Scribes and the Vocation of Politics in the Maratha Empire, 1708-1818

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2018
ABSTRACT

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This dissertation investigates the vocation of politics in the Maratha Empire from the release and restoration of Chhatrapati Shahu Bhonsle in 1708 to the British East India Company’s final victory against the Marathas in 1818. Founded in the mid-seventeenth century by the ambitious general and first Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhonsle, the Maratha Empire encompassed a decentralized web of allied governments stretching from the western Deccan into far-flung parts of the Indian subcontinent. While the Company’s pejorative moniker of “confederacy” has cast a long shadow over historical understanding of the politics of the Maratha state, this dissertation argues that the ascendancy of scribal-bureaucratic networks and their practices of communication enabled Maratha governments to foster a modern diplomatic framework of deliberation, adjudication, and collaboration.

The creation of a flexible language and practice of communication transcending linguistic, cultural, religious, and political divisions was the signal achievement of the scribal-bureaucratic networks that increasingly came to dominate politics and government in the eighteenth-century Maratha Empire. Through a case study of individuals and households of the Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu sub-caste, this dissertation demonstrates that both non-Brahman and Brahman officials skilled in the arts of verbal and written communication rose from the lower ranks of the Maratha bureaucracy to the highest circles of political decision-making. They not only advanced their socioeconomic claims to wealth, title, and property, but also shaped government agendas, resolved disputes, and forged alliances through the dialogic exchange of oaths, treaties, objects, and sentimental words. Moreover, scribal-bureaucrats drew on this mode of communication to
build strategic multilateral coalitions and to pen novel reflections on the meaning and purpose of politics once the dominance of the British East India Company was impossible to ignore. Communicative politics comes into vivid focus through a critical examination of the records and manuscripts that described, evaluated, and enacted relationships between Maratha governments. While the focus is on the critically important governments of Satara, Nagpur, and Pune, close attention is paid to conduits of power, persuasion, and affiliation between them and their rivals and allies in the eighteenth-century Deccan. Over the course of six chapters, this dissertation traces a chronological arc from the re-constitution to the dissolution of Maratha sovereignty as well as a thematic one from the structures and practices, to the personnel, and finally to the shifting meanings of politics. Chapters 1 and 2 explore how the delicate frameworks and practices preserving relationships between governments were made and unmade in the context of Maratha expansion in the Deccan. Turning to the personnel of politics, Chapters 3 and 4 follow the careers of Kayastha Prabhu scribal officials who attained influence at the courts of Satara, Kolhapur, Nagpur, and Baroda. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 highlight the ways in which the meaning of politics shifted in response to the emergence of Company power. The story of Maratha politics is thus the story of a concatenation of deliberative, pragmatic compromises suited to the realities of a dynamic inter-imperial world.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the good faith and guidance of numerous individuals, I could not have conceived of this dissertation, much less completed it. Parna Sengupta at Carleton College introduced me to South Asian history and gave me the confidence to pursue graduate study. Meera Sehgal, Annette Igra, Andrew Fisher, William Ellison, and Serena Zabin not only taught me to read and write critically, but also to cultivate an ethic of professional integrity. At the University of Chicago, Avi Sharma’s feedback dramatically improved my writing. Rochona Majumdar and Dipesh Chakrabarty exposed me to innovative frameworks for the study of South Asia. Philip Engblom’s course in advanced Marathi grammar was indispensable to my preparation to undertake doctoral research.

Learning from Allison Busch, Sheldon Pollock, Carl Wennerlind, Susan Pedersen, and Samuel Moyn at Columbia University allowed me to put my research into conversation with important bodies of scholarly literature. Janaki Bakhle set aside many hours of her time to continue my independent reading in Marathi. Dalpat Rajpurohit was a model of pedagogical excellence. I am very grateful to Mana Kia for reading drafts of research proposals and poring over Persian texts that have been critical to this dissertation. Adam Kosto, Michael Stanislawski, and Manan Ahmed offered advice and encouragement at several critical junctures.

My training and research have been facilitated by support from the the American Institute of Indian Studies; the Fulbright U.S. Student Program; and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Department of History, and the South Asia Institute at Columbia University. Gagan Sood at LSE, Sumitra Kulkarni at the University of Pune, and Vasant Shinde at Deccan College graciously agreed to sponsor important research stints in the UK and India.
In India, Sucheta Paranjpe at ACM India enthusiastically led my first engagement with the Marathi language, and Mangesh Kulkarni at the University of Pune encouraged me to pursue an ill-formed and unconventional set of research interests. During early trips to Delhi and Kolkata, Jharana Jhaveri and Jia Mata offered hospitality, friendship, and crash courses in political and intellectual activism. I am especially grateful to Sujata Mahajan, Shantanu Kher, Supriya Sahasrabuddhe, Girish Mandke, and Saroj Deshchougule at AIIS-Marathi for cheerfully guiding me through endless pages of Marathi historical texts. Their excitement about the language and concern for their students made my time in Pune an absolute delight. Stimulating conversations with Jonathan Loar, Christine Marrewa-Karwoski, Joya John, Holly Shaffer, Rachel Sturman, Waylon D’Mello, Sue Ellen Castellino, and Mircea Raianu fortified me in moments of research fatigue. Jacob Hustedt, Mario D’Penha, and Bikki Gill were the best of friends.

I am indebted in myriad ways to all of the archival staff at the British Library and Royal Asiatic Society in London; the Pune Records Office; the Marathwada Archives in Aurangabad; the Vidarbha Archives in Nagpur; the Maharashtra State Archives in Mumbai; Deccan College and the Bharat Itihas Sanshodhak Mandal in Pune; the Rajwade Sanshodhan Mandal in Dhule; the Salar Jung Museum and Andhra Pradesh State Archives in Hyderabad; the National Archives in Delhi; the Bhopal Records Office; and the Mumbai Marathi Grantha Samgrahalya. I could not have navigated the Nagpur Bhonsle historical record without the knowledge of Prabhakar Gadre at the Rajwade Sanshodhan Mandal. Ashish Chopra invited me to stay in his family’s home in Nagpur, exposing me to new and delightful parts of the city. Awantika Chitnavis and B.R. Andhare unreservedly opened their personal collections to me, and Shraddha Waghmare provided meticulous research assistance at the Pune Records Office. Anil Inamdar at AIIS-Pune
has performed logistical wizardry on many occasions. In London, Marina Chellini at the British Library allowed me to photograph a critically important manuscript, and Neha Vermani took photos of another that I was not able to view in person.

Abhishek Kaicker, Divya Cherian, Rahul Sarwate, Asheesh Siddique, and Roy Bar Sadeh provided much-needed encouragement at various stages of the doctoral research. Tania Bhattacharya, Benjamin Serby, John Chen, Sohini Chattopadhyay, Samyak Ghosh, and Rohini Shukla gave useful feedback on individual chapters. Beginning to share my work with others was a pleasurable experience because of the companionship of Naveena Naqvi and Hannah Archambault. Purnima Dhavan, Prachi Deshpande, Dipti Kher, Samira Sheikh, Roy Fischel, and Nandini Chatterjee have enriched my work through their intellectual example and engagement. Sumit Guha provided exceptionally detailed comments on an early iteration of the project and has made important information and sources available to me over the years. As an unofficial member of my dissertation committee, Rosalind O’Hanlon brought the full weight of her perspicacity to bear on the project over the course of several conversations. I also extend my most heartfelt thanks to Nishant Batsha, Alana Hein, Mary Freeman, George Aumoithe, Lindsay Gibson, Sarah King, Justin Smith, and Nicole Feldman for their unflagging friendship.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude towards the members of my dissertation committee at Columbia who have never stopped believing in my work over the past seven years and whose scholarship has exercised immense influence over the shape of the project. Janaki Bakhle from the very first day of the doctoral program committed to my aspirations while pushing me to pursue intellectual inclinations that I might otherwise have ignored. A truly peerless shahane, Partha Chatterjee’s erudite teaching and insightful mentorship have been exemplary, and his ability to cut straight to the heart of the project has sustained my confidence
in it. While leading me through the complexity of British historiography, Christopher Brown took responsibility for my training far beyond what I could have expected and continued to advise me with the greatest constancy and sincerity. Anupama Rao rigorously widened my intellectual horizons, tenaciously pushed me to chase my ambitions, and liberally extended many and various professional opportunities. I can never repay her for being such a tireless advocate in all senses of the word. I thank Nicholas Dirks for being an exceptionally wise and steady advisor. From New York to Berkeley and back again, he has made all of his insight and experience available to me in innumerable discussions, and I am forever indebted to him for making it possible to pursue a project of this kind.

The support of my family made it possible to pursue this path. My parents Annalisa Panizzon and Mark Vendell have always seen potential in me – even when I did not – and they taught me the value of being open to the unexpected. My grandparents Luella and Otto Vendell showed me what it means to lead a loving and humane life. Finally, I thank my partner Rishabh Kashyap, who has patiently invested every moment of writing this dissertation with a surfeit of joy. It is because of you that I have come this far.
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Any transliteration scheme, but especially one that aims to render multiple languages at different periods of their historical evolution, is necessarily imperfect. I have elected to employ the standard Library of Congress Romanization tables for the transliteration of Marathi and Persian words. It should be noted that these tables dictate that certain letters with similar sounds are transliterated differently. In the case of certain colloquial Marathi words borrowed from Persian, I favor a conventional Persian-derived transliteration, rather than one based on the LOC Marathi table, so as to avoid unwarranted perplexity. Readers should expect to encounter different transliterations of the same words, depending on context and usage (e.g. the ṣūbah of Berar and the title senā sāheb subhā). For the sake of simplicity, I do not include diacritics in rendering person and place names as well as well-known titles e.g. Peshwa. Variations in spelling and diacritical choices on the part of authors are preserved, not standardized or corrected.
INTRODUCTION: In Search of the House of the Scribe

For those in search of the old palace of the former Maratha rulers of Nagpur, the third largest city in today’s state of Maharashtra in west-central India, a good place to start is the intersection called Shivaji Chowk just east of Shukrawari Lake. It is popularly believed that Chand Sultan, the son of the Gond ruler and Nagpur’s founder Bakht Buland, built this urban reservoir to supply water to the city’s inhabitants. He is also said to have sponsored the construction of the Jama Darwaza whence you may enter the old city, commonly known as Mahal. In the late eighteenth century, you might have had to win over a couple of watchmen, but now all you have to do is dodge the two- and four-wheelers zipping in and out of the gate. Then simply follow the road to the next intersection and turn right. What appears to be just another non-descript lane will lead you straight to the Senior Rajwada, a gleaming, stately two-story residence (vāḍā) fronted by a dusty courtyard. A saffron flag atop the vāḍā and a statue of the first Maratha Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhonsle will immediately remind you of the pride with which its postcolonial denizens view their history.

Suppose you are not a casual visitor or an earnest researcher of the modern era, but instead one of several ubiquitous figures who passed in and out of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Nagpur: a decommissioned Afghan mercenary from Hyderabad desperate for a steady wage; a Jain cloth-merchant from Burhanpur hoping to peddle an array of silk sarees to the women of the royal household; or a Brahman envoy sent by a Calcutta-based British East India Company lieutenant to secure safe passage through uncertain territory. However legitimate your business, you might be hard-pressed to obtain an audience with the ruler if you lacked a formal petition or at least an introduction from a friend of the court. In this situation, your best option might be to make contact with one of the members of the king’s inner circle. Fortunately,
your associate employs an amaneusis – primarily for correspondence in the local language of Marathi – who is distantly related to the king’s chief scribe (citnavīs). Rather than pressing for entry into the Rajwada, you – like this modern researcher – might instead return to the main road and make your way to the vāḍā of the Chitnavis family. Today, the Chitnavis Wada is located in a neighborhood appropriately named Chitnavispura, just down the road from the Rajwada. When I visited the Chitnavis Wada one afternoon in May 2016, I was struck by how unreservedly its caretakers escorted me around the premises. The ground floor’s inner courtyard, so characteristic of the Maharashtrian vāḍā, was flooded with natural light, while its outer perimeters were shady and cool. I was struck by how peaceful it was then, and how busy it must have been in former times, when it was the residence of one of the most prominent political families of Nagpur.

The vāḍā is not the only landmark in Nagpur to bear the name of Chitnavis. There is a Chitnis Park just north of Shivaji Chowk, and the Chitnavis Centre in Civil Lines, the city’s government enclave in both the colonial period and today, is a cultural venue maintained by the Sir Gangadharrao Chitnavis Trust set up in honor of the family’s most well-known patriarch. It was through a connection to the Chitnavis family that Vinayakrao Anandrao Aurangabadkar, assistant to the British resident Richard Jenkins (1785-1853), discovered a mass of documentary sources for his composition of several important histories of Nagpur after the Company’s assumption of paramount authority in western and central India in 1817-8. But despite the evident legacy of this scribal family, the historical significance of their participation in the politics of the Maratha Empire is poorly understood today. In the popular historical imagination, the Marathas are primarily known as formidable warriors who struck terror in the hearts of some

1 I am extremely grateful to Awantika Chitnavis for granting me permission to view the Chitnavis Wada and providing several useful books about her family’s history.
and valor in the hearts of others as they established an empire stretching from Attock to Cuttack. Even their Brahman chief minister, or Peshwa, who resided in the now-dilapidated (and, some say, haunted) Shaniwar Wada in Pune is imagined as a warrior in the manner of Ranveer Singh’s Bajirao in the 2015 Bollywood film *Bajirao Mastani*. Yet, it would have been impossible for a state as expansive and multicentered as the Maratha Empire to be built by the power of the sword alone. On what political basis then did it survive for the roughly one hundred and fifty years of its existence?

This dissertation begins with the assumption that the integrity of the eighteenth-century Maratha Empire could only have consisted in the integrity of the political bonds between its several individual governments. But if these governments often acted independently and occasionally at cross purposes with the nominal sovereign Chhatrapati and his chief minister, then why maintain these bonds at all? For the British colonial official, the answer was love of plunder. For the anticolonial nationalist of twentieth-century Maharashtra, it was pride in being Maratha, often conflated with pride in being Hindu. Instead, I argue that Maratha governments remained bonded to one another because of their investment in a shared communicative framework for political action that they had built through a decades-long process of conflict and resolution. This dissertation shows that this framework was not primarily the achievement of rulers and generals, but rather of the administrators, counselors, diplomats, and especially scribes who staffed Maratha governments. Thus, politics was a vocation in which skilled, enterprising individuals could build a career, extend opportunities to their relatives and associates, and contribute to a cause that transcended the particularities of background and experience. In doing so, they fostered a language and practice of politics that enabled Maratha governments to mount
a coordinated, if ultimately unsuccessful response to the enroachments of a nascent British East India Company state.

**Eighteenth-Century South Asia and the Maratha Political**

In seventeenth-century western India, Shivaji Bhonsle (1630-1680), a leading general under the Adil Shahi sultan of Bijapur, roused his fellow Maratha landed gentry and peasant cultivators into a rebellion against Deccan Sultanate rule. While Shivaji’s military prowess led to the consolidation of an independent Maratha kingdom in the shadow of the Western Ghat Mountains, his ingenious engineering of his own coronation as chatrapati mahārājā in 1674 marked the founding of Maratha sovereignty. After a hard-fought war against the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir (1618-1707), his eldest son and successor Sambhaji (1657-1689) was captured and executed; his younger son Rajaram (1670-1700) was forced to flee to Gingee in the Karnatak; and his grandson Shahu (1682-1749) was placed in captivity. In subsequent years, Rajaram and his extremely able senior queen Tarabai (1675-1761) recaptured significant parts of Shivaji’s kingdom. Most crucially, Shahu following his release and restoration reached an agreement with the Mughal emperor in 1719 whereby he retained the Maratha core domains and gained partial authority over the Deccan through the collection of one quarter of Mughal revenues, a much-contested claim known as cauth. This agreement would not have been possible without the assistance of Shahu’s Peshwa Balaji Viswanath (1662-1720), whose successors Bajirao I (1700-40) and Balaji Bajirao (1720-61) gradually eclipsed Shahu in power by partnering with Maratha generals to conquer new territories in central and northern India. After Shahu’s death in 1749, the Peshwas, now based in Pune, sought to exercise sovereign authority in the name of the Chhatrapati; however, Maratha ruling households, such as the Bhonsles of Nagpur and the Dabhades and Gaekwads of Baroda, ruled over semi-independent kingdoms and
frequently subverted the Peshwas’ authority. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Marathas imposed their dominance over the Mughal throne, provoking an epic and disastrous battle with the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shahi Abdali at Panipat in 1761. Though Maratha expansionist ambitions survived their loss at Panipat, it is an important assumption of this dissertation that innovation in the field of Maratha politics in the eighteenth century was a product of relations between Maratha governments.

The foundational historiography of eighteenth-century South Asia tended to be preoccupied with the question of the extent to which Maratha power was a parasite of Mughal decline. Historians in the colonial and immediate postcolonial periods believed that the predatory establishment of an arriviste Maratha state hastened the decline of the Mughals. Even Jadunath Sarkar, a pioneer in the field of Maratha history, asserted, “The decline of the Mughal Empire presented an opportunity by which the Marathas profited more than any other people of India.” Historians of the Aligarh School located the causes of the decline of Mughal decline in a more general crisis of political economy. Whereas Irfan Habib pointed to explosive tensions between renter and rentier classes caused by a swelling tax burden, M. Athar Ali argued that the dramatic acceleration of grants of mansabs to new nobility in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries exacerbated a shortage of fertile revenue-free lands. Subsequent studies by M.N. Pearson and J.F. Richards supplemented Ali’s thesis with an emphasis on the challenges to imperial authority posed by protracted war and conflict. In particular, they demonstrated that the Mughal state was increasingly unable to retain the loyalties of not only its highest-ranking

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manṣabdār nobility, but also the zamīndār elites, including the Marathas, who wielded power at the local and regional levels.⁴

Debates about the integrity of Mughal imperial authority were predictive of a more general re-assessment of the suitability of decline as a paradigm of historical change in eighteenth-century South Asia. Responding to Pearson and Richards, Karen Leonard argued that the weakness of the Mughal center created opportunities for the enrichment and empowerment of Hindu banking households.⁵ Even more sweepingly, C.A. Bayly suggested that decentralization produced new, more local arenas for social, economic, and political flourishing. Though Bayly’s focus was on the petty nawābs, merchants and townsmen of north India, scholars working across the subcontinent found similar patterns of localization.⁶ In the case of western India, Frank Perlin in a series of extraordinarily insightful studies illustrated the ways in which elite Maratha households aggregated government offices with rights to surplus revenue across villages to form dispersed organizations whose influence penetrated multifarious relationships of social and economic interdependence.⁷ Perlin understood such state-society linkages to be characteristic of

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the dense interconnectivity of the “invisible city” of paper, currencies, and commodities underlying the polities of early modern Eurasia.  

The formulation of a post-declinist narrative of historical transformation in the eighteenth century inspired new insights about the dynamics of Maratha state-formation. Stewart Gordon in several essays on Maratha rule in Malwa and Khandesh revealed that conquest was a gradual process of subordination, incorporation, and very often preservation of pre-existing local rights and privileges. But perhaps the most influential post-declinist interpretation of the Maratha state has been André Wink’s seminal Land and Sovereignty in India (1986). Wink seconded Bayly’s and Gordon’s intimation that the Maratha state represented an instance of the appropriation of Mughal power by the regional intermediate zamīndār classes, but he also propounded a transhistorical theory of sovereignty in South Asia. In contradistinction to what he took to be the absolute and unitary character of post-Grotian sovereignty in the West, he understood sovereignty in South Asia to be governed by a logic of antagonism between the ideal of universal dominion shared by Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions of kingship and the reality of betrayal, sedition and rebellion, the latter of which he conceptualized with the Arabic term fitna (and the corresponding Marathi term, phītvā). However vivid their dreams of world conquest, South Asian rulers in Wink’s view could never “transcend fitna, since in actual political life fitna


had no end.”

He presented his most compelling evidence for the *fitna* theory of sovereignty in two case-studies of the Jagdale and Jedhe warrior clans, demonstrating that the Deccan sultāns, the Mughals, and the Marathas all reinforced these clans’ vested rights to land to secure their overlordship.

Wink’s provocative thesis generated a critical conversation in the field of South Asian history that helps distinguish the very different aims of this dissertation. Perhaps most troubling for critics like Irfan Habib has been the way in which Wink applies the framework of *fitna* without regard for the nuances of any particular political tradition. As such, he does not adequately demonstrate the relationship between the category of *fitna* and the extant textual and documentary apparatus of political practice. Of course, Wink’s argument is that *fitna* ran against hegemonic statements on sovereignty (e.g. the Ā’in-i Akbarī of Mughal emperor Akbar’s celebrated minister Abu al-Fazl Allami). Wink was more concerned with how *fitna* “worked in practice,” yet as Habib astutely notes, his structural application of *fitna* works “to exclude every other possible concept or device in the practice of sovereignty in India.”

To these historicist critiques, I would add a conceptual one. Because *fitna* conceives of politics in terms of a diametric opposition between sovereignty and rebellion within the field of political economy, it

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occludes the ways in which skilled individuals within multiple fields of political practice negotiated sovereign authority to attain a degree of freedom and responsibility.

