lineages of rulers and ascetic preceptors—has demonstrated the overlaps between the worlds of rich and poor, divine and lay.

The purpose of managing resources was to provide for oneself as well as for one's family and retinue. In this landscape, relationships and people themselves were a form of wealth. A husbanding household could only feed and reproduce itself by attracting wives and partners for its men, perhaps some servants to help till the land, and by maintaining a network of friends, kin, and patrons who could provide for it in times of need. Such provision was, however, given on the understanding of reciprocity. A husbandman who turned to a refuge for food and shelter in difficult times was obliged to extend such charity as was within his means. This could be a gift of labour; equally, it might be a small donation of money, or food, or even of a person from his household. Similarly, the tiller who sought protection from a warlord would be obliged to pay the latter tribute, and to fight for him, when the need arose. A ruler might likewise seek to court an influential holy man as a client, through acts of ostentatious generosity. As Chatterjee has observed, there was certainly a competitive aspect to such gift-giving; not only did a reputation for generosity yield spiritual capital and enhance prestige, it also was a form of political capital. Clients and dependents were drawn to those who could guarantee their 'salt' (*namak*). A ruler, who by virtue of complacency had lost control of his domains, and was thereby risking invasion and impoverishment, could not expect to keep the loyalty of his followers.

The focus upon households as networks of provision significantly modifies our understanding of community. To begin with, it reiterates the point that caste and tribe as ascriptive identities are simply too blunt to capture the nuances of community in precolonial South Asia. Within the context of south-eastern Panjab in particular, it provides a fuller context against which to understand the political and economic significance of raiding, which as we have seen, was practiced by elite and non-elite populations alike. Not only did a successful raiding career allow the humble husbandman to rise beyond his birth and origins, it also enabled him to acquire fame and wealth, corresponding to what Joo-Yup Lee has called 'ambitious brigandage'.[201] It was also a prerequisite to being able to participate in the redistributive economy of provision. It was this latter aspect that the East India Company did not understand when it arrived in the region. From its perspective, raiding was a form of criminality, one

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[201] Joo-Yup Lee, *Qazaqlïq, or Ambitious Brigandage, and the Formation of the Qazaqs* (Brill, 2015), 26-50. According to Lee, the term *qazaqlïq* is used in three related ways in the Turkic, Persian, Russian, Polish, and Latin sources in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These are 'flight or separation from one's own tribe', 'vagabondage' with the purpose of gathering arms, finances, and men; and lastly, the founding of an independent state, ibid., 49.

which also posed significant risks to political stability, and had thus to be clamped down upon. It is these extended networks of kin, clients, and dependents that must also be kept in mind when we consider the fallout of colonization.