The latest scholarship has addressed the question of the negotiation of sovereign authority by drawing attention to the *longue durée* of the social and cultural history of western India. Important early studies by V.T. Gune, A.R. Kulkarni, Hiroshi Fukazawa, and Hiroyuki Kotani have illuminated village- and district-level socioeconomic and judicial institutions.15 Building on the work of these scholars, Sumit Guha’s wide-ranging scholarship has shed light on many topics, including the Deccan agrarian economy; the penal and enumerative functions of the Maratha state; historical narrative; and the interface between caste, village society, and the margins of the agrarian order.16 Especially useful is his 2010 article on early modern scribal groups, wherein he illustrates how Brahman scribes negotiated the perceived degradations of Muslim rule by sacralizing the office of recordkeeping.17 Rosalind O’Hanlon has extended this line of inquiry to argue that Marathi-speaking Brahmans fostered expansive intellectual circuits


of Sanskrit knowledge to shore up their claims to status and privilege.\textsuperscript{18} Foundational to these arguments is Susan Bayly’s earlier thesis that in the eighteenth century, traditional kingly power was eclipsed by a “Brahman rāj” of skilled, literate Brahman service elites who shared an ideology of caste purity.\textsuperscript{19} Yet at the same time, as Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have shown, Kayastha and Khatri litterateurs in Mughal north India combined scribal work, history-writing, \textit{and} political service. In different ways, all of these authors foreground the “missing middle” of early modern South Asia, emphasizing the ways in which the socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse middle classes became “witnesses” to sovereign power.\textsuperscript{20}

Notwithstanding the many benefits it has yielded, the turn away from a post-declinist analysis of the political economic foundations of sovereignty to a focus on sociocultural issues in the historiography of early modern South Asia has circumvented the question of politics. This question concerns not merely how sovereign power was negotiated between rulers and rent-paying subjects, but more fundamentally how skilled individuals acted in concert to achieve common goals and to establish and reproduce the parameters within which sovereignty could be exercised. Addressing the question of politics is important to understanding eighteenth-century South Asia precisely because the decentralization of Mughal authority enabled the formation of new forms of polity and the entrance of new groups into political life. It is important to understanding the Maratha Empire in particular because this political formation in fact never

\textsuperscript{18} Rosalind O’Hanlon, \textit{At the Edges of Empire: Essays in the Social and Intellectual History of India} (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2014); for an accessible presentation of her core ideas, see Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Contested Conjunctures: Brahman Communities and ‘Early Modernity’ in India,” \textit{The American Historical Review} 118.3 (2013): 765-87.


resembled a traditional centralized and cohesive empire but instead took the form of a web of semi-independent governments whose allegiances were constantly in flux. If neither the Maratha Chhatrapati nor the Brahman Peshwa could hope to achieve universal dominion, what was the purpose and structure of politics in the Maratha Empire? What were the concepts, devices, and tools used to do politics? How did middling groups gain access to the political realm, and what sort of skills and competencies did they have to demonstrate? Finally, what were the discourses around Maratha politics that prevailed in the eighteenth-century and how did its skilled practitioners intervene in them? To what extent did they draw on their own experiences to produce a distinct political ethics? These questions are at the heart of this dissertation. First, however, I must clarify what I mean by politics, and what politics meant in the Maratha Empire.

Towards a History of Politics

Scholars of South Asia have tended to frame the political in terms of a Weberian model of the ideological legitimation of the state. For Weber, the state represents “a relationship in which people rule over other people.”21 That is, the dominance of the state cannot be build on brute force alone, but also requires legitimacy, or the consent of the dominated. His interest in the legitimation of domination was linked to a conviction that the vocation of politics was replete with ethical ambiguity. “Professional politicians” often feel that they are in pursuit of the just ends of a higher cause, or calling, yet they must also be willing to employ unjust means to achieve those ends. It has not been these nuances in Weber’s analysis of politics, but a more narrowly instrumentalist version of his legitimation model that has garnered critique. Sheldon Pollock has argued that whereas this model presupposes the instrumental, functionalist logic of capitalist modernity, the cosmopolitan language of Sanskrit in premodern South and Southeast

Asia formed an essentially non-instrumental cognitive framework within which power was aestheticized.\textsuperscript{22} From the different perspective of ethnohistory, Nicholas B. Dirks has argued that discourses about kingship in the south Indian “little kingdom” of Pudukottai constructed a ritualistic ethical order in which subjects shared in the king’s sovereignty through political actions, such as gift-giving, that were only partly instrumental.\textsuperscript{23} Pollock’s and Dirks’ critiques of the legitimation model deploy an anti-instrumentalist hermeneutics attentive to the ways in which texts create and transmit meaning, specifically the meaning of premodern power and authority. At the same time, they do not accede to the notion that the premodern state was merely a “theater state” concerned with the ritualized performance of purely symbolic actions. Rather, they insist that political action had both instrumental and symbolic dimensions.

In this dissertation, I build on these critiques by returning to the organizing principle of Weber’s sociology of politics: action. Weber insisted that an interpretive understanding (verstehen) of action requires an understanding of the meaning that an individual attaches to his or her action in relation to the actions of others.\textsuperscript{24} Action is purposive, or end-driven, but because action is indissolubly linked to certain prior intentions and to certain posterior effects, it must also be meaningful both for its agent and other agents who have their own intended actions. For historians of politics, perhaps the most influential engagement with the concept of action has been that of Quentin Skinner and his followers associated with the Cambridge school of the


history of political thought. Skinner focused in particular on the context in which the meaning and purpose of a communicative action takes shape.\textsuperscript{25} Enlisting J.L. Austin’s distinctions between the locutionary meanings, illocutionary forces, and perlocutionary effects of utterances, Skinner suggested that to understand a particular text – say a political treatise like Machiavelli’s \textit{Il Principe} (1532) – one must understand what a particular author intended to \textit{do} in uttering a particular statement. The author’s intended act of communication would only become clear against the backdrop of practical conventions governing similar communicative scenarios arising more or less routinely in the society in question.\textsuperscript{26} For Skinner, analysis of texts would bear out Weber’s contention that the world becomes meaningful in and through the communicative actions of those who inhabit it.\textsuperscript{27}

Historians of South Asia in recent years have examined prescriptive texts dealing with the question of politics. Muzaffar Alam has illustrated that Persian ādāb and akhlāq “mirror for princes” treatises employed Greco-Islamic ethical ideals to construct a conventional language of political conduct for diverse groups within the Mughal Empire.\textsuperscript{28} More broadly, C.A. Bayly has argued that such texts formed part of the moral and affective framework within which political

\textsuperscript{25} Here I am aware of but do not invoke Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action, which is grounded in the application of shared rational criteria for reaching understanding. As has been pointed out in many critiques, Habermas’ theory presumes a public sphere of rational equals abstracted from the realities of non-public social, or private, life. Such a presumption of course contradicts Weber’s original conception of action as a thoroughly social phenomenon. For the classic statement of the theory, see Jürgen Habermas, \textit{The Theory of Communicative Action}, volume 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).


\textsuperscript{27} For his view of the relationship of his approach to Weber’s \textit{verstehen}, see Skinner, “‘Social Meaning’ and the Explanation of Social Action,” in \textit{Meaning and Context}, 79-96.

\textsuperscript{28} Muzaffar Alam, \textit{The Languages of Political Islam} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
knowledge and practice took shape. The classic “mirrors for princes” text in Maratha historiography is the Ājñāpatra (1715-16) of Ramchandra Nilkanth Amatya, the close advisor of Chhatrapati Rajaram. Though Amatya frames the Ājñāpatra as a specific order (ājñāpatra) to Rajaram’s young son Shambhu, he also makes it clear that it is a work of rājnīti, or political ethics, partaking in the Sanskrit arthaśāstra and dharmaśāstra traditions and centrally concerned with elaborating the code of conduct that a king ought to exemplify for his subjects. Amatya identifies this code with maryādā, a Sanskrit-derived term that variously means “end,” “limit,” “code,” “morality,” and “propriety.” Maryādā in the Ājñāpatra challenged the conventionally high status of vatan, or patrimony, among the warrior-aristocratic class of the Maratha state. Alluding to the defections of Maratha nobility during the Mughal-Maratha wars of the last two decades, Amatya argues that this class was willing to resort to any means necessary to eke out their subsistence and to protect their vatan in times of uncertainty. Their actions caused the maryādā of the kingdom to fall into disorder, but at the same time, the kingdom’s growth (abhivṛddhī) was a certainty given by god (iśvaradatta). Reflection on this contradiction leads Amatya to the insight that the ruler must rectify the state of the kingdom by re-instating its maryādā through the application of his refined intelligence (śūṣmabuddhi).

Though such reflection on the Ājñāpatra sheds light on the ethical stakes of the actions of the ruler, it is less helpful in illuminating the actions of the quotidian political actors who moved within the extended orbits of Maratha rulers in the eighteenth century. Instead, this dissertation makes the case that the “invisible city” of paper that so fascinated Perlin – letters, orders, grants,


30 Ājñāpatra, edited by P.N. Joshi (Pune: Venus Prakashan, 1997), 11. For a further exploration of the genre of nīti, see Chapter 6.

agreements, revenue accounts, and family histories – constitutes the record of the mode of communicative action employed by practitioners of politics in the Maratha Empire. As I demonstrate through a case study of the political ascendancy of Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu officials, the primary criterion for entry into the political domain was not caste, class, religion, ethnicity, or any other ascriptive status. Rather, to become a practitioner of politics was to become fluent in the forms, idioms, and conventions of a specific mode of communicative action.

*Jawāb-Suwāl: Politics as Communicative Action*

As I have attempted to justify in the previous section, my approach to the study of politics in the Maratha Empire will be to consider politics not in terms of sovereignty or political economy, but in terms of action, and specifically communicative action. Within the Maratha Empire, the specific mode of communicative action that predominated in the political domain was known by the Marathi compound phrase jāb-sāl. Jāb-sāl is a shortened form of the Persian phrase Jawāb-Suwāl, which is composed of the words Jawāb (answer) and Suwāl (question). When translated literally as “answer-question,” or more colloquially for the English speaker as “question-answer,” the phrase already connotes the sense of communication involving two or more parties. Given that the verbal compound Jawāb-Suwāl kardan means “to converse,” Jawāb-Suwāl may be more colloquially translated as an abstract noun such as “talk,” “conversation,” or “dialogue.” But I propose that rather than a fixed, determinate entity, Jawāb-Suwāl in the context of eighteenth-century South Asia connoted a mode of action wherein the intended meaning, force, and end of one’s communicative act was realized in and through the intended meaning, force, and end of another’s. In an ideal Jawāb-Suwāl scenario, an actor not only

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comprehends the meaning of another’s utterance, but also takes up its force and performs its effect. In historical reality, of course, jawāb-suwāl did not always materialize in a substantive agreement; however, if both actors entered into this process in good faith, there was a basic shared understanding of the formal conventions whereby an agreement might be realized.

Historically, jawāb-suwāl or jāb-sāl has been an important term for several different literary and artistic genres, including north Indian classical music,\(^{33}\) Marathi tamāśā folk plays,\(^{34}\) and Christian and Islamic dialogues oriented towards conversion.\(^{35}\) But in the political circuits of eighteenth-century South Asia, jawāb-suwāl was the preferred term to describe processes of diplomatic negotiation. Hence when the chronicler Ghulam Husain Khan Tabatabai in his monumental Siyar al-Muta‘a khkhirīn (1781) sought to describe Bengal nawāb Mahabat Jang Alivardi Khan’s decision to pursue peace with Raghuji Bhonsle of Nagpur, he wrote that the nawāb “opened the road of negotiation of reconciliation with the Marathas (rāh-i jawāb wa suwāl-i mušālaḥat bā marhata kushūda).”\(^{36}\) The vernacularization of jawāb-suwāl in the Marathi short-form jāb-sāl is an example of the ways in which skilled elites at Maratha courts creatively adapted Persian language and knowledge. It is well known that many of the key terms employed in politics and government in the eighteenth-century Maratha country were derived from Sultanate and Mughal Persian usages. Though the late seventeenth-century Rājiyavavahārakaśa

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36 Ghulam Husain Khan Tabatabai, Siyar al-Muta‘a akhkhirīn (Lucknow, 1866), 509.
of Raghunath Pandit attempted to replace Persiane terms with Sanskritic synonyms, a Persian-inflected Marathi, committed to paper in the cursive script Modi, continued to be the lingua franca of Maratha politics and administration through the early nineteenth century.37

Much more than a simple descriptor, jāb-sāl encompassed a whole domain of communicative devices, including oaths, sacred objects, sentimental words, performative statements, and binding agreements. Most prominently, the outcome of a successful process of jāb-sāl was a written agreement representing the past, present, and future of a relationship between two or more governments. Such an agreement was typically called yād or yādī (memorandum) and, to a greater extent in the early nineteenth century, kalambandī. The Persian word qalam-bandī is related to qalam-band, which is composed of the words qalam (pen) and band (bound) and colloquially means “written down” or “committed to writing.”38 But another meaning of qalam is “section” or “paragraph.”39 Thus, yād/yadī and kalambandī denoted a genre of agreement structured around a set of articles that specify the terms and conditions of a relationship between two or more parties. Typically, each article in any such agreement concludes with the word kalam or the phrase kalam ek (one article). The content of a kalambandī was not necessarily diplomatic – a grant (sanad) or a judgement in a property dispute (mahzar).


38 Steingass, 986.

39 Steingass, 985.
could include *kalam* stating the conditions of ownership or transfer of rights to property.\(^40\) To adapt the *kalambandī* to the communicative context of *jāb-sāl*, practitioners of politics employed the term *karār* (Persian *qarār*). *Karār* can simply mean “agreement,” and in its reduplicated form *karār-madār*, it conveys the general sense of a set of agreements.\(^41\) But in the context of an agreement drafted during the process of *jāb-sāl*, the term takes on the force of an acknowledgement or approval. The word *karār* or the phrase *yeṇepramāṇe karār* often appears after each *kalam* in a conventional agreement to express the recipient’s acknowledgement of a set of terms and conditions. *Kalam* and *karār* thus form a pair reflective of a dialogic speech encounter.\(^42\)

The oath (*śapath*) was another tool within the communicative repertoire of *jāb-sāl*, one that was closely linked to the experience of a face-to-face speech encounter.\(^43\) The Marathi dictionarian J.T. Molesworth observed in 1857 that “numerous are the forms of Oath-taking or swearing, all instructive concerning the moral state and the sense of moral obligation of the

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\(^{40}\) For example, see *Selections From the Satara Rajas’ and the Peshwas’ Diaries* (hereafter SSRPD), edited by G.C. Vad and K.N. Sane, volume 9 (Poona, 1911), nos. 11-2, pgs. 7-9; *Marāṭhāvīncā Itihāsācī Sādhane* (hereafter MIS), eds. V.K. Rajwade and P.N. Deshpande, volume 8 (Dhule: Rajwade Sanshodhan Mandal, 2009), no. 58, pg. 52. For a more wide-ranging discussion of the genre of the mahzar, or mahzar-nāmā, see Nandini Chatterjee, “*Mahzar-nāmās* in the Mughal and British Empires: The Uses of an Indo-Islamic Legal Form,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 2 (2016): 379-406.


\(^{42}\) It is in this sense that with respect to the power of the Peshwa’s administrators Sakharam Bapu Bokil and Baburao Bhanu Phadnavis to issue grants, it was stated in a July 6, 1761 letter that “Sakharampant says karār. Dada [Phadnavis] says dyāve [the formal imperative ‘should be given’]. Giving is still closed. Much ‘give, give!’ is happening.” See MIS, eds. Rajwade and Deshpande, vol. 6, no 292, pg. 327.

Marāṭhā people." But many of the forms that he enumerates, which typically involve Hindu sacred objects such as the combination of bel leaves and turmeric powder (bel-bhandār), Ganges water (gaṅgā-jaḷa), the cow’s tail (gāice ṣepūṭ), and the black seashell of Vishnu (śāligrāma), have been attested by folklorists and anthropologists to be prevalent in various regions of South Asia, though the bel-bhandār oath was held in special esteem in the Maratha country. Procedures of adjudication and punishment within local majālas assemblies and caste pañcāyats routinely included the administration of oaths and ordeals for both Hindu and Muslim subjects. In this context, the oath very often assumed the form of a curse that foretold evil effects should an individual take certain proscribed actions. The application of oath-taking rituals in diplomatic situations was an important stage of communication often preceding the finalization of an agreement within the total process of jāb-sāl.

Finally, sentimental words and performatives were the most fundamental elements of the communicative repertoire of the practitioner of politics in the Maratha Empire. Certain words, including, most commonly, khāṭrī or khāṭarjamā, conveyed the most potent sentiments of confidence and certainty of mind, while others, such as mamatā, conveyed somewhat less potent ones of affection and attachment. Just as sentiments of trust were most conducive to political

44 Molesworth, 459.


47 The curse in particular is a very old communicative form in the Marathi-speaking regions of western India that is probably linked to the transcultural, transhistorical “evil eye” prophylaxis. On this question in connection with the donkey curse of Yadava-period inscriptions, see Christian Lee Novetzke, The Quotidian Revolution: Vernacularization, Religion, and the Premodern Public Sphere (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 78-86.
relations, words that expressed doubt and uncertainty, particularly *samśaya* and *sandeha*, were most corrosive. The performatif or (in Austinian terms) illocutionary force of such sentiments is indicated by the fact that in the ordinary language of the period, it was acceptable to both speak (*bolne*) and to do (*karne*) them. \(^{48}\) Along these lines, individuals regularly alternated between declarative statements and imperative commands, exposing the degree to which even the former carried the force of a communicative action. Consider two successive statements in an April 29, 1803 letter composed for Raghuji Bhonsle: “It is very good that there is no concern (*upasarga nāhī he phār cāṅgale āhe*)” and “It is proper that there ought not to be concern (*upasarga nasāve he ucita āhe*).” \(^{49}\) Here the switch from the declarative to the imperative in the dependent clause makes explicit the force of the re-descriptive statements “It is very good” and “It is appropriate.” Not just sentimental words, but even seemingly mundane statements of fact could become powerful tools in the hands of a political practitioner.

Understanding the agents, structures, and tools of the vocation of politics in the eighteenth-century Maratha Empire entails the application of novel interpretative strategies to an eclectic array of sources, both central and peripheral to the existing field of Maratha history. The sources that I employ in this dissertation can be classified into three types. First, unpublished Marathi- and, to a lesser extent, Persian- and English-language government documents, particularly grants, orders, and revenue accounts, as well as official and personal correspondence, anchor my argument. The Marathi-language sources were handwritten in Modi, a cursive script that was the preferred medium of secular writing in the pre-colonial era. As artifacts of of scribal-administrative expertise, these sources not only record, but also encode

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48 See letter from Peshwa Madhavrao Ballal to Janoji Bhonsle regarding visit of Chimaji Rakhmagad discussed in Chapter 2.

49 British Library (hereafter BL), Mss Marathi, D37, ff. 72b-73a.
political action in a linguistically hybrid, but conceptually specific register that I have begun to describe in this Introduction. Supplementing these materials are sources of a second type, namely Marathi- and English-language published documents. Because gathering, editing, and publishing documents was the central preoccupation of V.K. Rajwade, T.S. Shejwalkar, D.B. Parasnis, K.N. Sane, Y.M. Kale, Y.R. Gupte, G.S. Sardesai, and other doyens of Maratha history, published source collections are a staple of the field; however, these sources must be used with some caution, as very often their provenance is unknown. As a general rule, I corroborate major empirical and analytical claims with unpublished sources or note when those claims are purely speculative. A similar caveat applies to the third major source type found in this study: eighteenth and early nineteenth century Marathi- and Persian-language historical narratives. Instead of merely adhering to a skeptical attitude towards their “facticity,” I read such narratives, and especially scribal-authored Marathi bakhars, as records of the social history of politics. While their apparent subject is usually dynastic history, their real subject is the often unremarked, though not unremarkable doings of the scribal-bureaucratic individuals, households, and networks that made politics happen. Of course, scribal authors sometimes exaggerated the accomplishments of their forebears. Such exaggerations should not be taken as signs of duplicity or prejudice, as I argue in Chapter 6 with respect to the works of Malhar Ramrao Chitnis, but rather as deliberate rhetorical strategies with specific aims and intentions.

The tumultuous relationships between the Maratha ruler of Nagpur, and his allies and rivals, including the Maratha sovereign Chhatrapati Maharaja of Satara, the Peshwa of Pune, and the Nizam of Hyderabad, constitute the principal site for this dissertation’s exploration of the communicative politics of jāb-sāl within the Maratha Empire. The first section of the dissertation outlines the formation, evolution, and transformation of this set of relationships from the re-
establishment of Maratha sovereignty under Shahu to the final resolution of the civil wars
between Nagpur and Pune in 1769. Chapter 1 offers an account of how a junior branch of the
Bhonsle Maratha clan led by Raghuji Bhonsle (1695-1755) employed alternating strategies of
conquest, compromise, and conciliation to consolidate an autonomous kingdom in the much-
contested Mughal province of Berar in central India. The Bhonsles’ long-standing claim to cauth
revenues in Berar did not sit well with the Deccan governorship of the Mughal nobleman Nizam
ul-Mulk (1671-1748); however, by means of jāb-sāl, Janoji Bhonsle (d. 1772) struck a set of
agreements with Nizam ul-Mulk’s successor Nizam Ali Khan (1734-1803) in 1757 to settle the
terms of Maratha-Nizam joint rule of Berar. But it was the Bhonsles’ intimate friendship with the
Nizam’s feudatories – the Afghan rulers of Ellichpur (Achalpur) – that enabled lasting peace.
Mudhoji Bhonsle (d. 1788) helped to permanently etch their friendship in stone by providing the
funds for the construction of a new outer court surrounding the burial shrine of the warrior-saint
Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah outside Ellichpur city after the death and in memory of the late ruler
Ismail Khan Panni (d. 1775). By re-affirming both the sacral power of the saint and the secular
power of the ruler, Bhonsle’s gesture, I argue, revealed that their friendship exceeded the
parameters of the purely instrumental, strategic relation encoded by the 1757 agreement.

The Bhonsles’ friendliness with the Nizam of Hyderabad and his feudatories existed
uncomfortably alongside their commitments to the Peshwa’s government at Pune. Chapter 2
traces the origins and aftermath of the Pune-Nagpur civil wars of the 1760s. It explains why
these governments were unable to manage a panoply of unresolved points of contention: unpaid
debts, contested jurisdictions, non-performance of military service, and outright treachery as well
as more subterranean anxieties borne of the sudden rise to political supremacy of the Chitpavan
Brahman sub-caste. Most fundamentally, Maratha governments were unable to reach a workable
consensus because of declining trust in the actions of their administrators (kārbhārī). Criticisms of the aberrant cunning of kārbhārī, including most notably Devaji Chorghode (d. 1782), the Bhonsles’ lead advisor at Nagpur, revealed the critical importance of these skilled political practitioners in preserving relations of trust and amicability. The process of jāb-sāl that followed the cessation of hostilities in 1769 built the foundations of a peaceful and cooperative relationship between the Pune and Nagpur governments, allowing them in subsequent decades to coordinate their policies with respect to the British East India Company.

Though the several kārbhārī who fell into disgrace in the 1760s were Brahmans, their much-overlooked predecessor, as I argue in Chapter 4, was the Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu chief scribe and intimate advisor to Chhatrapati Shahu, Govindrao Khanderao Chitnis (d. 1785). In a last ditch effort to restore confidence in the Bhonsles’ loyalty to the Peshwa, Devaji Chorghode sent a relative of Govindrao Khanderao’s, the Kayastha Prabhu scribe Chimaji Rakhmagad (d. 1780), to negotiate with Peshwa Madhavrao I (1745-1772). Chimaji and Govind were both members of a prominent Kayastha Prabhu extended household with branches at Satara, Nagpur, and Pune that along with members of several other Kayastha households acquired a foothold in Maratha politics in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. The second section of the dissertation examines the ascendancy of Kayastha Prabhu service households as a case study of the ways in which the vocation of politics facilitated social mobility. In Chapter 3, I profile the functional niche of Kayastha Prabhu officials within the Maratha bureaucracy and hone in on the socioeconomic and professional trajectory of the Chitnis household of Satara from the early to the late eighteenth century. I emphasize that junior relations were able to make use of their extended family networks to obtain new positions and to establish connections with potential patrons. Chapter 4 illustrates how Kayastha service households transitioned from
administrative and military service to politics by following the careers of prominent members of the Chitnis and Chitnavis households of Satara and Nagpur and associated Kayastha households at Kolhapur, Pune, and Baroda. Though subject to the changing whims of fickle rulers and the resentments of orthodox Brahman priests, Kayastha scribes and soldiers like Govindrao Khanderao of Satara and Mahitpatrao Dinkar and Krishnarao Madhav (d. 1803) of Nagpur were able to advance themselves into roles of diplomatic influence. Mastering the formal rituals and routines of the Maratha court, they cultivated working relationships with their peers across divides of caste, community, and political affiliation. I draw attention to the promise of these relationships with special reference to the profit-sharing agreement (karārnāmā) struck by the Nagpur scribal-diplomats Sridhar Laxman and Krishnarao Madhav and the Peshwa’s envoy Baburao Viswanath Vaidya prior to the battle of Kharda of 1795.

At Kharda, Maratha governments won one last battle in their long-running feud with Nizam Ali Khan over control of the Deccan before the political tides began to shift in favor of the increasingly powerful British East India Company. The final section of the dissertation asks two questions: How did the Company interpret and intervene in Maratha politics, and how did the purpose and meaning of Maratha politics change in an emerging epistemic world in which Company knowledge played a decisive role? Chapter 5 argues that Company officials understood politics in the Maratha Empire primarily through the category of predation. The Governors-General Warren Hastings (1732-1818) and Richard Wellesley (1760-1842) pursued increasingly aggressive policies against what they understood to be a predatory system of “confederate” states sparing no expense to maximize their booty. In formulating this conception, they were abetted by historical and geographical research, represented foremost by the work of the Pune resident Charles Warre Malet (1752-1815). At the same time, the ministers Nana
Phadnavis (1742-1800) and the aforementioned Devaji Chorghode in 1779-80 and the scribal-diplomats Krishnarao Madhav and Sridhar Laxman in 1803 enacted processes of *jāb-sāl* to devise anti-British coalitions that the Company deemed to be an illegitimate “confederacy.” “Confederacy” has persisted into the present as the preferred term for describing the eighteenth-century Maratha state, obscuring the sophisticated forms of communicative action that I argue were central to sustaining the bonds of a decentralized and dispersed imperial formation.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I re-introduce the question of political ethics by reviewing the writings of scribal historians at Satara and Nagpur. I analyze how a treatise on *rājnīti* authored by Malhar Ramrao Chitnis (d. 1823) informed the composition of historical narratives (*bakhar*) about the lives of Shivaji and his successors. Though Company historians like James Grant Duff (1789-1858) set the tone for how these works would be received by post-colonial readers by evaluating them on narrow empirical grounds, Chitnis’ aim was primarily commemorative and didactic. That is, he viewed not only the Bhonsle rulers, but also his scribal forebears as exemplars of good conduct, positioning the scribal classes as the caretakers of a living tradition of political ethics. In a very different fashion, the Nagpur resident Richard Jenkins’ assistant Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar worked in and outside the empiricist parameters of Company research by assembling an extremely diverse archive of letters, documents, personal testimony, and his own narratives on the history of the Nagpur Bhonsles. The research labors of skilled, literate scribal officials like Aurangabadkar would go unnoticed even as their employers’ histories of the Maratha state became guidebooks to colonial governance. Having lost the right to exercise their communicative expertise to shape the fortunes and destinies of governments, all that was left for the old practitioners of politics to do was to protect their hard-won patrimony from the miserliness of the early colonial state. A new colonial politics of *vatan*, as I suggest in
the Conclusion, was the ultimate outcome of the Company’s depoliticization of the Maratha Empire.
CHAPTER 1: Expansion and Affiliation in the Eighteenth-Century Deccan

In early December 1785, Mudhoji Bhonsle, the frail and battle-worn Maratha ruler of Nagpur, visited the burial shrine of the warrior-saint Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah on the banks of the Bichan River just northeast of the city of Ellichpur (today’s Achalpur) in central India (see Figure 1). This was not Mudhoji’s first visit. He had financed the construction of the shrine’s outer walls after the death of his friend and co-ruler Ismail Khan Panni, the nawāb of Ellichpur, in 1775. Before returning to his camp at Daryapur about fifty kilometers to the southwest, Mudhoji visited Salabat Khan, Ismail Khan’s son and the new nawāb, at his home. They sat together and chatted for a few hours. Just as the nawāb was about to make a customary gift of a set of robes in honor of his visit, Mudhoji declared, “You are my son (ciraṅjīva). I do not wish to take your robes.” Having dispensed with the usual formalities, they instead enjoyed a refreshing digestif of pān, and Mudhoji was on his way. He lingered at Daryapur for a few more days to finalize some negotiations with the nawāb and his brother Bahlol Khan, eventually setting out for Nagpur on December 26, 1785.50 His health deteriorated in the next couple years, and in May 1788, he contracted a bad fever and died. Salabat and Bahlol Khan visited Nagpur on June 12, 1788 to offer their condolences to Mudhoji’s son Raghujī. But when they tried to present him with a shawl and a vessel of holy water, he stated, “You and I are brothers (bandhu). There is no need for this.” Though they pressed him to accept, he refused. The brothers grieved with the Bhonsles for another week or so before taking their leave.51

Considering the principal political and religious affiliations of these two dynastic lineages, this set of interactions may seem peculiar. Mudhoji Bhonsle of Nagpur was a Hindu Maratha rājā who ruled at the pleasure of the Maratha Chhatrapati at Satara, while Salabat and Bahlol Khan were Muslim Panni Afghan nawābs who paid obeisance to the Nizam of Hyderabad. Historians have long known that the Marathas and the Nizam pursued both war and diplomacy to manage relations that were by turns friendly and antagonistic, but fundamentally strategic.\footnote{For T.S. Shejwalkar, the strategic character of Nizam-Maratha relations reflected the fundamental hypocrisy and ideological bankruptcy of the Maratha state under the Peshwas. By compromising with the Mughals, and with their proxies in the Deccan, the Peshwas had ceded Shivaji’s dream of independence. See his Nizām-Peśve Sambandha (Pune, 1963); also see Setumadhavrao Pagadi, Eighteenth Century Deccan (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1963).} Being the two main competitors for dominance in the vast trunk of the Indian subcontinent known as the

\textbf{Figure 1: Main Entrance of the Dargah of Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah}
Deccan, the Maratha and Nizamate states clashed in six major battles and countless minor scuffles over the course of the eighteenth century. Within the interstices of their antagonism, however, a friendship blossomed between the individuals who co-ruled the Deccan province of Berar on their behalf. In fact, the Maratha rājās of Nagpur and the Panni nawābs of Ellichpur, and especially Mudhoji Bhonsle and Ismail Khan Panni, were something more than friends. As the statements of familial affection adduced earlier suggest, their friendship entailed a degree of heartfelt regard and affection that exceeded the protocols of diplomatic etiquette.

This chapter traces a particular instantiation of Hindu-Muslim encounter in pre-colonial South Asia, a subject that has received much attention in recent scholarship. Rejecting a “communalist” view of the past, this scholarship has revealed the ways in which Hindu and Muslim elites evinced interest in each other’s literary, artistic, and religious practices. The formation of elite political and cultural capital was often marked by a high degree of cultural exchange and experimentation. This insight should not lead to the conclusion that pre-colonial South Asia was free from strident rhetoric and spectacular violence between Hindus and Muslims. Rather, as Sanjay Subrahmanyan has articulated with respect to the days leading up to

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53 By “major,” I refer to battles in which large swathes of territory changed hands. These were the battles of Palkhed (1728), Bhopal (1737), Udgir (1760), Alegaon (1761) Rakshasbhuwan (1763), and Kharda (1795).

the momentous 1565 battle between the Vijayanagara Empire and the Deccan Sultanates, intimacy could lead to instances of insult, invective, and outright violence.\(^55\) Similarly, Cynthia Talbot argues that violence occurred within “a tense but mutually comprehensible system of political relations.”\(^56\) The “system of relations” that subsisted between two or several powers, as well as the prevailing languages and practices that political actors used to call it into being, varied based on the political, economic, and cultural configuration of the historical moment in question. Yet, scholars still resort to a static Weberian concept of legitimation – that is, rulers and elites sought to establish their fitness to rule over diverse populations by exhibiting a desire to incorporate diverse ways of life into the polity.\(^57\) The goal of this chapter is to offer a more dynamic model of how a particular “system of relations” between Hindu and Muslim polities evolved in response to the realities of shared governance of the eighteenth-century Deccan.

In this chapter, I argue that rulers and their followers within the expanding Maratha and Nizamate orbits primarily organized their relations under the rubric of friendship. Insofar as it existed neither in a state of absolute alienness or absolute identification, friendship provided a language to articulate the multiple potentialities of a relationship in flux. In particular, I examine the evolution of the friendship between the Maratha and Afghan feudatory co-rulers of Berar. By the time of the events described above, they considered themselves to be almost brothers. But this degree of affection was not natural or pre-ordained; rather, it was the contingent outcome of

\(^{55}\) Through a careful reading of the chronicle record, Subrahmanyam shows that the conventional name for this battle – the battle of Talikota – is not entirely reflective of where it actually took place. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 34-102.

\(^{56}\) Talbot, *The Last Hindu Emperor*, 30.

\(^{57}\) For a recent engagement with this concept – one that claims that the Mughals in particular were interested in Indic ways of life primarily as a form of self-fashioning, rather than legitimation – see Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 2-3, 18.
an extended process of political transformation. I show that the friendship between the co-rulers of Berar emerged out of a crucible of recurring conflict between the Marathas and the Nizam. In this first section, I introduce the Deccan, and especially the Mughal province of Berar, and outline Maratha expansion into this region through the delegation of authority to a junior Bhonsle household. The Bhonsles cultivated affiliations not only with the Peshwa, the Maratha sovereign’s chief minister, but also with the Peshwa’s primary opponent, Nizam ul-Mulk of Hyderabad. As I elaborate in the second section, the Bhonsles established control in Berar by deploying strategies of conquest, compromise, and counter-affiliation with local rulers, including the Nizam’s Ellichpur-based governor of Berar. While joint rule (do-amali) of Berar took on a more formal and negotiable form through the sāt-cālīs diplomatic arrangement of 1757, the success of this agreement depended on the actions and sentiments of those deputed to execute it. Particularly after the appointment of Ismail Khan Panni to the provincial governorship in 1763, the Maratha rājās of Nagpur and the Afghan nawābs of Ellichpur fostered a sincere friendship that transcended strategic necessity. Mudhoji Bhonsle’s patronage of the construction of the outer court of the dargah of Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah after the death of Ismail Khan was the ultimate gesture of affection for and remembrance of a dearly departed friend.

**Berar, the Bhonsles, and the Problem of Affiliation**

The Deccan is a region of historic geophysical and geopolitical significance. In geophysical terms, the Deccan consists of the downward-pointing triangular plateau bounded by the Eastern and Western Ghats and the Vindhya and Satpura ranges. It is predominantly composed of fertile black soil produced by the solidification and disintegration of prehistoric lava flows (known as the Deccan Trap), though hillier parts of the plateau also feature less fertile red soils. Its fertility made it viable for settlement and conquest since at least the Mauryan
period. The name “Deccan” likely derives from the use of the Sanskrit designations *dakṣina* and *dakṣinapatha* in the Puranic and epic literature to refer to the area south of the Narmada River.\(^{58}\)

In his political genealogy of the region, the early seventeenth century chronicler Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Astarabadi, better known as Firishtah, stated that Dakan was the son of Hind and had three sons, Marhat, Kanhar, and Tiling. As Richard Eaton has argued, these offspring referred to three major linguistic zones – Marathi, Kannada, and Telugu – that roughly corresponded with the three major post-Chalukya regional kingdoms: the Yadavas, the Hoysalas, and the Kakatiyas. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the Khilji and Tughluq sultans of Delhi mounted repeated campaigns against these kingdoms. The conquest of the Deccan and consequent migration of large numbers of people from the north accelerated the formation of an “Indo-Persian axis” stretching from the Deccan to north India and central and west Asia. In 1347, the breakaway Bahmani Sultanate was founded by Muhammad bin Tughluq’s general Alauddin Hasan Bahman Shah in 1347. Bahmani politics was divided between factions of Deccanis, those descended from the original north Indian settlers who identified with the Dakhni language, and Foreigner (also known as Westerner) migrants from the Persian, Turkic, and Arab lands who identified with Persian language and culture. By the late medieval period, the Deccan had become a crossroads between north and south, a battleground between “transregional sultanates” and “regional kingdoms,” and a laboratory of linguistic and cultural interaction.\(^{59}\)

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Berar, or Vidarbha as it is known today, is the northeasternmost sub-region of the Deccan. Though its boundaries shifted under succeeding regimes, its core is the fertile basin lying between the Wardha and Wainganga rivers. Under the Bahmanis, Berar was a frontier province fortified on the north by the forts of Gawelgadh and Narnala in the Satpura Mountains and on the south by the fort of Mahur. Narsingh Rai, the Gond ruler of Kherla across the Tapi River to the northeast, challenged Bahmani control over the province until Firoz Shah Bahmani forced him to pay tribute in 1399.\(^{60}\) Towards the end of the fifteenth century, the Bahmanis began to cede control over the province to their general Fathullah Imad ul-Mulk. During the reign of Mahmud Shah Bahmani, he founded a breakaway sultanate, inscribing his independence in stone by erecting the outermost Mahakali gate of Narnala in 1487 and the south gate of Gawelgadh, known as the Fath Darwaza, in 1488.\(^{61}\) Along with the Nizam Shahs of Ahmadnagar, the Adil Shahs of Bijapur, the Qutb Shahs of Golconda, and the Barid Shahs of Bidar, the Imad Shahs became successors to Bahmani rule in the Deccan.

Fathullah’s successors held Berar for almost a century despite facing repeated Nizam Shahi assaults from the south. In the early 1560s, the adolescent Burhan Imad Shah was confined by his minister Tufal Khan, who soon after was chased out of the country by a combined Nizam Shahi and Adil Shahi force. In 1572, Berar was absorbed into the Nizam Shahi sultanate, only to be taken by the Mughal emperor Akbar’s son Murad in 1596. With the exception of a brief period of Nizam Shahi control imposed by the general and kingmaker Malik Ambar, Berar would remain under Mughal rule until it was seized by Nizam ul-Mulk in 1724. Before he died,


supposedly of successive drinking, in 1599, Prince Murad built himself a residence at Shahpur near Balapur. Abu al-Fazl, who himself had led the conquest of Gawelgad and Narnala, mentioned this residence in the entry on Berar in his encyclopedic Āʿīn-i Akbarī (c.1595). The Āʿīn-i Akbarī,62 and the Sawānīh-i Dakan (1783) of Mu’nim Khan al-Hamdani al-Aurangabadi63 (who cites al-Fazl) include detailed descriptions of Berar as one of the six regularly administered Mughal provinces (ṣūbah) of the Deccan.

Al-Fazl and al-Hamdani claim that the name “Berar” derived from “Varda-tat,” an amalgam of the name of the neighboring Wardha River and the word for bank or shore.64 Both emphasize the excellent quality of its climate and soil, though al-Hamdani’s estimate of the total revenue assessment (Rs 12,268,727) show that it was one of the poorer Deccan ṣūbahs.65 By the time of their writing, Berar had acquired more or less stable boundaries. Al-Hamdani states that its neighbor to the east was Chanda; to the west the provinces of Khandesh and Aurangabad; to the north the district of Hindiah; and to the south the province of Muhammadabad-Bidar. He includes a further territorial division, established under Shah Jahan, between the Balaghat and the Payanghat falling on the southern and northern sides of the Ajanta mountain pass,

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63 British Library, Persian Manuscripts, Add 23885, ff. 21b-22a.

64 Jarrett, trans., 228; BL, Persian Manuscripts, Add 23885, ff. 21b.

65 For a slightly different figure from another manuscript of the Sawānīh, see History of the Medieval Deccan, vol. 1, 625; for the figure recorded by Grant Duff after his review of the Satara daftar, see James Grant Duff, A History of the Mahrattas, volume 1 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1826), 450.
respectively. Borrowing from al-Fazl, al-Hamdani highlights local sights such as a well near the fort of Kherla; a spring near Melgadh with the power to petrify plants or wood; and the violent and sweet-smelling ginger flower as well as several high-quality local goods, including grain, rice, ghee, cotton, millet, cattle, teak, and bamboo. Finally, he offers a snapshot of its changing political landscape:

The seat of power (ḥākim-nishīn) of Berar is the city of Ellichpur. In the center are two rivers named the Sapan and the Bichan, and both of these rivers join the Purna. The shrine (dargah) of Rahman Shah Quds Allah north of the eminent city of Ellichpur on the Sapan River is venerable. The ‘urs lamps of that elder are famous... When Qutb al-Mulk arrived as the governor of Berar, the district of Pathri was incorporated. In the time of Akbar, the imperial domains were augmented. The length of this province was 200 kurohs from the forts of Batiala to Biragarh, and its width was 180 kurohs from Bidar to Hindiah. When the country of the Deccan was conquered, the district of Nandir with the sub-districts of Telangana were incorporated into the province of Muhammadabad-Bidar. The width of Berar was finally fixed, running from the district of Nandir to Hindiah as well as the length from Batiala to Chanda. Through the exertions of the late nawāb [Nizam ul-Mulk], the fort Manikdurg-Sirpur and other territories were incorporated into this province. Because the Maratha Bhonsles in recent years became co-conquerors (shārīk-i ghālib) of the province, its affairs fell into disorder (kārish az nasq bar āftād).

As I will explore later in this chapter, the capital, the shrine, and the opportunities and challenges of shared governance were closely intertwined in Berar in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Northeast of the Berar flatlands, Bahmani and Mughal imperial authority was more limited in the hilly and densely forested region of Gondwana. The Gonds, an Adivasi people spread across central India, established the kingdoms of Kherla, Deogadh, Gadha-Mandla, and

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66 Hamdani calls this range the sabhāchal. See BL, Persian Manuscripts, Add 23885, ff. 21b. On the division between the Balaghath and the Payanghat, see C. Brown, Central Provinces and Berar District Gazetteers, volume 1A (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1910), 43; A.C. Lyall, Gazetteer for the Haidarabād Assigned Districts, Commonly Called Berar (Bombay: Education Society’s Press, 1870), 1-2.

67 BL, Persian Manuscripts, Add 23885, ff. 22a.
Chanda in the Satpuda hills.\(^{68}\) Claiming descent from an earlier line of Gaoli rulers, including one Tulobaji,\(^ {69}\) the Deogad Gond rājās emerged by the seventeenth century as the wealthiest, most powerful, and therefore most enticing to the world-conquerors of Delhi. According to the Āʾīn, their forebear, a zamīndār named Jatba, was in possession of 2,000 cavalry, 50,000 foot soldiers, and more than 100 elephants, far exceeding the resources of the rival chieftains in his vicinity.\(^ {70}\) Jatba’s successors Koka Shah and Kesari Shah narrowly avoided Mughal conquest by acceding to successive demands for tribute. Bakht Buland, the most famous of the Deogad rulers, converted to Islam and paid his respects to Aurangzeb at Delhi. The latter awarded him the title buland-bakht (fortunate) but later changed it to nigūn-bakht (unfortunate) when his new vassal began to augment his domain with Mughal territory.\(^ {71}\) Bakht Buland was said to have founded the city of Nagpur by joining a series of hamlets called Rajapur Barsa and initiated a more intensive process of deforestation for settlement and cultivation.\(^ {72}\) When the Nagpur resident Richard Jenkins’ assistant Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar toured the region in the 1820s, residents continued to credit him with creating prosperity by guaranteeing the rights to land of local proprietors.\(^ {73}\) When the Bhonsles sought to consolidate their authority in Berar and

\(^{68}\) For a broader assessment of Gond political history, see Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*, 122-9.

\(^{69}\) For example, an account solicited by Vinayakrao Aurangbadkar in 1821-2 relayed that the first Deogad Gond rājā Jatba acquired the kingdom from the Gaolis. See BL, Mss Marathi, D44, ff. 34b. Also see Y.K. Deshpande, “Fresh Light on the History of the Gond Rajas of Deogarh,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 13 (1950): 231-3.


\(^{73}\) See extended quotation in Guha, *Environment*, 126.
Gondwana, they developed functional relationships with the successors of Mughal and Gond rulers, a process that will be discussed in detail below.

The accepted founder of the Bhonsle lineage that came to rule in the northeastern Deccan was Mudhoji Bhonsle, who, along with his kinsman Rupaji, was said to have held the office of village headman (*pāṭil*) of Hingani. However, later generations also claimed an ancestral right to the district headmanship (*deśmukhī*) of Kadewalit near Ahmadnagar. An order (*farmān*) from the dynastic archive at Nagpur relays the story of how the Bhonsle clan of Kadewalit paid obeisance to Ahmad Nizam Shah I in the early 1490s after he marched from Bidar to Bhingar, which became the foundation of his new residence, the Bagh-i Nizam, and the city of Ahmadnagar:

> All of the affairs of the kingdom (*umūrāt-i mulk*) were taken into hand. All of the proprietors and officials and traders of the blessed city presented themselves at the front of the fort. Suryaji, son of Shahji Bhonsle, who possessed the *dīsā ṭ* [*desāī*] of Kadewalit and six other territories, paid a sum of 3,000 *hons* and was distinguished with the full robes of the *dīsā ṭ* of Kadewalit and appointed to the service of the fort. With regard to his own business, the *dīsā ṭ* on behalf of Haidar Nayak, son of Bom Nayak, the headman (*muqaddam*) of the town of Bhingar, requested that since that town is near Junnar, and since a new city and fort have been founded here, he should be appointed to the command of the fort of Sarnar and to construct new fortifications. He will handle both appointments.

In addition to Suryaji’s confirmation in the *desāī* post, Haidar Nayak’s request to augment the fortifications near Bhingar was granted with financial support to be provided from the town of

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74 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 36a-39. I would like to thank Sumit Guha for making a scanned microfilm copy of this manuscript available to me. Also see G.S. Sardesai, *Atitāśika Gharāṇyāṇcyā Vaṃśāvali* (Mumbai: Government Central Press, 1957), 113; Nāgpūrkar Bhāṣyāṇcī Bakhar (hereafter *NBB*), edited by Y.M. Kale (Nagpur: Madhyaprant Sanshodhak Mandal, 1936), 5-6.

75 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 22a.

76 The Marathi translation of the Persian text, which itself is a transcription of a now-lost original *farmān*, records the name as Savner. Perhaps these names refer to the fort that under Shivaji was called Shivneri.

77 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 22a.
Narayangaon in Kadewalit. The Bhonsles’ rights in this district continued to be linked to control of Ahmadnagar. According to an account of the Mughal prince Daniyal’s conquest of the Nizam Shahi capital in 1599, the “proprietors and officials and cultivators were brought to court. Gifts were taken, and deeds were issued for their territories. Thus, Sharafji Bhonsle [later noted as son of Suryaji], the proprietor of the province Kadewalit paid his respects, gave a gift of 500 hons, and received a turban.”

Sharafji also received two new districts and some additional lands in different villages, thereby re-affirming and augmenting his deśmukhī rights in Kadewalit.

What kind of a family relationship existed between Mudhoji and Rupaji Bhonsle of Hingani and Shahaji, Suryaji, and Sharafji Bhonsle of Kadewalit is unclear. Nevertheless, the Kadewalit deśmukhī was an important part of the package of “nested rights” claimed by the Bhonsles from at least the early eighteenth century onwards. Such rights, as Stewart Gordon has argued, were multifariously tied to existing allocations of property within a particular locality; however, they also conferred new powers on the recipient. The above descriptions of local landowners – the Bhonsles of Kadewalit among them – arrayed before succeeding imperial regimes bears out Gordon’s conclusion that the deśmukh was a “hinge” figure between centralizing imperial authorities and village-based officials like the headman Haidar Nayak.

Bahmani, Mughal, and eventually Maratha rulers with expansionist ambitions had to win the

78 Composed in 1709 by one Keshavrai, son of Ramrai Chitnavis, of Bidar fort. See BL, Marathi D35, ff. 26a-31a.

79 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 30a.

80 For example, a 1710 writ of agreement (kadbā) in the name of Malji, son of Bhivaji Laudh, the pāṭīl of Bhamar in pargaṇa Chambhargod in Kadewalit regarding property stolen during an armed dispute with one Gombaji Gaekwad was authorized by witnesses (gavāhī) from the village assembly (gota) and then circulated to the Bhonsles. See BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 44a-46b.


82 Gordon, The Marathas, 33.
loyalty of desāīs and deśmukhs and corresponding leaders at the village level to consolidate their authority in newly conquered territories. In turn, for the Bhonsles of Nagpur, possession of the Kadewalit deśmukhī seat was a source of prestige, especially because of its longevity and independence from any specific conditions of service.

While certain accounts claim that the Hinganikar Bhonsles served under Shivaji, the relationship between this branch and the Bhonsle Chhatrapatis can be more assuredly dated to the critical period of political re-consolidation under Chhatrapati Rajaram and his queen Tarabai (1675-1761). In addition to the re-conquest of core Maratha forts, this process included new raids into Mughal territory, starting with the Karnatak near Rajaram’s refuge at Ginjee and moving northwards into Khandesh, Malwa, and Berar. In 1699, after fleeing from Ginjee, Rajaram planned an expedition into Berar and Gondwana at the invitation of the aforementioned Bakht Buland of Deogadh. Parsoji Bhonsle (d. 1711), the son of Mudhoji Bhonsle, was one of several sardārs who joined this expedition, which – with the exception of one division that successfully crossed the Narmada – was cut short by Mughal forces. After Rajaram’s death in 1700, Tarabai ordered more northern raids under the leadership of Nemaji Shinde, Keshavpant Pingle, and Parsoji Bhonsle. Accompanied by fifty thousand cavalry, they made it as far as

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83 See, for example, NBB, ed. Kale, 6, 8-9, 13-4. Included in Gupte’s account is a transcription of a sanad dated 1674 granting two villages in Kadewalit to Sabaji, the son of Mudhoji Bhonsle. In addition, Kale claims that Mudhoji Bhonsle’s son Rupaji is the same Rupaji Bhonsle mentioned in Sabhasad’s description of the siege of fort Salher. There is no supporting evidence of this claim. See Malhar Ramrao Chitnis, Śakakarte Śrī Śiva Chatrapati Mahārājā Hyānce Saptapraparityātmaka Caritra (hereafter Saptapraparityātmaka Caritra), ed. K.V. Herwadkar (Pune: Venus Publications, 2002), 92.


85 BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 4a; Grant Duff, A History of the Mahrattas, vol. 1, 389-90.

Kalabag in February 1704. Among the Mughal commanders who countered these raids was Rustam Khan, the Mughal deputy governor of Berar based at Ellichpur.

When the Maratha prince Shahu left Mughal captivity in 1707, he passed through Berar and Khandesh; along the way, he met Parsoji Bhonsle. By mid-1708, Parsoji had declared his support for the prodigal prince in open defiance of the solicitations of Tarabai and many of the Maratha mobility. In return, he was named senā sāheb subhā, a title of martial prowess akin to the title of senāpati, and authorized to collect tribute in Berar and Gondwana. When Parsoji died in October 1711, his son Kanhoji (d. 1737) asked Shahu for land to support the maintenance of a flower garden and oil lamps at his father’s final resting-place (śmaśāna-sthāla) in the village of Khed at the confluence of the Krishna and Venna Rivers. Shahu granted his request and recognized him to be the rightful heir of the senā sāheb subhā title. In April 1715, Kanhoji and Khanderao Dabhade at the head of force of three thousand soldiers raided Malwa, though they lost much of their plunder in battle with Sawai Jai Singh, the Mughal-appointed Rajput governor of Malwa.

Meanwhile, both Shahu and Tarabai were continually petitioning Delhi for rights to collect cauth and sardeśmukhī (usually 10 or 12 1/2 % of total land revenue) in the six śūbahs of

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89 The meeting between Shahu and Parsoji Bhonsle at Lambkani was brokered by the latter’s Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu jamanīs and the kulkarnī of Muthekhore, Bapuji Sonaji Dighe. See G.S. Sardesai, Marāṭhī Riyāsat, volume 5, part 1 (Bombay, 1942), 32. Later accounts of these events falsely credit the mediation to Shahu’s celebrated Kayastha scribe Khando Ballal. For a discussion of the narrative construction of Khando Ballal’s role, see Chapter 6.

90 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 62b-63b.

the Deccan. These rights, as I explained in the Introduction, were central to the delegation of imperial sovereignty in the Deccan. Emperor Bahadur Shah entertained requests from Shahu and Tarabai without issuing any formal decision in either party’s favor. During Zulfiqar Khan’s stint as governor of the Deccan from 1708 to 1713, he and his deputy Daud Khan Panni came to an informal agreement that the cauth could be collected through imperial officers. In 1718-9, Peshwa Balaji Viswanath made a successful bid for these rights in exchange for furnishing the kingmaker Saiyid Husain Ali Khan Barha with an army to seize Delhi from the wayward emperor Farrukhsiyar. Kanhoji’s cousins Santaji and Ranoji Bhonsle were part of the army that occupied the Mughal capital for a month or so while the Barha brothers initiated a bloody coup. While Santaji lost his life in a street melee, the Peshwa managed to extract formal sanads with the imperial seal for rights to svarājya, cauth and sardeśmukhī, including in the šūbah of Berar. 

Sanads notwithstanding, Kanhoji Bhonsle was one of many Maratha generals whose loyalties were tested by the emergence of an alternate source of patronage in the person of Chin Qilich Khan Nizam ul-Mulk, a Mughal statesman and founder of the “successor state” of Hyderabad. First appointed to the governorship of the Deccan in 1713, Nizam ul-Mulk in 1722

92 As early as 1700, Tarabai offered submission to Aurangzeb in exchange for recognition of her son Shivaji II and the grant of sardeśmukhī. For the various claims and counter-claims, see Satish Chandra, Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-1740 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27-8, 84-8, 114-5.

93 According to testimony offered in the late 1810s, a tomb (thadaga) was erected on the spot where he died. See BL, Mss Marathi, B26, ff. 123b; J.F. Blumhardt and S.G. Kanhere, eds., Catalogue of the Marathi Manuscripts in the India Office Library (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 73; NBB, ed. Kale, 37.

94 The original sanads issued to Balaji’s delegation no longer exist. Some were probably issued during the brief reign of Rafi ud-Darjat and some after the ascension of Muhammad Shah. These would have been retroactively dated to the date of Farrukhsiyar’s deposition, which was considered Muhammad Shah’s first regnal year. Grant Duff contested the assertion that Berar was included in these grants. See A.G. Pawar, “Some Documents Bearing on Imperial Mughal Grants to Raja Shahu (1717-24),” Proceedings of the Indian Historical Records Commission 17 (1940): 204-15; Chandra, Parties and Politics, 187, ft. 26; Grant Duff, A History of the Mahrattas, vol. 1, 450-2.
finally achieved his long-held ambition of acquiring the post of wazir at Delhi only to give it up for a more independent course. Munis D. Faruqui has pointed out that a principal obstacle to the consolidation of the Nizam’s authority in the Deccan was the strength of the Marathas. The relationship between the Nizam and the Marathas varied over the course of the 1720s. Peshwa Bajirao I fielded troops on behalf of Alam Ali Khan in a losing battle with the Nizam near Balapur in 1720. When the Nizam returned to the Deccan four years later, Bajirao prepared for another confrontation. Ultimately, he supported the Nizam against the upstart deputy governor Mubariz Khan at Sakharkhed in September 1724, earning a mansab rank of 7,000. But Nizam threw his weight behind Shahu’s rival Sambhaji II of Kolhapur (1692-1760), and they clashed again at Palkhed in 1728. This battle resulted in a decisive Maratha victory and the Nizam’s recognition of their claims to cauth and sardesmukhi. Extending a pattern established during the Mughal-Maratha wars of the late seventeenth century, conflict between the Nizam and the Marathas opened up a field of opportunity for defection, ambivalence, neutrality, delay and various other forms of counter-affiliation. As I will explore in subsequent sections, counter-affiliation from the perspective of imperial authority was treachery, or fitna; however, from the perspective of provincial governance, it was an expedient approach to the realities of power on the ground.

Kanhoji Bhonsle’s intentions were sufficiently uncertain in the months leading up to the battle of Sakharkhed to prompt an order from Shahu to remain neutral in the brewing struggle

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96 Chandra, Parties and Politics, 197, 229-30.
between the Nizam and Mubariz Khan, who had been actively seeking Kanhoji’s assistance. In February 1726, Kanhoji unsuccessfully clashed with the Nizam’s general Aiwaz Khan and chased the Maratha defector Chandrasen Jadhav before proceeding towards Golkonda to join the Peshwa’s Karnatak campaign. At the same time, however, he must have been considering his own chances on the other side of the battlefield. As early as mid-1727, the Peshwa’s partisan Ambaji Purandare received word that “if Kanhoji Bhonsle and Sripatrao Pratinidhi were to do the work of Bhaganagar [Hyderabad], the nawāb [Nizam ul-Mulk] would give Kanhoji the kingdom of Chanda and designate him as a separate king.” By 1730, it was well known that Kanhoji was subsisting on a grant of tax-free land revenue (jāgīr) made by the Nizam. An extant farmān indicates that this jāgīr included an assignment of 74,000 dāms from the pargāna of Kurha (Kurhad) in the district of Kalamb in Berar, which the Nizam had removed from its previous owner Saiyid Haji Khan. Around this time, Kanhoji was also indiscriminately extorting ghāsdānā, an irregular grain levy for feeding horses. As I will explore in this and the following chapter, the levying of ghāsdānā, like dodging a summons to fight or neglecting to pay off arrears, was an oblique challenge to the delegated sovereignty of the Peshwa that was redressed by non-violent diplomatic means, or at the last extremity, by war.

97 SSRPD, edited by G.C. Vad and D.B. Parasnis, volume 1 (Pune: Deccan Vernacular Translation Society, 1902), no. 12, pg. 5; Chandra, Parties and Politics, 229, fn. 19.
101 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 41b. The dates recorded on this farmān are Muhammad Shahi regnal year 23 and fašli year 1150, or 1741 CE. Since Kanhoji died in 1737, it may be a copy of an earlier order.
The Maratha central government considered defection to be a grave breach of trust in relations with both its subjects and external powers.\(^{103}\) Included in a set of negotiating terms (\textit{kalam}) exchanged with Delhi in the early 1720s were the statements that “our people should not take service with the Mughals” and that “those of our Maratha nobility who serve with the Mughals should be given back to us.”\(^{104}\) In a letter to the Peshwa’s representative with the Nizam, Purandare, the official mentioned earlier, re-iterated, “There is an agreement (\textit{karāṛ}) that the \textit{nawāb} should not take on our [people], and we should not take on the \textit{nawāb’s} [people]. Now that Kanhoji has been taken on after he absconded, how will this provision be implemented?”\(^{105}\) In addition to castigating the Nizam for violating the terms of their agreement, the Maratha central government sought to remedy the situation by mandating reconciliation. Having earlier sent an agent to Satara to “make promises (\textit{āṇ-śapath}) of loyalty at the feet of the \textit{mahārājā} [Shahu],” Kanhoji made a personal visit to Shahu sometime between 1733 and 1734.\(^{106}\) But before their relationship could be repaired, he hastened back to Berar, prompting Shahu to depute his nephew Raghuji to imprison him. Kanhoji was eventually caught and imprisoned in Nandir in Vani \textit{pargana} just east of the Wardha River; several of his followers were captured; and his entire household was escorted to Satara in the summer of 1734.\(^{107}\) Later accounts suggest that it was Kanhoji’s haughty and violent behavior – including refusing to dine

\(^{103}\) By the second half of the eighteenth century, sequestration (\textit{japt}) was the most common punishment for defectors. See Chapter 2.

\(^{104}\) \textit{SPD}, ed. Sardesai, vol. 10, no. 1, 3.


with Shahu, addressing himself as mahārājā, and even forcibly demanding women’s breast milk for his consumption – that finally drove Shahu to turn Raghuji against his own uncle.  

While these charges cannot be verified, it is clear that Kanhoji’s transgressions were serious enough to tarnish his reputation and inspire a re-distribution of patronage within the Bhonsle clan.

Back in 1727, the Maratha central government had re-distributed one third of Kanhoji’s service assignment (saranjām) to his cousin Ranoji and nephew Raghuji. After Kanhoji fell out of favor, Raghuji became Shahu’s new favorite and a member of his extended royal household. In this regard, he was almost the equal of Shahu’s adopted son Fattesingh Bhonsle, who became Raghuji’s co-parcenary in Berar and military companion in the Karnatak later in the 1730s. By dint of a grant (ināmpatra) dated November 22, 1733, Shahu awarded Raghuji with a vatan for the permanent maintenance of his line (vamśa paramparene cālavne) in the village of Deur, located about twenty-five kilometers northeast of Satara. Because the Deur vatan, like the Kadewalit deśmukhī, was not technically dependent on the contingencies of a service relationship, it conferred significant prestige on Raghuji’s line. At the same time, its physical proximity to the Maratha capital allowed for swift punitive action, should his political activities violate the commands of central authority.

Between Kanhoji’s fall from favor in 1733 and his death in 1737, the Maratha central government began to implement a fresh division of the Berar revenues. As was customary in all of the Mughal provinces of the Deccan conquered by the Marathas, the sardeśmukhī share, or ten

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109 After his brother’s death in Delhi, he was also known as Sawai Santaji.


111 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 47a-b.
percent of the total revenue yield, was reserved for the Chhatrapati. In theory, the cauth share, or twenty-five percent collected on the remainder (ain-tankhā), would be split into the bābtī share for the Chhatrapati and the mokāśā share for further re-distribution. After certain special cesses, including six percent in sāhotrā and three percent in nādgauṇdā, were levied for Shahu’s favorites, the remainder (ain-mokāśā) would then be available for military service assignments. In practice, each province had its own particular set of flexible arrangements. In the case of Berar, the bulk of the mokāśā was transferred from Kanhoji to other members of the Bhonsle clan with Raghuji as the primary recipient. Central government records for individual parganaś in Berar reflect this division. For example, records for Nandgaon Peth, Pale, and other parganaś in the district (sarkār) of Gawel display an entry for Kanhoji Bhonsle for the year 1732 and a separate entry for Raghoji Bhonsle for the period running from August 29, 1733 to the year 1738 under the revenue heading mokāśā va nime jakāt. Other named recipients of mokāśā include Fattesingh Bhonsle, Ranoji Bhonsle, Kanhoji’s son Rayaji, and even Kayastha Prabhu scribal officials employed by the Bhonsles.

112 Wink, Land and Sovereignty, 310-1.

113 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 71a-74a; PD, Shahu Daftar, rumal 5, nos. 4082-4.

114 PD, Shahu Daftar, rumal 31, nos. 44315, 44318, 44324, 44288.

115 For example, see PD, Shahu Daftar, rumal 31, no. 44305. According to a letter and an agreement dated February 3, 1741 and November 25, 1748, Rayaji was entitled to a saranjām to support himself and his army as long as he served under Raghoji. The agreement also specified that the latter was to give Rayaji 50,000 rupees for his personal maintenance, three-quarters lākh rupees annually to pay off his creditors, and 25,000 rupees in lieu of saranjām for his troops. See BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 51a-52a, 57b-58b.

116 See Chapter 3.
By 1739, Raghuji Bhonsle possessed extensive rights to mokāsā in Berar and Gondwana\textsuperscript{117} as well as the title of senā sāheb subhā. In addition, Shahu issued a sanad in Raghuji’s name for rights to collect cauth in the northeastern provinces of Bundelkhand, Allahabad, Lucknow, Maksudabad (Murshidabad), and Dhaka.\textsuperscript{118} Even more so than previous grants, this sanad gave Raghuji license to establish a distinct sphere of authority in central and northeastern India. Nevertheless, this authority still existed within the parameters of Raghuji’s vassalage to Shahu, which entailed participation in centrally planned military expeditions, regular attendance at court in Satara, and forfeiture of a significant portion of the Berar yield. To buttress his sphere of authority, Raghuji employed a repertoire of strategies of counter-affiliation that created friction with Peshwa Bajirao I, the leading representative of the Maratha Chhatrapati in Raghuji’s lifetime. Conversely, counter-affiliation fostered a degree of political amity and cooperation with non-Maratha local rulers. It was through these promiscuous counter-affiliations that Mughal-Maratha shared governance in the Deccan was realized.

**Conquest and Counter-Affiliation in Berar and Gondwana**

In popular historical memory, Raghuji Bhonsle is best remembered for mounting several Maratha campaigns in Orissa and Bengal. These campaigns, which took place in 1742-3, 1744-5, and 1747-8, followed from the 1738 sanad extending Raghuji’s authority and resulted in significant financial and political gains for his nascent dynasty. In addition, for many twentieth-century Maharashtrian Brahman historians, they embellished the story of the growth and expansion of Maratha rule across the Indian subcontinent, particularly under the leadership of

\textsuperscript{117} See BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 56b-57a, 63b-67b. Raghuji was entitled to a third portion of the Kanhoji’s half of the revenues of Devgahr and Chanda as well as half of the customs duties (jakāt), while Fattesingh Bhonsle retained the other half. In the next section, I explore how Raghuji expanded his holdings in Gondwana.

\textsuperscript{118} BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 85a-89b; G33, ff. 16a-b.
Raghuji’s rival Peshwa Bajirao I. This narrative usually highlights the heroism of Raghuji’s Brahman general Bhaskarram Kolhatkar and his martyrdom at the hands of the forces of the Bengal nawab Alivardi Khan. Outside Maharashtra, the memory of these campaigns has been very different. Sharply critical eighteenth-century Persian tārikh accounts such as Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai’s Siyar al-Muta’akkhirīn dwelled on the violence and chaos of the Maratha raids. They also reinforced a pre-existing stereotype of the Maratha as bārgīr or bārgī, a term used to denote a Maratha cavalry soldier employed in the Deccan. Most famously, the Bengali verse narrative Mahārāṣṭra-purāṇa (1751) of Gangaram Dev, who probably experienced the Maratha raids first-hand, asserted that the goddess Durga commanded the bārgīs to invade in order to punish the sins of the Bengal nawabs. Similarly frightful references to Maratha invasion endure in Bengali lullabies to this day. But falling between these poles of valor and terror was a broad spectrum of political strategies, ranging from direct conquest to overlordship to counter-affiliative friendship, employed in the service of Maratha expansion and

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120 For example, the Maratha cavalrmen serving under Malik Ambari were called bārgī-ān. The other term often used was qazzāq, which connotated an armed figure closer to a robber or, in the language of Company officials, a brigand. See, The Maāthir-ul-Umarā: Being Biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu Officers of the Timurid Sovereigns of India From 1500 to About 1780 A.D. By Nawwāb Samsām-ud-Daula Shāh Nawāz Khān and His Son ‘Abdul Ḥayy, translated by Henry Beveridge and Baini Prashad, 2nd edition, volume 1 (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1979), 58, 185, 451, 536; also see Beveridge, “Derivation of the Words Bargī and Sabaio,” *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (July 1906): 704-6. For a further discussion of the characterization of the Maratas in eighteenth-century Indo-Persian writing, see Chapter 5.

governance. These strategies were most preponderant in Berar and Gondwana across the primary frontier of Raghuji Bhonsle’s expansion into the Deccan.

In Gondwana, Raghuji’s primary strategy was to bring his military might to bear on the succession disputes of local rulers. As most spectacularly revealed by Maratha interventions in the Rajput kingdoms in the later eighteenth century, this strategy could lead to bloody and grievous consequences. The outcome in the case of the Gond kingdoms was less harmful in the long term, though it was not without its costs. When Chand Sultan, Bakht Buland’s successor at Deogad, died in 1739, his four sons struggled for the throne. Wali Shah killed his eldest brother Mir Bahadar, prompting the senior queen Ratan Kuwar to summon Maratha aid through her minister Raghunath Singh. The minister stumbled across Raghuji Bhonsle’s army near the town of Shirasghat on the banks of the Wainganga River and agreed to broker an agreement between Raghuji and the two Deogad heirs, Akbar Shah and Burhan Shah. In a 1739 letter to Raghuji, they referred to themselves with the titles of mahārājādhīrājā and mahāpāti devarājā gosāī, stating, “Despite not having the right, Wali Shah was tyrannically ruling so we summoned you and your forces to help us free the kingdom and agreed with you to the following articles.” These articles included a payment of ten lākh rupees for the maintenance of Raghuji’s cavalry; a third of the domains of the Deogad kingdom, including the fort of Pavani and the sub-districts


123 See, for example, the interventions in Mewar described in R.K. Saxena, Maratha Relations With the Major States of Rajputana (1761-1818 A.D.) (New Delhi: S. Chanda & Co., 1973), 59-85.

124 The accounts of the succession in the Nagpur bakhars differ. We may surmise that Akbar Shah and Burhan Shah were the official heirs of Chand Sultan, while Wali Shah and Mir Bahadar were the sons of concubines. The latter and his brother Badal Shah were allotted a junior kingdom at Bagheda. See BL, Mss Marathi, D33, 14a-18a; NBB, ed. Kale, 47-8.
of Multapi and Marud; and a promise to consult him before making any movements or entering into any engagements.\textsuperscript{125} As they had done with the Mughals a hundred years earlier, these Gond rājās preserved their symbolic authority by ceding effective sovereignty to a more powerful ruler.

It was at the time of Raghuji’s subjugation of Deogadh that he first became associated with an elite Rohilla Afghan household that would come to rule the towns of Seoni and Chhapara, and in so doing, fortify the Bhonsles’ authority in Gondwana. According to an account of the Afghan Seoni-Chhapara jāgīrdārs commissioned in 1831 by the Company agent of the Saugor and Narbudda Territories, their ancestor was an obscure Afghan cavalryman named Raj Khan (d. 1734)\textsuperscript{126} who had served under the Hada Rajput kings of Kota-Bundi before migrating to central India. Eventually, Raj Khan won a jāgīr at Dongertal by paying fealty to none other than Bakht Buland, and he took the fort of Sangarhi (also known as Sahangarh) on behalf of the Deogadh ruler.\textsuperscript{127} Coming to the notice of Raghuji Bhonsle, his son Muhammad Khan (d. 1761) in exchange for his loyalty received Seoni and Chhapara in jāgīr.\textsuperscript{128} Muhammad Khan’s successors Majid Khan (d. 1774) and Muhammad Amin Khan (d.1798) continued to rule at Seoni and Chhapara and came to the aid of the Bhonsles on several occasions, most prominently during their campaigns in Gadha-Mandla in the late 1790s.\textsuperscript{129}

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\textsuperscript{125} BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 75a-77b.
\textsuperscript{126} Referred to as Taj Khan in Charles Grant, \textit{The Gazetteer of the Central Provinces of India} (Bombay: Education Society’s Press, 1870), 473.
\textsuperscript{127} Grant also alleges that Raj Khan impressed Bakht Buland by killing a bear single-handedly with his sword! See Grant, \textit{Gazetteer}, 473.
\textsuperscript{128} Madhya Pradesh State Archives (MPSA), District Office Records, Incomplete Records Related to Seoni District, “Musulmaun Jagheerdars of Seonee,” ff. 124-133.
\textsuperscript{129} For example, see \textit{NBB}, ed. Kale, 84, 92, 109, 142, 150, 178, 191.
\end{flushright}
While I will briefly touch on this later history of Seoni-Chhapara in Chapter 5, here I want to emphasize that the Bhonsles’ relationship with the Afghan rulers of Seoni-Chhapara was emblematic of the way in which the Maratha conquest of Gondwana and Berar entailed the cultivation of friendly affiliations with local Afghan martial elites. The most remarkable instance of this process – their friendship with the Panni nawābs of Ellichpur – will be discussed in detail in the following section. The Bhonsles’ promotion of new Afghan nawābī states at Seoni-Chhapara and Ellichpur echoes the rise of the Rohilkhand and Farrukhabad nawābs in the Doab. C.A. Bayly emphasizes how these north Indian Afghan nawābs sought political respectability by seeking relationships with the Mughal successor state at Awadh; similarly, I show that the Afghan nawābs of central India shored up their newfound status and authority by pursuing friendships with the Maratha rājās of Nagpur.130

The Bhonsles consolidated their control over Gondwana by applying pressure to other local rulers to cede key territories and ratify permanent alliances with them. Badal Shah, another son of Chand Sultan and the ruler of the far eastern territory of Bagheda, in a February 23, 1738 letter expressed his friendship (iṣḥatva) with Raghuji Bhonsle by handing over the fort Bhowargarh and the pargāna Dhamb.131 In the early 1740s, Akbar Shah avoided a brewing conflict with his brother by taking refuge with the Nizam, which allowed Raghuji to take possession of additional territories in Deogadh, including the capital city of Nagpur.132 Collaborating with a disgruntled former minister, Raghuji forced the Chanda ruler Nilkanth Shah to give up Chandrapur fort and retire to Balapur. The ensuing plan for joint collection of the


131 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 77b-78b.

132 Raghuji seems to have had some involvement in the assassination of Akbar Shah of Deogadh after his defection to the Nizam. See *NBB*, ed. Kale, 53-4.
revenue of the kingdom conveyed the delicate balance between dominance and friendship structuring the relationship between the two rulers. Out of every 110 rupees, 37.5 were alloted to both the Maratha senā sāheb subhā and the Gond ruler in a category termed bhāī vāṭanī, or fraternal distribution, while an extra 10 rupees in sardeśmukhī and twenty-five in cauth were alloted to the former.\footnote{Strangely, Jenkins records the fraternal share as Rs 37.8. See Jenkins, Report, 107.} In lieu of this collection, Nilkanth Shah would receive a fixed payment of 1,500 rupees, thereby reliquishing powers of revenue administration to his new Maratha overlord.\footnote{BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 104b-106b.} In addition, he made a special grant of the pargāṇa of Amgaon as restitution for the injury of Raghuji’s hand committed by his cavalry-soldier, one Rahim Dad Khan.\footnote{BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 107a-b.} Similar arrangements for joint rule existed with rulers north of the Narmada in Bundelkhand. For example, by means of a 1739 agreement (tahanāmā), a prince named Harid Singhji accepted Raghuji Bhonsle’s service (naukarī); granted him the parganas of Sihora, Katangi, and Amoda; vowed to provide military assistance for future conquests (mulukgirī); and promised to pay the cauth and sardeśmukhī.\footnote{BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 80b-81a.} Thus, the implementation of Maratha claims to cauth and sardeśmukhī in the Deccan led to the re-distribution of authority at the local level and the gradual creation of new ruling partnerships through a combination of violent and diplomatic means.

Just as in Gondwana, initial Maratha encounters with entrenched government in Berar featured their fair share of conflict. As I outlined in the previous section, Berar was a Mughal province with a centrally appointed governor. After Nizam ul-Mulk returned to the Deccan in the 1720s, he continued the Mughal government in Berar, appointing Aiwaz Khan Azad ud-Daulah

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\footnote{133 Strangely, Jenkins records the fraternal share as Rs 37.8. See Jenkins, Report, 107.}
\footnote{134 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 104b-106b.}
\footnote{135 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 107a-b.}
\footnote{136 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 80b-81a.}
\end{flushleft}
to the governorship after the battle of Sakharkhed in 1720. But given that Berar was a major
source of his mokāsā revenues, Raghuji Bhonsle also sought to control the government of the
province. Al-Hamdani records in the Sawāniḥ-i Dakān that in 1731, Raghuji killed Isa Khan, a
jāgīrdār in the district of Kherla, and seized the villages in his jāgīr as well as the fort of
Salbardi; however, three years later, Nizam ul-Mulk re-took the fort and restored Babu, son of
Isa Khan, to his father’s jāgīr. In December 1737, Raghuji once again tried to secure his
access to the Berar mokāsā by punishing Shuja’at Khan, who had become sūbahdār after the
death of Aiwaz Khan Azad ud-Daulah in 1729. In retaliation for Shuja’at Khan’s withholding of
cauth payments and refusal to enter into negotiations, Raghuji marched on Ellichpur. The
sūbahdār lost his life in the ensuing battle.

The early nineteenth-century Nagpur minister Yashwantrao Ramchandra and son of
Ramchandra Dado, the Bhonsles’ envoy at Ellichpur and Hyderabad, told a very different tale
regarding Raghuji’s killing of Shuja’at Khan:

Raghoji Bhonsle maintained a friendship (dostī) with the governor of Alajpur [Ellichpur]
Sujyayet Khan [Shuja’at Khan] as if he was his kin (culat). Appajipant worked for the
Khan as a revenue collector. Based on a landlord’s complaint, Sujyayet Khan sat him on
a donkey, shaved his head, and sent him out of the city. Appajipant went to Raghoji
Bhonsle. Realizing that the dishonor of Brahmans was taking place in his Hindu
kingdom, Raghoji Bhonsle mustered his cavalry and traveled to Alajpur. He fought
Sujyayet Khan two kos from the village of Bhugaon and cut off his head. Taking
possession of his kettledrum, he surrounded Alajpur with the intention of looting the city.
There was no ruler there. This imperial city and dwelling-place would come to ruin. The
Pathan [Ismail Khan Panni] sent Ramchandra Dado to conduct negotiations (suwāl-
jawāb) and settle the amount of a tribute. Raghoji Bhonsle laid siege on a subsequent
occasion when he came to know about a precious diamond owned by the merchant
Narayan Nayak. Ramchandrapant paid a price of seven thousand rupees to the merchant
and delivered the jewel to Raghoji. He was satisfied. The Mughal governor died.

137 BL, Persian Manuscripts, Add 23885, ff. 27a.
138 BL, Mss Marathi, D33, 9a-b.
This testimony is replete with the creative distortions of memory. Collapsing several successive events into one frame, it suggests that Raghuji was motivated by both simple greed and a Hindu dharmic imperative to protect Brahmans from harm.\(^{139}\) There is no indication of such a motivation in other accounts of the event.\(^{140}\) Leaving aside its distortions, what is useful about the testimony is its starting assumption, which is that a quasi-familial friendship subsisted between the Bhonsles of Nagpur and the Berar governor of Ellichpur. As I will show throughout the remainder of this chapter and in the following chapter, quasi-familial intimate friendship was the conceptual framework within which Maratha and non-Maratha governments in the Deccan organized their interactions. Of course, such a friendship was a strategic partnership. Because it was premised on self-interest, or put more crudely, on profit sharing, it could break down into antagonism if one party failed to meet its terms – for example, by withholding revenue. Though unsentimental, friendship was not devoid of sentiment. Rather, preserving friendships required the constant exchange of friendly sentiments through diplomatic negotiation (*jawāb-suwwāl*) as practiced by go-betweens like Ramchandra Dado. The border between friendship and antagonism, and between violence and diplomacy, was thin.

After Shuja’at Khan was killed in battle, Nasir Jang, the second eldest son of Nizam ul-Mulk, appointed Saiyid Sharif Khan (d. 1751) to the post of deputy governor of Berar,\(^{141}\)

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139 The idea that a core mission of Maratha kingship was to protect Brahmans (and cows) stems from the nineteenth-century idea of Shivaji as a *gava-brāhmaṇa pratipālak*. See Chapter 2.


141 According to his entry in the *Ma‘āṣir al-Umarā*, Saiyid Sharif Khan was the grandson of Mir Saiyid Muhammad Qannauji, a noted scholar and spiritual guide to the Mughal emperors Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. At the end of Muhammad Shah’s reign, he migrated to the Deccan with Nizam ul-Mulk. He was stationed in Berar with the title of *bakṣi* and eventually became the leading authority in the province. See *The Maāthir-ul-Umarā*, ed. Beveridge and Prasad, vol. 2, 821-3.
imploring Raghuji to establish regular communications with him.\(^\text{142}\) At the time, the prince was administering the Deccan while his father was in Delhi preparing for an imminent battle against the Persian ruler Nadir Shah, who crossed into India and plundered and occupied the Mughal capital in 1739. Bhonsle seems to have spent much of that year entangled in petty fights with Maratha generals in the Nizam’s service, though he too had been summoned to the north to halt Nadir Shah’s invasion.\(^\text{143}\) In subsequent years, Raghuji and Nasir Jang met with very different ends. Over the course of 1740-1, the former obtained significant profits in a successful campaign to depose Chanda Saheb, an upstart minister of the nawāb of Arcot,\(^\text{144}\) while the latter conceded several territories to the Marathas and mounted an unsuccessful rebellion against his father. After the death of Nizam-ul Mulk in 1748, Nasir Jang ascended to power and briefly ruled until a rebellion mounted by his nephew Muzaffar Jang led to his assassination in 1750. The letters that Nasir Jang sent to Raghuji in this period, which were transcribed as part of Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar’s research into the history of Nagpur, reveal some of the possibilities and tensions of the political relation of friendship.\(^\text{145}\)

Several of Nasir Jang’s letters concerned humdrum matters of local administration that required cooperation between the two rulers. For example, he requested in a 1748 letter that Raghuji provide assistance to an official named Khwaja Abdal Hazi Khan, who had been despatched to Karanja to inquire with the village headmen of the area about affairs of state (ba-

\(^{142}\) BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 120b.

\(^{143}\) SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 15, nos. 82, 85, 93, pgs. 78-9, 81-2, 104.

\(^{144}\) Bhonsle ransomed Chanda Saheb for a handsome price. See Chapter 4.

\(^{145}\) BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 69a, 79a, 120a-125a.
Several letters relayed reports of Raghuji’s collectors making undue exactions of revenue. The same Khan had notified Nasir Jang that “some people of the strong and powerful one [Raghuji Bhonsle] were demanding excessive amounts of cauth from the pargana Mahur and others since last year. They were becoming the source of the cultivators’ confusion and damage (maṣdar-i barkhāsh wa aẓīyat). So it should be written to them that they should refrain from countless molestations, and they should be warned not to engage in extortion of any kind (ḥīch waja-yi ziyādat-i talabī nakardah).” Jang voiced similar objections to collections in the parganas of Akot and Adgaon and in territories in the pargana Mandgaon composing the jāgīr of a judge (qāẓī) named Saiyid Muhammad Qasam Khan. Complaints of improper collection, and the stern orders issued to redress them, were endemic to revenue administration, but their swift resolution was especially important in the jointly ruled province of Berar.

The fair and efficient operation of revenue administration depended upon maintaining friendly relations between co-rulers, which in turn was predicated upon a healthy degree of trust. In one missive, Nasir Jang expounds:

In the exemplars of ethics (nuskhā-yi akhlāq) it has been written that the test of a friend (imtiḥān-i dost) is that whenever a rough and arduous event occurs (har gāḥ namwar sa‘b wa shadīd itīfāq uftad), full and complete trust [in him] comes to hand (i‘timād-i kullī mī rasad). In fact, the rule for gold is that it emerges unsullied out of the test of a crucible. Although the greatness appearing in this court was fortuitous and not connected with an ethical design, still it is a fact that the accidents of goodness have resulted from the trust

146 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 121a.
147 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 124a.
148 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 123b, 125a.
and sincerity (ṣidq) and purity (ṣafāʾ) of the refuge of courage [Raghuji Bhonsle].

This letter’s expression of confidence in Raghuji’s sincerity co-existed with and ideally counteracted suspicions of unfaithfulness. Whispers of disloyalty could easily tarnish the delicate purity of friendship:

We have trusted the refuge of courage [Raghuji Bhonsle] in these matters, but as it has been scrupulously written, should any accident occur, he should take care in these matters and chastise those who show signs of audacity (iqdām bā harkāt). It is inevitable that the arrival of such news to the ears of the sworn allies (ba gosh-i muḥalifān) of that refuge of courage will be the cause of crimes and certainly will be borne by those dog-headed ones (sag-sarīḥā) who are the opposite of this ruler (khilāf-i in sar-dārīst). It has been simply stated that one should not allow the weak opinions of whisperers that needlessly vitiate faith to enter into one’s affairs and dealings (ba auhām-i za ūf-i wushāt bī-asl zinhār-i taghaiyur ba-ahwāl wa atwār-i khūd rāh nadādah). With absolute firmness (ba kamāl-i ustuwārī), one should be vigilant of one’s favors, staying on the steady path of sincerity and resolute trust (bar jadat-i rusūkh ikhlās wa i tiqād-i ṣābit-qadam buda mutaraṣīd-i ināyāt bāshand). What more is there to say? Good rulers do not agitate, and by logical inference, rule that cannot bear up is not secure (sar-dārī ki taḥamul nadāshtah bāshad nadz-i aqla-an sar-dārī-yi wa musalam nīst).

In keeping with these admonitions, Nasir Jang enjoined Raghuji in several instances to attend to the instructions of his trusted followers Samsam-ud Daulah Shah Nawaz Khan and Muhammad Qazi Dayam, both of whom supported him in his fatal succession struggle with Muzaffar Jang in 1749-50. In addition, Raghuji was expected to cooperate with the Berar governor Saiyid Sharif Khan. In future years, the friendship between the Nizam’s representative at Ellichpur and the Nagpur rājā would continue to be critical to joint rule of Berar.

Over the course of the 1750s, the friendship between the Bhonsles of Nagpur and the followers of the Nizam of Hyderabad evolved through intermittent conflict and mediation,
eventually assuming a more formal and stable character through the *sāt-cālīs* agreement of 1757.

In early 1754, Salabat Jang, the son of Nizam ul-Mulk who had succeeded to the Nizamate in 1751, and his *diwān*, the aforementioned Shah Nawaz Khan, planned an expedition to check Raghuji’s extractive activities in Berar. In this endeavor, they had the tacit support of Peshwa Balaji Bajirao. In the early 1740s, Raghuji and Peshwa Bajirao I had fought for control over the northeastern frontier of Maratha expansion. With the blessing of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah, Bajirao even allied with Nawab Alivardi Khan in repelling Bhonsle’s invasion of Orissa and Bengal.152 Although the Bhonsles’ and the Peshwas’ separate spheres of influence had been settled in 1743-4, and although this settlement had been re-affirmed after Shahu’s death in 1749, there continued to be tension between the two powers.153 In a compilation of Shah Nawaz Khan’s letters called the *Ruqʿāt-i Ṣamsām al-Daulah*, a letter to Bajirao conveys sentiments similar to those expressed earlier in Nasir Jang’s letters in order to make a subtle critique of Raghuji’s willful conduct. “Truth and justice are precious everywhere,” he asserted, and further on exclaimed, “Praise God that [your] unshakeable integrity and truthful conduct and constancy of words and agreements are known to the world. All of these are what greatness and leadership require. There is no other discernment of the nuances of truth and falsehood besides the sight of those blessed with divine favors.” Though he went on to suggest that an

152 In addition, Bajirao on several occasions despatched his generals to raid Gardha-Mandla, a thickly forested tract on the banks of the Narmada, despite its proximity to the core domains of the Bhonsles. See *Vaidya Daptarāntūn Nivādalele Kāgad* (hereafter *VDNK*), edited by S.L. Vaidya, volume 4 (Pune: BISM, 1949), no. 13, 18, pgs. 10-11, 18-9; *SPD*, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 29, 33, pgs. 21, 24-5.

undertaking against Raghunath may be desirable, he re-iterated terms for a potential mediation that had already been circulated. These terms included desisting from inciting rebellions around Hyderabad and extorting excess revenue from Berar, repaying a sum of five lākhs, handing over Gawelgadh fort, and sending troops into Bengal.\footnote{Salar Jung Manuscripts Library (herafter SJML), Persian Manuscripts, No. 154, ff. 128.}

Evidently, Raghunath did not agree to these terms. Salabat Jang and Shah Nawaz Khan authorized the Nizam-affiliated Maratha commander Sultanji Nimbalkar to lead a force into Berar. Among the cavalrymen posted on the right-hand side of this battalion were two Panni Afghan officers, Sultan Khan and his cousin and son-in-law Sarmast Khan Panni.\footnote{al-Husseini, Tārīkh-i Rāḥat Afzā, 286.} As I will discuss in the next section, Sultan Khan’s son Ismail Khan became the ṣūbahdār of Berar under Nizam Ali Khan, founded a nawāb ruling household at Ellichpur and established an extraordinarily robust camaraderie with Raghunath’s heirs Janoji and Mudhoji Bhonsle. But, at this juncture, the Nizam’s forces quickly bested Bhonsle’s. Sarmast and Sultan Khan, along with Nimbalkar, served as diplomatic intermediaries to settle terms for reconciliation, which, in accordance with Shah Nawaz Khan’s letter to Bajirao, included the forfeiture of five lākhs worth of cash.\footnote{al-Husseini, Tārīkh-i Rāḥat Afzā, 287.} In exchange, Raghunath demanded that the Nizam assign a permanent jāgīr to his son, which materialized in the assignment of a manṣāb at the rank of 5,000 ẓāt/5,000 suwār\footnote{In 1756, it was increased to 7,000/7,000. See BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 134a-137a.} to his eldest son Janoji Bhonsle. As described in the Tārīkh-i Rāḥat Afzā (1760) of Saiyid Muhammad Ali al-Husseini, Shah Nawaz Khan assented and invited Raghunath to his camp to finalize the deal, but not everyone on the victor’s side was prone to reconcile. The high-ranking general Mir Najaf
Ali Khan, who not incidentally was al-Husseini’s patron, signaled his disapprobation by refusing to alight from his elephant to greet him. This relatively minor conflict would not be the last between the Bhonsles and the Nizam, but its resolution would also not be the last to yield new incentives for preserving their friendship.

About a year after this scuffle, Raghuji Bhonsle died. Through a settlement made at Pune, the succession struggle between his sons was resolved in favor of the eldest Janoji, while his brothers Mudhoji, Vyankoji, and Sabaji received separate, semi-autonomous domains. In a similar attempt to forestall fraternal conflict through territorial division, Salabat Jang on the advice of Peshwa Balaji Bajirao appointed his brothers Mir Mughal, Basalat Jang, and Nizam Ali Khan to the Aurangabad, Bijapur and Berar șubahs, respectively, in 1756. Nizam Ali Khan’s appointment provoked tensions with the Bhonsles that manifested in at least two discrete military engagements between 1756 and 1759. In early February 1757, Nizam Ali Khan came into conflict with Janoji’s top general Raghuji Karande near the town of Akola. In mid-1758, these two forces clashed for a second time at Washim. Again, Nizam Ali Khan relied on a conduit of supplies and reinforcements originating in the entrepot of Burhanpur, and near the time of this


159 For a more detailed explanation of this struggle, see Chapter 2.


161 Additional minor scuffles are attested in certain sources but not others. For example, see the Bhonsles’ general Raghuji Karande’s conflict with Muhammad Mu’in Khan in 1756 in al-Husseini, Tārīkh-i Rāḥat Afzā, 304; and with Ibrahim Khan Gardi in 1757 in SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 93, pgs. 98-9.

conflict, he extorted its wealthiest merchants for cash. The Marathas aimed to cut off this supply chain by surrounding the Nizam’s army; however, it seems that they ultimately lost. Extant accounts suggest that the seed of these conflicts lay in Nizam Ali Khan’s efforts to mobilize an army in support of his new station in Berar. His mobilization of military force disrupted the regular state of affairs between the two powers by breeding an intolerable degree of suspicion and uncertainty. Regardless of who fired the first shot, the rather ad hoc conditions of joint provincial rule combined with the unpredictability of individual political actors produced a powderkeg of potentially fatal misunderstandings. Mutual trust – and a more enduring peace – demanded the regularity of a more formal diplomatic arrangement.

The sāt-cālīs, or sixty-forty, arrangement for the distribution of revenues in Berar between the Nizam and the Bhonsles, respectively, evolved out of the peace established at the end of the 1750s. This arrangement replaced the more informal one operating since the initial Maratha expansion into Berar in the 1730s whereby the Bhonsles’ mokāsā was to amount to one-half of the yield. Insofar as the Bhonsles were now entitled to a smaller share, the agreement represented a short-term financial loss – after all, it took several clashes of arms for them to come to the bargaining table. But overall this agreement represented a reasonable determination of the delegation of Mughal sovereignty at the provincial level, offering a potential respite from

163 BL, Persian Manuscripts, Add 23885, ff. 72b; al-Husseini, Ṭārīkh-i Rāḥat Afzā, 332-3.

164 Setumadhavrao Pagadi argued that the 60/40 split dated to the conclusion of the 1757 conflict on the basis of the conclusion of the chronicler Girdhari L’al in the Ṭārīkh-i Zafrah (1771). L’al states, “Previously, half of the collection of Berar belonged to the government, and half was taken by Janoji. Now, it was determined that sixty rupees would go to the government and forty to Janoji for a total of one hundred.” But based on all available documentation, it is clear that the settlement process was ongoing from 1757 to 1759. Moreover, as I discuss below, the original split was 55/45, though in practice, it may have worked out to something closer to 60/40. In addition, Gupte records a later settlement after the battle between Nizam Ali Khan and Peshwa Raghunathrao at Bidar in 1773. See Girdhari L’al Ahqar, Ṭārīkh-i Zafrah (Gorakhpur, 1927), 132; Pagadi, Eighteenth-Century Deccan, 249-50; NBB, ed. Kale, 128.

165 It was therefore termed nime-mokās-bāb. For example, see BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 53a.
an almost thirty-year contest between the Nizam and the Marathas. This determination was the fruit of the diplomatic efforts of representatives of the Nizam and the Bhonsles, including the previously mentioned Afghan kinsmen-in-arms Sultan and Sarmast Khan Panni. Nizam Ali Khan, Sarmast Khan, and one Wajid Ali Khan and various members of the Karande and Bhonsle clans met on several occasions over the course of February 1757 to swap gifts of cloth, horses, and robes and to discuss previous settlements of cauth and ghāsdānā revenue. Sarmast Khan even invited Raghují Karande to his home in Ellichpur and gifted several lengths of cloth. On March 25 of the following year, Janoji Bhonsle hosted the Nizam in his tent in the field, greeting him with an ostentatious display worthy of a person of stature. Prior to this formal meeting, the terms and conditions of peace had been established concretely in the form of fifteen articles of agreement. Based on the dates applied to extant transcriptions, and the overall lexicon of the text, it is likely that the articles were first committed to paper at Ellichpur in Marathi (Modi) and then transcribed and partially translated into Persian in June 1757.

The articles of the 1757 agreement fell into two relatively distinct categories: the political-economic and the political-existential. The first eight articles concerned issues of revenue. In certain named parganas and in territories designated jāgūr-i sarkār, or the territories assigned in jāgūr to Nizam ul-Mulk as sūbahdār of the Deccan, the Nizam’s government would be entitled to fifty-five percent of the yield and the Bhonsles’ to forty-five percent after the deduction of village expenses (kharca) and the sardeśmukhī. The older fifty-fifty split would

167 SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 95, pgs. 79-80.
168 BL, Mss Marathi,, D35, ff. 137b-139a, 143a-146a.
169 For this term, see M.A. Nayeem, Mughal Administration of the Deccan under Nizamul Mulk Asaf Jah (1720-48 AD) (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1985), 182-4.
remain in the parts of the districts of Kalamb, Kherla, and Pavnar lying on the eastern side of the Wardha River. The second category of terms and conditions concerned fundamental issues bearing on the present and future existence of shared sovereignty in Berar. Both governments would be responsible for securing cultivation of land, protecting officials, punishing rebels, and refraining from intervening in internal politics or giving shelter to disaffected individuals. In addition, the Maratha prince Sabaji Bhonsle was to be admitted into the service of Nizam Ali Khan. Finally, the two governments committed to not deviating from the agreement on pain of incurring divine displeasure. This particular stipulation in both Marathi and Persian read: “A promise has been made on both sides. They should act in accordance with it and should not deviate from it. God is in the middle of both sides.” Syntactically, the promise or agreement and God are identical mediating terms between two opposing poles, creating reciprocity out of division and compromise out of conflict through the force of mutual fidelity. The power of the agreement depended upon the power of the faith of those who entered into it.

Though the sāt-cələs arrangement strengthened the battered friendship between the Bhonsles and the Nizam, it posed a threat to the Bhonsle’s other major political relationship, namely that with the Peshwa’s government at Pune. Janoji Bhonsle in a letter to the Peshwa’s cousin and leading general Sadashivrao Bhau on January 1, 1759 fretted that reconciliation would come with a steep price:

To preserve a friendship (sneha) with Salabat Jang, we should not disturb his government. Similarly, a friendship on both sides will endure only if we establish a friendship with Nizam Ali Khan and act according to his wishes. If damage is caused to

170 This service assignment materialized in a permanent jāgīr at Darwha. See NBB, ed. Kale, 73.

171 In Marathi, the text is “Udbhaye pakṣi vacana pramāṇa jale tyāpramāṇe akṛtrīma vartāve tahāt antar paḍũ na dyāve. Udbhayetās śivara dar myān”; in Persian, it is “Fi-mā baṭn āncha ‘ahd wa paimān dar miyān āmadah muwāfiq-i ān ’amal bāyad namūd wa tafāwut nabāyad kard. Az ṭarafa’in khudā dar miyānast. Qalam.” See BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 137b, 146a.
the territory of Hyderabad, how will the Nizam remain content? You have told us this again and again. The Nizam has definitively become the master here. If we become friends with him, it will become our responsibility to effect his will. Then we will have to find some [new] revenues to acquire. How are we to mollify twenty thousand troops? How are we to send the money due to the [Peshwa’s] government? Berar is utterly sunk, and there is no money to be seen anywhere.\footnote{SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 97, pgs. 81-2.}

Here Janoji intimates another potential cost aside from the financial, which is that a permanent settlement of terms could alter the Nagpur government’s orientation within the Nizam’s and the Peshwa’s dogged competition for dominance. Hitherto the Bhonsles had thrown their weight behind the Peshwa despite their disputes over Bengal and Garda-Mandla; however, as I discuss in the next chapter, only two years later they would join a group of Maratha leaders in defecting to the service of Nizam Ali Khan. While this turn of events was of course not discernible at this juncture, the friendship between the Bhonsles and the Nizam took shape within a broader web of political relationships in the Deccan. Foremost among those relationships, as I have emphasized in this section, was the friendship between the Bhonsles and the šubahdār of Berar based at Ellichpur. In the next section, I hone in on this this friendship, examining facets of their regard for one another that exceeded the pragmatic concerns of revenue administration. The affection between Ismail Khan Panni and Janoji and Mudhoji Bhonsle was so personal and tangible as to leave an enduring mark on Ellichpur’s most famous and sacred monument, the dargah of the warrior-saint Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah.

**The Politics of Friendship**

Compared to the more famous Rohilla chieftaincies of the north or even the Panni and Miyana states of Arcot, Kurnool, Cuddapah, and Savnur in the southern Deccan, there is relatively sparse documentation of the history of the Panni Afghan nawābs of Ellichpur. The first nawāb Ismail Khan earned a short entry in the Ma‘āṣir al-Umarā’ (1780) of Shah Nawaz Khan,
which al-Hamdani later roughly copied into the *Sawânih-i Dakan*. Two colonial-period texts provide fuller accounts of Ismail Khan and his lineage: the *Târîkh-i Amjadiyah* (1869) of Saiyid Amjad Hussain and the *Sawânih-i ʿUmrî* (1906) of Saiyid Abdul Razaq. Composed by a prayer leader (*khâfîb*) of the Jama Masjid of Ellichpur and dedicated to Nizam Afzal ud-Daulah Asaf Jah V of Hyderabad, the *Târîkh* is of particular interest because of its connection to the cult of the warrior-saint (*ghâzî*) Ghazi Miyan. The historian Shahid Amin via Wolseley Haig’s English summary describes the *Târîkh*’s colorful account of the battle between an imagined Berar king called Eil and Abdul Rahman, also called Dulha Shah, a local iteration of the legendary warrior-saint Ghazi Miyan, a nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni (d. 1030) who supposedly abandoned his nuptials to pursue the glory of martyrdom on the battlefields of India. Hundreds of years after the time of these events, the Bhonsle *rājās* of Nagpur joined the diverse community of Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah’s celebrants by aiding in the reconstruction of his *dargah* just north of the city of Ellichpur.

The Bhonsles’ patronage of the memory of the *ghâzî* was a concrete expression of their friendship with the *nawâbs* of Ellichpur, and Ismail Khan Panni in particular. As I mentioned earlier, Ismail Khan was the son of Sultan Khan, who along with his son-in-law Sarmast Khan

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174 SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 437-574; Saiyid Abdul Razaq, *Sawânih-i ʿUmrî* (Agra: Matba’ Mufid Aam, 1906). I am very grateful to Hannah Archambault for making a copy of this text available to me.

175 Shahid Amin, *Conquest and Community*, 46-52.
were officers in the army of Nizam Ali Khan. According to the Tārikh-i Amjadiyah, Sultan Khan’s grandfather Hindal Khan migrated from Afghanistan to Delhi and then found employment with the Rajput rulers of Jaipur. Traveling further south to Alipur in Berar, they entered the service of Bakht Buland, and in 1696-7, they joined the cavalry of Ali Mardan Khan, the governor of Berar under Aurangzeb. They continued to serve in the provincial cavalry through Farrukhsiyar’s appointment of Azad al-Daulah Aiwaz Khan to the governorship, eventually seconding their employer in backing Nizam ul-Mulk against the Barha brothers. During the battle between the Nizam and the Barha brothers’ general Dilawar Ali Khan in 1720, Sarmast Khan’s father Azmat Khan “alighted in front of the elephant of Azad al-Daulah Aiwaz Khan and gave his life (piyādah shudah jān niṣār gardid).” The status and prestige of Sarmast Khan and Sultan Khan, and the latter’s sons Ismail Khan and Umar Khan, within Berar affairs continued to grow over the years, as attested by the above references to their important military and diplomatic roles during the Berar governorship of Nizam Ali Khan.

Even prior to the significant architectural works of Ismail Khan Panni and his successor Salabat Khan, this Afghan martial clan made its mark on the local landscape of Ellichpur. Sarmast Khan obtained a jāgīr west of Ellichpur, which evolved into the neighborhood (maḥallat) of the city known as Sarmastpura, while the area of Sultan Khan’s jāgīr towards the

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176 His daughter Shams Khatun married Sarmast Khan. While the Maʿāṣir only refers to this affinal relationship, Saiyid Amjad Hussain and Saiyid Abdul Razaq specify that Sarmast Khan was also Sultan Khan’s paternal uncle’s son. See SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 439, 573; Razaq, Sawāniḥ-i ʿUmṛ, 4.

177 SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 437.

south near the Sapan River was called Sultanpura. Taking care not to disturb the tombs of the local holy men (*darwish*) Ishaq Shah and Mahboob Shah, the Mughal-period fort defending the city was re-furbished with brick and plaster, and a new residence for the Panni household was built near the fort in the neighborhood Farmanpura. Another *mahallat*, Anwarpura, was under the protection of Inayat Khan, the son of Sarmast Khan. In addition, he held Daryapur and several other *paraganas* in Berar in *jāgīr*; when he died in 1760, these were transferred to Bahlol Khan, son of Ismail Khan, along with a *manṣab* of 3000/1000. Several years later, these holdings were transferred to Bahlol Khan’s son-in-law Jiwan Khan, the grandson of Sultan Khan by his daughter Himmat Khatun. Through typical elite patrimonial strategies of marriage and land ownership, this family established roots in Ellichpur and the surrounding rural areas.

In the early 1760s, Ismail Khan distinguished himself in several battles between the Peshwa and the Nizam. As an example of his courage in battle, Saiyid Amjad Hussain describes one engagement in which Ismail Khan and about five hundred cavalrymen while escorting a foraging party clashed with four or five thousand enemy cavalry. He extolls, “An equal barrage of bullets ensued on both sides. The thieves were so many that by the force of their brute strength, they matched the expert claws of the lions of Islam. Coming to their aid, [Ismail] Khan in the same manner showed courage and manliness and was ready to give his life to crush the enemy.” While Hussain does not specify at which battle these events took place, they may refer to the battle of Udgir, in which Ismail Khan fought under the leadership of Ibrahim Khan

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179 SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 439. The Central Provinces gazetteer for Amravati dates Sarmastpura to 1724, which would align with the promotion of both Sarmast Khan and Sultan Khan after their kinsman’s death in the battle against Dilawar Ali Khan. See S.V. Fitzgerald and A.E. Nelson, *Central Provinces District Gazetteer: Amraoti District*, vol. 2a (Bombay, 1911), 396.

180 SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 440.

181 SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 437.
Gardi from December 1759 to January 1760.\(^{182}\) Girdhari La’l’s account in the *Tārīkh-i Zafrah* (1771) indicates that he was among several leaders who “were injured and fell on the battlefield.”\(^{183}\) But it was his bravery at the battle of Rakshasbhuwan of August 1763 that catapulted him to the highest ranks of the Deccani Afghan nobility. Following the battle, he received a high *manṣab* of 7,000/5,000 as well as a *jāgīr* at Balapur worth over five *lākh* rupees.\(^{184}\) Most importantly, Nizam Ali Khan awarded him with the governorship of Berar,\(^{185}\) with the wholehearted approval and possibly at the instigation of the Bhonsles of Nagpur.\(^{186}\)

Inasmuch as it was a device for managing the tensions of shared governance, the friendship between the Bhonsles and Ismail Khan at first glance appears to be one of convenience. The Bhonsles desired a governor who would abide by the terms of the *sāt-cālīs* revenue-sharing agreement and perhaps even look the other way if their collectors occasionally returned an excessive amount. The authors of the *Maʿāṣir al-Umarā’* remarked, “Because Janoji Bhonsle, who at the time was the proprietor (*taʿalluq-dār*) of the aforementioned province

\(^{182}\) BL, Persian Manuscripts, Add 23885, ff. 73a.

\(^{183}\) SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 326, ff. 174.

\(^{184}\) SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 439, 441. In addition, is brother Umar Khan and son Salabat Khan received smaller *manṣabs*.

\(^{185}\) SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 441-2.

\(^{186}\) BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 91b-93a, 99b. Yashwantrao Ramchandra indicated to Vinayak Rao Aurangabadkar that the Bhonsles recommended Ismail Khan for the position because they were unhappy with the current governor, Rajaram Baburao. Documents provided to Aurangabadkar by the celebrated Hyderabad minister Chandu Lal reveal that Rajaram, better known as Raja Narayandas, was a relative of Vithal Sundar Parshurami, the top counselor of Nizam Ali Khan who perished at Rashasbhuwan. When Narayandas was serving as the deputy governor under Ghulam Saiyid Khan, he conscripted troops from Aurangabad and looted Berar. Unable to pacify him by diplomatic means, Janoji Bhonsle and Raghunoti Karande assaulted his army, causing him to flee to Aurangabad. According to a second testimony proffered by Ramchandra, he later returned to Berar and died in battle. The disposition of Narayandas’ personal possessions and the artillery under his command was an article in an agreement between Nizam Ali Khan and Janoji Bhonsle dated February 14, 1766.
[Berar] on the part of the Marathas, knew him from long back (az sābiq maʿrifat dāsht), he put off correcting the design of the administration…Because of his addiction to intoxicants, he became distracted from work, and signs of his pride became evident.”¹⁸⁷ From the perspective of the Nizam’s government as captured in the Maʿāşir, Ismail Khan’s unusual degree of affection towards his Maratha co-rulers was apparently one of several deviations from the standards of good administration and good conduct. In this way, they resemble the previously discussed Sawānīh-i Dakan’s insinuation that after the Maratha penetration of Berar, affairs fell into disorder. Like the consumption of intoxicating substances, a friendship that crossed political boundaries could be interpreted as a sign of distraction and ultimately of unseemly self-regard. To understand the nuances and possibilities of a counter-affiliation, apart from its distortion in the eyes of centralized power, it is necessary to examine the social and symbolic life of politics undergirding the pragmatic concerns of revenue administration.¹⁸⁸

The socio-symbolic dimension of the Bhonsle-Panni friendship materialized in the performance of gestures of care, hospitality, and generosity without immediate expectation of reward or profit. Occasions for hospitality arose frequently between the death of Janoji Bhonsle in 1772 and that of Ismail Khan Panni in 1775. In fact, Janoji’s senior queen Daryabai Bhonsle was in Ellichpur for the wedding of Ismail Khan’s son Salabat Khan when she received word of his death.¹⁸⁹ In the three chaotic years following this event, members of the Bhonsle royal family and their followers frequently visited Ellichpur to plead their cases in a painful succession


¹⁸⁹ Janoji and Mudhoji had left for Tuljapur to meet the Peshwa, while Daryabai, Sabaji, and Janoji’s nephew and adopted son and heir Raghují stayed behind in Akot. From there, Daryabai proceeded to Ellichpur for the wedding. See BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 54b.
dispute between Mudhoji Bhonsle on one side and Sabaji and Daryabai Bhonsle on the other.\textsuperscript{190}

It was after one such visit that Mudhoji found himself in need of Ismail Khan’s brotherly love:

[At the time when] the long-standing familiarity and friendship (az sābiq iritibāt wa dil bastagi) between Raja Mudhoji Bhonsle and Muhammad Ismail Khan was perfect, Mudhoji out of unhappiness with his brother Sabhaji [Sabaji] came to Ellichpur. With a pure heart and full faith, he paid a visit to Hazrat Shah Abdal Rahman Ghazi and asked assistance from the spirit of victory to obtain the throne of Nagpur. For several days, he was happily occupied in riding and hunting. Then one day, sitting side by side on a horse-drawn palanquin in full regalia, they set out from the dargah of Shah Rahman Ghazi. In the middle of an intersection, two armed individuals sent by Sabaji approached the palanquin, stabbed Mudhoji with their swords, and took flight. Being wounded, Mudhoji was conveyed to the court inside the small fort as befitted a respectable man in a fearful state. Every doctor was too afraid to dress his wounds until Muhammad Rostam, the attending physician of Ismail Khan, on the order of his master bravely applied sixteen stitches to his limbs and one stitch to his lip, earning a reward of seventeen gold coins.\textsuperscript{191}

Other accounts of this episode indicate that the would-be assassins were not followers of Sabaji, but rather Afghan mercenaries in Mudhoji’s employ who were fed up with not receiving their wages; however, like the above description, they affirm that Ismail Khan saw to it that his wounds received swift medical attention.\textsuperscript{192} By providing safe refuge from the hazards endemic to politics, Ismail Khan treated Mudhoji like an honored guest, a true friend, and as evoked both by this description and the letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter, a fellow devotee of Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah.

Before Mudhoji made his ultimate gesture of attachment to both the nawāb and the ghāzī, his friendship with Ismail Khan was severely tested. Responding to tensions caused by the dispute between him and his brother, and perhaps to Ismail Khan’s unstable mental state, several of the Bhonsles’ officials, including their envoy Ramchandra Dado, fled Ellichpur, fearing that

\textsuperscript{190} For more on this dispute, see Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{191} SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 446-7.

\textsuperscript{192} NBB, ed. Kale, 138-9; BL, Mss Marathi, G33, 136b-137b.
they might be imprisoned or killed.\textsuperscript{193} The situation was not made any better by the fact that both Bhonsle brothers were exploring the possibility of an alliance with Ismail Khan’s rival Ibrahim Beg Dhauns Zafar ud-Daulah, a general of Nizam Ali Khan who had recently conquered the small Telugu nāyaka principality of Nirmal.\textsuperscript{194} After fighting an inconclusive battle at Kumbhargaon in 1773, Sabaji joined Ibrahim Beg Dhauns and Rukn ud-Daulah Mir Musi Khan, another follower of the Nizam, in laying siege to Ellichpur. In collusion with this faction, Mudhoji’s minister Devaji Chorghode had arranged for his master to vacate the city; however, when Mudhoji caught wind of their plans, he rushed back to aid his friend. Together, they repulsed the siege and brought its leaders to the bargaining table by the beginning of 1774.\textsuperscript{195}

Though his bond with Mudhoji Bhonsle weathered the storm of dynastic politics, Ismail Khan did not survive his fierce rivalry with Ibrahim Beg Dhaunsa. In 1775, he lost his life in battle with Dhaunsa. After his death, Mudhoji played an important role in ensuring that his sons inherited his estates at Balapur and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{196} In addition, he ordered the construction of a sandstone wall around the existing dargah of Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah, creating an enormous outer courtyard that today features winding pathways, trees, rocks, and gravestones. Its construction took place from 1776-79 under the supervision of one Shaikh ‘Iza al-Din, an

\textsuperscript{193} BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 123a-125a; \textit{NBB}, ed. Kale, 109.

\textsuperscript{194} The \textit{Sawānīḥ-i Dakan} features a sketch of Ibrahim Beg Dhaunsa’s biography. He was the son of Fazil Beg, whose forefathers were Turks of the Barlas clan who had immigrated to the Deccan. After cementing his reputation with the rājā of Srikakulam, he entered the service of Mubariz Khan Imad ul-Mulk when the latter assumed the governorship of Hyderabad early in the reign of Farrukhsiyar. Hamdani relays that it was said that that the common people gave him the unusual title of “Dhaunsa” because of all the drums that used to play on the battlefields on which he fought. After obtaining the favor of Nizam Ali Khan through the minister Rukn ud-Daulah, he took the fort of Yellabkonda – renaming it Zaffargadh – and eventually made Nirmal his seat. See BL, Persian Manuscripts, Add 23885, ff. 81b-82a.

\textsuperscript{195} SJML, Persian Manuscripts, No. 80, ff. 442-4; \textit{NBB}, ed. Kale, 110-5.

associate of Ismail Khan’s fort superintendent Jham Singh. Raghuji Bhonsle II added a fifth gate on the north side in 1780-1.197 Though these inscriptions do not name Ismail Khan, the fact that Mudhoji executed this project in the years immediately following his death suggests that it was a gesture in memory of his friend, with whom he shared a regard for the ghāzī’s power.

Three gates on the western, southern, and eastern sides of the dargah were built on the orders of Mudhoji Bhonsle between 1190 and 1192 AH (1776-9 CE). Each featured a large entranceway arch topped by a small rectangular pavilion (bārahdarī) with six arches and four rectangular minarets. Mudhoji’s builders also constructed a second western gate (see Figure 1) with only two minarets and no bārahdarī. While this gate currently serves as the main entrance to the shrine, its inscription merely records the date of construction. By contrast, the inscriptions of the more elaborate gates are more richly commemorative. The inscription of the western gate (see Figures 2-4) clearly credits Mudhoji for its construction:

The burial garden (rauzat) of Rahman Ghazi,  
the ornament (raunaq) of the kingdom of Berar  
Was fortified with its courtyard by Raja Mudhaji  
Hence its construction, when Jham Singh conveyed the order to ‘Iza al-Din,  
Was manifestly in one thousand and one hundred and ninety of the hijrī [1190 AH]  
With regard to its date that I wrote out of the tablet of my own spirit  
This voice came from heaven to request the remembrance of the famous one198


198 Burgess, 231. A comparison of Burgess’ transcription and the original inscription reveals several errors on his part. For example, he has written jihab instead of jiḥat (direction, mode, reason), jūd instead of khūd (self, one’s own), and shā instead of shod (occurred, happened). In addition, my translations of the second hemistich of the final couplet are significantly different. Whereas he has read ‘arz in the sense of breadth or width, I have read it in the sense of request or petition, though both senses may be intended by the writer.
**Figure 2:** Western Wall of the Dargah of Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah

**Figures 3 and 4:** Western Gate Dated 1190 AH (1776-7 CE) and Detail of Inscription
The inscriptions adorning the southern and eastern gates (Figures 5-8), built in 1191 AH (1777-8) and 1192 AH (1778-9) respectively, mention these same names; however, they also more vividly illustrate Mudhoji’s regard for the power and majesty of Abdul Rahman. The first hemistich of the southern gate’s inscription reads, “Through the favor of Shah Rahman, the pearl in the crown of kings / King Mudhoji achieved his propitious desires (maqsad-i bahrawar) in this world.”199 Similarly, the first two couplets of the southern gate’s inscription recognize the supremacy of the ghāzi over the rulers of the secular world:

Higher than the sky, and in truth (ṣidq) and certainty (yaqīn),
The pinnacle of this court of the governor of religion (ḥākim-i dīn)
Shah Rahman, a martyr (shahīd) and also a warrior (ghāzī),
At whose door kings lay their foreheads200

In addition to affirming his conventional appellations of ghāzī and shahīd, these inscriptions refigure Abdul Rahman as a powerful, but compassionate overlord. Both the use of the word ḥākim (governor, judge) and the image of kings laying their foreheads at his door suggest that Mudhoji’s fortification of the shrine with an outer court was a gesture of obeisance and even submission to his this-worldly power. As the narratives discussed earlier implied, Mudhoji believed to a degree that this power manifested in tangible actions in favor of his political goals and desires.201 What is noteworthy in this case is the way in which Abdul Rahman’s blessing implicitly underwrote the friendship between the Maratha and Afghan co-rulers of Berar.

199 Burgess, 230. Again, Burgess’ transcription is problematic. His translation of the Persian word ṭafīl as “favor” does not correspond to any dictionary meaning of this word. While this part of the inscription is difficult to parse, the intended Persian word is much more likely to be faiz or fazl, both of which give the sense of favor, grace, and bounty.

200 Burgess, 230.

201 Granting favors to kings had been the prerogative of Islamic saints and holy men since at least the period of the Delhi Sultanate. See Simon Digby, “The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Mediaeval India,” in India’s Islamic Traditions, edited by Richard M. Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 234-62.
Figures 5 and 6: Southern Gate Dated 1191 AH (1777-8 CE) and Detail of Inscription

Figures 7 and 8: Eastern Gate Dated 1192 AH (1778-9 CE) and Detail of Inscription
Conclusion: Affiliations, Old and New

In the beginning of this chapter, I described a trip that Mudhoji Bhonsle made to Ellichpur in 1785 to visit the dargah of Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah and to chat with his late friend’s sons Salabat Khan and Bahlol Khan Panni. Though they may have reminisced about old times, they were no doubt equally preoccupied by new uncertainties about Berar’s governance. In 1781, Ismail Khan’s rival Ibrahim Beg Dhaunsya died, leaving his son Farrukh Mirza Ehtesham Jang to assume his seat at Nirmal. But the Peshwa’s news-writers at Nagpur reported that because Ehtesham Jang could not seem to recruit capable administrators and fought with his brother Sabit Jang and nephew Shah Mirza and his paymaster Wali Muhammad, Nizam Ali Khan considered simply absorbing Nirmal.\(^{202}\) Perhaps to preempt him, Ehtesham Jang rebelled in early 1783; they briefly came to blows; and Nizam Ali Khan eventually made peace and transferred him to the şūbahdar post at Ellichpur. At the same time, Salabat Khan and Bahlol Khan received new jāgīrs in recognition of their role in mediating a settlement. The peace was made even happier by the celebration of the birth of Salabat Khan’s son, to whom Mudhoji Bhonsle made customary gifts of robes and jewelry.\(^{203}\)

But Salabat Khan’s contentment was short-lived. Soon after Ehtesham Jang took up his şūbahdar post at Ellichpur, his nephew Shah Mirza, who had been released from captivity in Nirmal by Nizam Ali Khan, began indiscriminately raiding Umarkhed, Karanja, and other places held by both the Nizam and the Peshwa, perhaps in hopes of amassing sufficient resources to


challenge his uncle. To discuss this and additional issues, Mudhoji Bhonsle deputed Mahipattrao Dinkar, an experienced Kayastha Prabhu soldier-administrator whose career will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Salabat Khan arranged a meeting between the latter and Ehtesham Jang at Ellichpur, which initiated a process of negotiation that on January 13, 1784 culminated in an eleven-article agreement on the future governance of Berar. As Ehtesham Jang ordered his nephew’s arrest, Salabat Khan himself traveled to Nagpur to talk with Mudhoji Bhonsle. After about a month and a half, they began to grow suspicious of Ehtesham Jang’s intentions, having received reports that he was assembling a new and varied force in violation of the terms of his sūbahdār appointment. As described by the Peshwa’s envoy Sadashiv Ram Gune, Salabat Khan was especially galled, saying, “Jang and I had an agreement, and assembling new troops was not part of it. He sent me [here] me to make assurances and behave amicably. He told me to mediate and obtained the Nawab’s [Nizam Ali Khan’s] permission to do so. So I have come to talk. But when I write to him that there has been no opposition between us, and that we have come to a united determination, he does not reply and instead collects new troops.” Finding that Ehtesham Jang’s letters did not allay his fears, Salabat Khan decided to return to Ellichpur.

Whatever may have motivated Ehtesham Jang to break the terms of his appointment is unclear, but he, Salabhat Khan, and several members of the Bhonsle family gathered near Amravati in December 1784 to pursue further discussions towards an agreement for the

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205 BL, Mss Marathi, D34, ff. 68a; Shejwalkar, NA, vol. 2, no. 49, pg. 21.
207 Ibid., no. 55, pg. 26.
Their ongoing openness to dialogue is a testament to the power and durability of the framework for joint provincial rule established by the *sāt-cāḷīs* agreement of 1757-9 and substantiated by the friendship between the Bhonsles and Ismail Khan Panni. In this chapter, I have sought to argue that the need for such a framework of political understanding emerged out of the very dynamics of Maratha imperial expansion. When Maratha military potentates like the Hinganikar Bhonsles arrived in distant and unfamiliar regions, they did not simply demolish pre-existing systems of governance, or merely overlay them with their own, but formed partnerships with local rulers and fief-holders that over time accrued not only strategic, but also affective and symbolic value. But at the same time that the Bhonsles consolidated new affiliations, they had to manage older ones, particularly with the ascendant Peshwa of Pune. This affiliation, and the peril that its deterioration could mean for the prospect of peace within the Maratha Empire, is the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 2: Crisis and Reconciliation in the Maratha State, c. 1761-1769

“हे गडबडीचे दिवस.”
These are tumultuous days.”
-Peshwa Madhavrao Ballal to Ramchandra Narayan Gore, Tuljapur, April 8, 1763

Devrao Bhivaji, the chief revenue collector (kamāvīṣdār) of the sub-district of Songir in Khandesh in northwest Maharashtra, replied on April 5, 1769 to an order issued by Peshwa Madhavrao Ballal (1745-1772). The order directed Bhivaji to sequester the property of any cavalry soldier (śiledār) employed by the errant Nagpur ruler Janoji Bhonsle, whose conduct since defecting to the Nizam six years earlier had been less than compliant. As punishment, the Peshwa instructed that the lands of anyone who took up service with him were to be confiscated. His possessions were to be seized. His entire family was to be imprisoned. In reply to these orders, Bhivaji explained that he had searched every village in the district but failed to locate anyone who had joined Janoji.210 In the nearby town of Dhule, the kamāvīṣdār Naro Hari gave a similar answer and promised to notify the Peshwa if he found any trace of a defector.211 By the time their messages reached Pune, Janoji’s armies, which had been wreaking havoc on eastern Khandesh for several months, had been defeated. After nearly a decade of civil war, Janoji was suing for peace.

Similar orders of sequestration that circulated throughout the Khandesh, Marathwada, and western Maharashtra regions indicate the extent to which a crisis of authority within the Maratha state had engulfed the livelihoods of rulers, counselors, and soldiers alike. This crisis was symptomatic of the evolution of Maratha politics between the death of the Maratha

209 Aitihāsika Lekha Saṅgraha (hereafter ALS), ed. V.V. Khare, volume 2 (Kurundwad, 1897), no. 226, pg. 380.


souverign Chhatrapati Shahu Bhonsle in 1749 and the disastrous Third Battle of Panipat of 1761. As sovereign authority within the Maratha Empire became increasingly fragmented between the Chhatrapati, the Peshwa, and semi-independent Maratha rājās who sometimes maintained controversial affiliations – as I explored in the last chapter – skilled administrators, or kārbhārī, became responsible for the preservation and restoration of confidence in the collective political bonds that constituted the Empire. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will trace the social origins of the kārbhārī, focusing on Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu households that climbed the ranks of the Maratha secretariat to take part in politics and diplomacy. In this chapter, I explore the moment when kārbhārīs came under fire for transgressing ethical boundaries in their political dealings between Maratha courts. This administrative class enabled the maintenance of a domain of communicative action in which disputes between governments could be resolved nonviolently; however they also precipitated acute tensions surrounding the ethics of political service. Administrators who rapidly rose to prominence by applying their skills in the management of communication were just as rapidly denounced when relations between Maratha governments soured.

This chapter begins at the height of the crisis in 1769. I diagnose the depth and severity of the conflict between the Pune and Nagpur courts by examining its ramifying effects on the military labor market and on relationships between Maratha governments and the landed families who served them. Next, I turn to the politics underlying the crisis. I show that the transformation of Maratha politics in the years leading up to and following the historic battle of Panipat of 1761 was rooted in repeated devolutions of sovereign authority resulting in the unprecedented empowerment of kārbhārī. The following three sections shed light on the tensions surrounding the rise of the skilled administrator in Maratha politics in the 1760s by delving into transitional
moments in the fluctuating lives and careers of three prominent administrators, highlighting in particular the failed efforts of the Nagpur Bhonsles’ Kayastha scribe Chimaji Rakhmagad to regain the trust of the Peshwa in the years immediately preceding the 1769 war. In the final section, I discuss the 1769 peace settlement between Pune and Nagpur within the communicative framework of jāb-sāl that was outlined in the Introduction. Paradoxically, the initial failure to resolve the conflict by non-violent means revealed the importance of trustworthy communication in maintaining fragile bonds between Maratha governments. During the post-war process of negotiation, the dialogic mode of jāb-sāl communication allowed the Pune and Nagpur governments to address long-standing disagreements on questions of jurisdiction and obligation. The resulting settlement, finalized by two treaties in the conventional form of the articles of agreement (vādlī), laid the foundations for more than thirty years of sustained peace and cooperation between the two governments.

Patterns of Crisis and Response, c. 1769

In March 1763, Bhavanrao Kulkarni, the leading member of a distinguished, but relatively powerless family holding the title of pant pratinidhi, allied with Nizam Ali Khan of Hyderabad in a campaign against Peshwa Madhavrao Ballal. The most prominent fief-holders who joined them were Janoji and Mudhoji Bhonsle and Gopalrao and Govind Hari Patwardhan of Miraj in southern Maharashtra. While the defectors had different relations and grievances, which I will detail below, they all shared a perceived loss of political status and financial security. Between March and August 1763, the Peshwa’s and the Nizam’s forces pursued a series of attacks and counterattacks, including an assault on Pune carried out by Janoji’s commander Raghuji Karande. This conflict ended in an uneasy ceasefire after the battle of Rakshasbhuvan on
August 10, 1763. Because the Bhonsles had returned to the side of the Peshwa in the final days before battle, they were assigned new territory worth 32 lākh rupees, yet relations between the Nagpur and Pune governments did not remain tranquil for long. At the beginning of 1766, they skirmished until the Bhonsles were forced into a punitive settlement at Daryapur near Amravati. They came to blows again in 1769. Reaching Berar in mid-January, the Peshwa marched on and burned the city of Nagpur as the Bhonsle brothers frantically scrambled towards Pune in an attempt to distract his attention. While the Bhonsles had safely installed their families in the distant mountaintop fortress of Gawelgarh, the people of Nagpur, as it was remembered around fifty years later, fled to more immediate refuge in Ambagad and Pratabgad with anything that they could carry.

At the peak of the second campaign against Nagpur, the Peshwa took the drastic measure on March 11, 1769 of issuing almost 60 orders of sequestration (zapt), mostly to kamāvīśdārs stationed in pargana across western Maharashtra, Marathwada and Khandesh (see Figure 9). While the punishment of sequestration could be applied to a variety of major crimes such as conspiracy, dacoity, and murder, it became the preferred punishment for defection in this

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212 Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar noted in his 1813 bakhar that Karande’s assault on Pune was “still famous” at the time of writing. See BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 77b.


214 BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 103b.

During the 1762-3 rebellion, the property of many individuals who defected to the Nizam, including Janoji Bhonsle, had been attached.  

Figure 9: Parganas Receiving the Peshwa’s Orders of Sequestration, 1769

Similarly, in 1769, kamāvīṣdārs were ordered to seize the property, household, and lands of anyone who was known to have taken up service with Bhonsle. The orders targeted cavalrmen resident in the stretches of contested territory across which Bhonsle and his armies under Raghuji Karande and Narhar Ballal were marching on their way to Pune. Thus, in addition to punishing

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216 See the distribution of punishments by type of crime in Gune, *The Judicial System of the Marathas*, 257.

217 SSRPD, edited by G.C. Vad and B.P. Joshi, volume 7 (Poona, 1911), nos. 569-571, 576, 583, pgs. 185-6, 189, 193.
those who defected, the intended effect of the sequestration orders was to arrest the functioning of the Maratha military-fiscal economy, in which generals sustained and augmented their armies by extracting, often forcibly, men, money, and goods from the small district towns where they halted over the course of prolonged campaigns. This intensification of the operations of the military-fiscal economy could be destructive to rural areas. Reports from the campaigns of the 1760s regularly decried the spoliation of cultivators’ fields, theft of livestock, and depopulation of villages that followed the movements of large armies. The Peshwa’s uncle and rival Raghunathrao (1734-83) in a December 27, 1762 letter to Janoji Bhonsle decried the deleterious effects of these operations. He stated, “Cavalrymen seek money and means of support according to their desire. By this means, the enemy becomes powerful. Campaigns in Hindustan and elsewhere are halted and everyone looks to his own affairs. Money dries up so cavalrymen turn to the enemy, and when the enemy becomes strong, it is your house that becomes extinct.”

The Peshwa’s 1769 orders were intended to suppress this process and in so doing force Bhonsle to submit to his authority. Both sides, not just the Peshwa, deployed sequestration to cut off the enemy’s access to military resources. For example, Govind Hari Patwardhan in 1763 instructed his son Gopalrao to caution the Nizam against directly attacking Pune and instead to pursue the sequestration of Khandesh, Gangathadi, and the country around Junnar. The punishment of sequestration had become fully weaponized.

While the weaponization of sequestration indicates the way in which the Peshwa’s 1769 assault against Bhonsle was a war of attrition, its extreme character also suggests that it was a civil war expressing the collapse of the delicate bonds linking Maratha governments. As I described in the last chapter, the Bhonsles’ cultivation of separate affiliations with both the

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218 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 212b.

Chhatrapati at Satara and the Nizam and his proxies in Berar as well as their pursuit of territorial ambitions in central and eastern India did not sit easily with the rising power of the Peshwa. The conflicts of the 1760s demonstrate how this rivalry became linked with anxieties about not only the Peshwa’s authority, but also about the integrity of political mediation and political mediators in general. When such anxieties occluded the potential for diplomacy, the results were evasion, disobedience, defection, rebellion, and war, yet the restoration of peace also required the revivification of time-honored practices of political mediation, including the exchange of oaths, agreements, and sentiments of trust and affection. In succeeding sections of this chapter, I will chart the complex origins and aftermath of the civil wars of the 1760s with particular attention to their impact on the status of the practice of politics. But, first, it will be helpful to consider how the conflict itself produced effects within the operations of the Maratha state on the ground.

These effects are perhaps clearest when we consider the role of the kamāvīsdār, the official directly answerable to the Peshwa’s orders of sequestration. Stewart Gordon has painstakingly demonstrated that the kamāvīsdār was the key figure in the implementation of the Maratha system of revenue administration in newly acquired territories. While the purchase of a kamāvīs only required the advance of the amount of the district’s estimated revenue, the Peshwa’s government regulated the actual administration of the kamāvīs by checking accounts, recruiting subsidiary staff, and even removing exploitative kamāvīsdārs from their offices. The terms of the appointment could be quite specific. For example, Govindrao Sadashiv, one of the kamāvīsdārs who received the Peshwa’s sequestration orders in 1769, purchased his office in

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220 Stewart Gordon, “The Slow Conquest,” 43-4; Gune further specifies that while larger territories were assigned to officials called māmlatdārs, those with revenues below 1 lakh were commonly assigned to kamāvīsdārs under the Peshwa and that the kamāvīsdār, along with the members of the local pāncāyat (village council), largely replaced the majālas (assembly) in the administration of justice in both Peshwa- and sardār-governed parts of Berar and central India. See Gune, The Judicial System of the Marathas, 42, 48, 126.
pargana Bhose in 1763/4 for five years for an estimated revenue of over two lakh rupees. The conditions of this appointment were the following: criminal fines should not exceed five hundred rupees; amounts for interest on the advanced amount and any alienated villages as well as losses from any uprising or other unexpected calamity should be deducted from the collection; any loss or profit from the annual tax increase should accrue to the kamavisdar; five thousand rupees each year should defray previous excess advances made by him for the pargana of Ambejogai; and his advance should be paid back before any villages are alienated from the pargana.  

Kamavisdars constituted a closely monitored arm of the Peshwa’s government. In addition to collecting revenue, kamavisdars were responsible for administering justice and gathering intelligence on the doings of people in their jurisdictions. They supervised a small staff and a garrison of infantry and cavalry to execute these duties. Because they carried out most of the functions of central government at the local level, they tended to act as the Peshwa’s eyes and ears on the ground. Providing up-to-date information on the positions, movements, and activities of rival armies, kamavisdars allowed the Peshwa to more swiftly contain the local political effects of military recruitment and conflict. For example, in February 1769, Viswasrao Ramchandra, the kamavisdar of Bodwad, informed another official Chintaman Hari that Bhonsle’s army was in the vicinity of Jalgaon in Khandesh, prompting Hari to bring a force of three hundred soldiers to challenge them.  

Another recipient of these orders, the Solapur kamavisdar Ganesh Trimbak, reported on February 26, 1769 that the Bhonsles were on their way to Pune and that he would take the necessary precautions to guard a political prisoner who had

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222 SSRPD, ed. Vad and Sane, vol. 9, no. 151, pg. 135.
been committed to his care. Given their substantial responsibilities, the Peshwa’s decision to assign specific powers of confiscation and punishment to kamāvīsdārs represented both a re-assertion of the supreme authority of his government and an extension of the conflict with Nagpur into local society.

A closer examination of the variation in responses of different kamāvīsdārs to the Peshwa’s orders of sequestration reveals how local society interfaced with the conflict between Pune and Nagpur. Very few officials reported having identified anyone who had defected. While it is possible that the Bhonsles’ armies enjoyed limited support during their march from Berar, it is far more likely that investigations were fruitless because village headmen (pāṭīl) and other village-level officials with whom they interacted were reluctant to turn in their neighbors to the district authorities. Several letters indicate the extent to which kamāvīsdārs relied on the information and discretion of these officials. For example, Mahadji Narayan, the kamāvīsdār at Indapur pargana, reported, “I summoned the pāṭīls of each village of the aforementioned pargana and conducted an inquiry, but no one has left for the service of the Bhonsles. The pāṭīls of each village wrote that no one from their villages left for the Bhonsles’ service. I am investigating. If I find anyone, I will confiscate [their possessions] as ordered.” Other replies betrayed a similar inability to account for the movements of small bands of armed men who may have joined the Bhonsles’ armies at different points during the war. Laxman Mahadev, the kamāvīsdār of Pathode, stated on March 26, 1769 that he found no noteworthy individuals in his search but that there may be some trifling men in the Bhonsles’ employ that he promised to

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locate. Later on April 5, Balaji Laxman, an official reporting to Tukoji Holkar’s kamāvisdārs, wrote from Hade near Nasik that there were no soldiers in the area, only Bhil and Gond peoples, but that some cavalrymen had gone to Gawelgadh and perished with the Bhonsles’ commander Narhar Ballal, probably sometime in late February. Such ambivalent responses to the orders of sequestration demonstrate the limitations of the Peshwa’s central authority in regulating a highly flexible and politically sensitive military labor market.

Powerful Maratha clans who affiliated with rival governments were especially difficult to restrain. One such clan was the Jadhavs of Sindkhed. In 1762, Ramchandra Jadhav was enticed to defect from the service of Nizam Ali Khan by means of a hefty revenue assignment, including the fort of Kopal, and the prestigious title of head general (senāpati). Within a year, he had revived his relationship with the Nizam, looted Maratha-held territories, and ordered the assassination of Raghunathrao. The assassins ingeniously ambushed Raghunathrao in the privy, but he escaped with a minor cut. Jadhav was captured and locked up in Daulatabad fort. In 1769, similarly independent-minded Maratha families defied the efforts of the Peshwa’s kamāvisdārs to control their movements. Mahadji Hari, stationed in Karad in Satara district, noted that while no one from Karad had defected, he could not vouch for the Patankars of nearby Patan. He stated that Appajirao Patankar remained with the Peshwa’s

227 The Jadhavs were one of the most distinguished Maratha clans in the Deccan whose service with the Nizam Shahi Sultanate was co-eval with that of the Bhonsles. Lakhujī Jadhav was the father of Shivaji’s wife Jijabai. In the early eighteenth century, Dhanaji Jadhav held the title of senāpati and famously defended the Maratha kingdom against Mughal attack. Dhanaji’s son Chandrasen defected to the Nizam. For their genealogy, see Sardesai, ed., Aitihāsika Gharānyāncyā Vamśāvalī, 44-5.
228 MIS, edited by V.K. Rajwade, volume 10 (Pune, 1909), no. 2, pg. 1; SSRPD, ed. Vad and Sane, vol. 9, nos. 4, 345 pgs. 4, 318.
government, but his brother Balojirao had gone over to the Bhonsles with two hundred people.\footnote{PD, San.Ni.Ka. Daftar, rumal 11, no. 5717.} Earlier in the 1760s, the Patankar returned to the Peshwa’s side after their kinsman Raulojirao supported the Nizam.\footnote{SSRPD, ed. Vad and Sane, vol. 9, no. 344, pg. 318.} Being a landed desmukhī family with control over the small hill-fort of Dategad, the Patankars had the resources to continue to hedge their bets as the civil wars developed.\footnote{Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, volume 19 (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1885), 539-40.} Subhanji Athavle, who inherited a saranjām in several districts in Marathwada and Berar and the title of dhurandhar samśer bahādar from his father Santaji in 1764/5,\footnote{SSRPD, ed. Vad and Sane, vol. 9, no. 354, pg. 326.} explained that there were many people with his name. Some were not his kin, and a couple Athavles employed by the Bhonsles had caused trouble in his district.\footnote{PD, San.Ni.Ka. Daftar, rumal 11, no. 5760.} The Naik Nimbalkars of Phaltan present a similar case. Piraji Naik Nimbalkar’s assignment in pargaṇa Alande was attached in 1765/6 for supporting the Bhonsles’ defection.\footnote{SSRPD, ed. Vad and Joshi, vol. 7, no. 581, pgs. 192-3.} In 1769, his kinsman Mudhoji Naik Nimbalkar was ordered to cooperate with the government clerk Govind Anant in searching house by house for defectors.\footnote{PD, San.Ni.Ka. Daftar, rumal 11, no. 5745.}

The Athavles and the Naik Nimbalkars were clans with long histories of service with the Nagpur Bhonsles. Malharji and Bhavanji Athavle, Piraji Naik Nimbalkar, Tuljoram Konher, and
Surat Singh Hazari are all mentioned as part of the army of Janoji Bhonsle in January 1766.\textsuperscript{237} Surat Singh Hazari was one of eight brothers hailing from Sangamner who served in the cavalry of Khanderao Dabhade, a prominent Maratha general who controlled much of Gujarat in the early eighteenth century. Later he entered the service of Peshwa Balaji Bajirao with a company of twelve hundred men. After the battle of Rakshasbhuvan, Janoji induced him to join his forces by conferring an assignment of twenty-two tracts of land near Warghat in the thickly forested northeastern part of his kingdom.\textsuperscript{238} Hence, by the time the Peshwa’s orders of confiscation reached Trimbak Krishna, the kamāvīsdār at Sangamner, Surat Singh and his immediate family had relocated to Berar. Krishna admitted that there were a couple of his relations still living at Sangamner, but they had long been mere landless laborers with no connection to any kind of rebellion against the Peshwa.\textsuperscript{239}

Neither able to control the fluctuations of the military labor market nor the loyalties of local landed families, the Peshwa Madhavrao Ballal’s administration struggled to mitigate the harmful effects of the war, especially in those areas that were exposed to the depredations of prodigious armies. The official Dhondo Mahadev, who was tasked with carrying out sequestration orders in the subdistrict of Waluj,\textsuperscript{240} complained on December 7, 1768 that the Peshwa’s army had caused extensive damage while marching from Daulatabad fort towards Berar. He wrote, “They grazed their horses on the sorghum fields. They destroyed the sugarcane


\textsuperscript{238} NBB, ed. Kale, 114.


plantations. In each village, they took two to four hundred rupees worth of crops and sugarcane and grass and then left, causing roughly five thousand rupees in damages. Given this kind of extravagance, how is cultivation to be sustained? How are monies to be realized?”

By early February, the Bhonsles were on the run. Conditions in the buffer zone between Daulatabad and the western parts of Berar near Buldana and Akola became so chaotic that, as Mahadev stated, Khanderao Barge, a load-carrier who had been dispatched with treasure for the Peshwa’s army, was unable to move beyond the Ajanta pass and had to return the treasure to Daulatabad. The second front of the war – running from the eastern stronghold of Chandrapur, which was the Bhonsles’ refuge after fleeing from Gawelgadh, to Nanded – fared no better. Krishnaji Anant, an official with control over several districts falling in this area, carped that although Bhonsle’s armies left his territories untouched, the Peshwa’s made off with cattle, burned villages, and unleashed general havoc. In response to his complaints, he was told that during a campaign, such collateral damage was inevitable.

Government officials in the countryside watched helplessly as rival armies passed through their jurisdictions, forcibly taking whatever grain and cattle they could find, while resident cavalrymen and landed notables bypassed their remit to take up arms with whichever side would pay. The representatives of the Peshwa’s authority were largely unable to maintain their hold on the reactions of local society to the war. Loyalties were divided and difficult to pin down. The Pune government had taken the desperate measure of circulating a blanket injunction against the Nagpur Bhonsles. Not only was this injunction of limited practical effect, but also, it reflected a deeper sclerosis in the political tissue of the Maratha state, which depended upon the recognition of a determinate hierarchy of authority. To better understand the nature of this

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sclerosis, we must examine how tensions surrounding the Peshwa’s authority in the years following the momentous battle of Panipat of 1761 corroded relations between the Pune and Nagpur governments.

**Panipat and the Transformation of Maratha Politics**

According to the prevailing view, the civil wars of the 1760s were symptomatic of the decline of Maratha political fortunes following the Third Battle of Panipat of 1761. Panipat was part of a conjuncture of events that led to political transformation in north India, Bengal, and the Punjab. Falling between the battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1765), it represented a deeply contingent stage in the British East India Company’s gradual assumption of dominance in the Mughal Empire’s eastern provinces. Upon the assassination of the Mughal emperor Alamgir II in 1759, his successor Ali Gauhar fled eastwards, where he mounted several campaigns until the Company forced him into a treaty of protection in 1765 in exchange for control over the tax revenue of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, conventionally known as the *diwānī*. Having been recognized as emperor Shah Alam II in 1760, he spent many years at Allahabad before returning to Delhi in 1772 under the protection of the Maratha leader Mahadji Shinde. Henceforth the Mughal emperor ruled at the pleasure of not just his ministers, which had been the case since the early eighteenth century, but also of rival subsidiary powers that imposed exploitative arrangements of protective alliance.

While the Company was the Mughal Empire’s primary underwriter in the eastern provinces, the Afghans and the Marathas vied for dominance over the Upper Doab and Punjab. The Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Durrani marched on Delhi in 1757. In 1758, Maratha forces invaded the Punjab, marching as far as Attock. The following year, Durrani returned to Punjab to stop these encroachments and continued towards Delhi. Peshwa Balaji Bajirao’s cousin
Sadashivrao Bhau and son Vishvasrao marched northwards to meet Durrani in battle and re-captured Delhi in August 1760. Both sides spent the following months competing for alliances with various north Indian powers, which resulted in Durrani securing the key support of the Rohilla Afghan chief Najib ud-Daulah and the Nawab of Awadh Shuja ud-Daulah. The Marathas were less successful in building a coalition and faced persistent shortages in their food and water supply. The battle began on the plain of Panipat about eighty kilometers north of Delhi on January 4, 1761 and lasted for ten days until the Marathas were finally routed.243

The human cost of Panipat was extreme – an estimated 75,000 people were killed and 22,000 were captured and ransomed.244 Contemporaneous narratives emphasized that a failure of leadership magnified the chaos of the battle and its aftermath. For example, Kashiraj Pandit, an envoy of Shuja ud-Daulah, in his eyewitness account of the battle criticized the arrogance with which Sadashivrao Bhau conducted himself among more experienced generals in the Maratha army. For example, Kashiraj writes that he dismissed the Jat ruler Suraj Mal’s proposal that the Maratha army leave some of its weight behind before proceeding onwards against Durrani. He believed Suraj Mal’s counsel to be unworthy of consideration because he was a mere zamīndār without sufficient knowledge to be offering advice; worse still, he referred to Malhar Rao Holkar, who supported Suraj Mal’s position, as an “old man deprived of his reason (pīr-i salab-i al-ʿaql).”245 He also evokes some of the difficulties faced by the intermediaries who represented


244 Sardesai, New History of the Marathas, vol. 2, 443.

245 BL, Persian Manuscripts, Or. 1733, ff. 97b; also see An Account of the Last Battle of Panipat and of the Events Leading to It, translated by H.G. Rawlinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 7-8.
Sadashivrao Bhau and Shuja ud-Daulah in prosecuting a successful process of *jawāb-suwāl* diplomacy:

Raja Debi Dutt, an inhabitant of Delhi and the son of Lalji Sitaram who was in the service of the government, along with Bhavani Shankar Pandit were sent for the sake of negotiation (*barač-i jawāb-suwāl farastādand*). Bhavani Shankar Pandit was told that I, Rao Kashi Ram – having waited on the late *nawāb* [Safdar Jung, Shuja ud-Daulah’s father] – was also from the Deccan. In his presence, Pandit and I met and realized that we were of the same community and the same homeland. Pandit informed Bhau [Sadashivrao Bhau] that I was in the service of the *nawāb*. Bhau sent a note written for me in the Hindi of the Deccan [Marathi]. Because the form of address did not meet my standards, I did not write a reply. Bhau asked Bhavani Shankar why I did not reply. He said that the scribe had written contrary to the rules. Bhau was so angry with his scribe that next time he would write with understanding. When Raja Debi Dutt reached Bhau [Sadashivrao Bhau], he negotiated (*suwāl-jawāb kard*). Bhau was not satisfied by the points that he made. He sent Bhavani Shankar back [to Shuja ud-Daulah] to convey that this man is a broker by trade and not suitable for keeping a secret. [He said] send someone you trust by whose tongue I will send word of what is advisable for me. Malhar Rao and Raja Suraj Mal were coming on a different matter. Nawab Shuja ud-Daulah provided a blow-by-blow report to Najib al-Daulah and the nobles and ministers of state. In keeping with their counsel, they were conducting negotiations with the leaders of the Marathas (*suwāl wa jawāb bā sar-dārān-i marhata mī kardand*).²⁴⁶

Though commonalities of identity and experience, such as the fact that both Kashiraj and Bhavani Shankar were Maharashtrian Brahmans, could massage the process of *jawāb-suwāl*, a slight hiccup in communication, such as a poorly written letter or a smarmy demeanor, could just as easily disrupt it. Thus it was critical to recruit practitioners of *jawāb-suwāl* who were trustworthy and fluent in the verbal and written conventions of political discourse.

Later historiography on the Marathas extrapolated from such assessments of Maratha leadership at Panipat to make more general judgments about Maratha politics in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Major figures in this historiography, such as Jadunath Sarkar, V.K. Rajwade, and T.S. Shejwalkar, equated Maratha political achievement with the success or failure of Maratha conquest of territory. For Rajwade and Shejwalkar, such expansion further represented a project of nation building against Mughal and British imperial domination. In this

²⁴⁶ BL, Persian Manuscripts, Or. 1733, ff. 101a-102a.
narrative, Panipat serves as a kind of climax, up to which the Marathas were unstoppable in their drive to conquer India from Attock to Cuttack and after which they struggled to re-establish their supremacy on the Indian political stage. Despite the acknowledged fact that the outcome of the battle was overdetermined by a range of variables – unsuccessful negotiations with potential allies, deficiency of supplies and information, and the superior artillery and organization of Durrani’s army – the consensus among historians has been that the Marathas’ defeat reflected a basic moral failing in their politics. Sarkar in the *Fall of the Mughal Empire* stated:

The Maratha failure to oppose the foreign invader in 1757 and even more, with the Bhau’s vast resources in 1760-61, convinced the Indian world that Maratha friendship was a very weak reed to lean upon in any real danger…Maratha protection was not worth purchasing by the least sacrifice, because the Marathas had clearly demonstrated in the last four years that they could not protect their dependents any more than they had been able to protect their own selves in 1761.247

Sarkar found a “lack of statesmanship, and even of intelligent self-interest” among Maratha generals posted to the north. He believed that these deficiencies disqualified them from becoming heirs to the Mughal imperium.248

In contrast to Sarkar, Rajwade and Shejwalkar developed a more sympathetic interpretation of the Maratha politico-ethical project and its transformation in the eighteenth century. Their critique was premised on an assumed ideal of political achievement as defined by the unifying leadership of the first Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhonsle. Rajwade argued that the core of the Maratha project was *mahārāṣṭradharma*. This term has a complex history rooted in the idea that Shivaji Bhonsle united the leading Maratha families of the western Deccan to protect a shared Hindu ethics and way of life, or *dharma*. This project is most succinctly and famously encapsulated in the seventeenth-century *sant* poet Ramdas’ injunction: “Bring all the Marathas

247 Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, vol. 2, 262.

248 Ibid., vol. 3, 10.
together and spread the Maharashtra dharma.”

Rajwade’s own definition of mahārāṣṭradharma included several key components: the advancement of Hindu religious practice, the sustenance of cows and Brahmans, the establishment of self-rule, and the unification and leadership of the Marathas. He claimed that these components remained in place despite major shifts in the locus of sovereign authority that took place over the course of the eighteenth century. Thus, he referred to the period of rule under Chhatrapati Shahu as the period of Hindu rule (hindupadpādsāhi) and that of the rule of the Peshwas as the period of Brahman rule (brāhmanpadpādshāhi) with the implication that the latter was the culmination of the project initiated by Shivaji. He argued that this project continued to develop through the celebrated Maratha victory at Kharda in 1795. With regard to Panipat, he blamed the choices of individual leaders such as Malharrao Holkar and Govind Ballal Kher, the Peshwa’s chief officer in Bundelkhand, but avoided a general critique of Maratha political leadership. While the privilege that he reserved for Brahman power, and Chitpavan Brahman power in particular, was rejected from both non- and para-Brahman perspectives, his overall understanding of the virtues of unifying leadership remained intact.

T.S. Shejwalkar moved beyond Rajwade’s criticisms of individual leaders at Panipat on the basis of a more extensive Marathi archive. He shared Rajwade’s belief that Maratha “protection” of north Indian rulers was rooted in a “constitutional” ideal of preserving cultural


251 Rajwade, 46.

252 Ibid., 47-91.
and political autonomy. But unlike Rajwade, he did not believe this ideal was realized in the leadership of the Chitpavan Brahman Peshwa. Such a view is consistent with the overarching argument that Shejwalkar makes in many of his works on Maratha history: that the polity established by Shivaji in the late seventeenth century could have become the vehicle for a cohesive, pan-Indian nationalist politics had it not been corrupted by the temptations of Mughal patronage. Thus, in his discussions of post-Shahu Maratha politics, he duplicates Sarkar’s claim that Maratha leaders were too blinded by self-interest to pursue a unified political agenda. He reserves special ire for the high-level administrators who shaped the overall direction of Maratha expansion. For example, Shejwalkar disparages “wily” Sakaram Bapu’s failure to organize a permanent Maratha garrison in the northwestern regions of Lahore, Multan, and Kabul. He elaborates, “He seems to have developed a faculty for easily disposing of the twenty-two subahs of the Mughal Empire by his parlour calculations…There seems to have been some brain-wave set in motion at the court of Poona whereby all such problems of high imperial policy were settled at one sitting on the basis of theoretical or oral information supplied by Munshis!”

Shejwalkar set the trend for the subsequent historiography of the Marathas in blaming the Marathas’ failure to fulfill their empire-building ambitions on the “parlour calculations” of the skilled bureaucrats who dominated political life at late Maratha courts.

Thus, Panipat has come to signify the beginning of a general and permanent state of disorder in the Maratha state that endured up to the British conquest in 1818. Yet Panipat was

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253 For his summary view, see T.S. Shejwalkar, Panipat: 1761 (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1946), v-xviii, 106-127.

254 Shejwalkar’s rejection of Rajwade’s bias towards Chitpavan Brahmans in part derived from his own identity as a Karhade Brahman, a Brahman sub-caste that historically rivaled and competed with the Chitpavans. I thank Janaki Bakhle for alerting me to this point.

255 He also blames Bapu for Raghunathrao’s financial mismanagement during the Lahore campaign. See Shejwalkar, Panipat: 1761, 10, 47-8.
merely one of several concrete issues that shaped relations between Maratha governments in the
1760s. As I discussed in the last chapter, Raghuji Bhonsle of Nagpur competed with Peshwa
Bajirao I for territory and influence during the 1740s. In addition, Raghuji and his successors
established an enduring friendship with the feudatories of the Nizam of Hyderabad in Berar, the
Panni Afghan nawābs of Ellichpur. The relative independence that such competing affiliations
allowed the Bhonsles was an important political condition structuring the relationship between
Pune and Nagpur. Another major issue was the entanglement of their dynastic successions. Upon
the death of Raghuji in 1755, his sons Janoji and Mudhoji Bhonsle each made claims to the senā
sāheb subhā title, which resulted in the factionalization of both the Pune and Nagpur elite.256
This situation was compounded when the death of Peshwa Balaji Bajirao immediately after
Panipat produced a second succession dispute. Balaji Bajirao’s son Madhavrao Ballal was
invested with the robes of the peśvā office on July 20, 1761; however, Madhavrao’s uncle
Raghunathrao cultivated a separate faction within the nobility and maintained a secret
correspondence with Mudhoji. Moreover, the Bhonsles’ succession dispute made it difficult for
them to meet their feudatory obligations to the Peshwa. They reneged on promises to provide
military assistance in confrontations with the Nizam and Ahmad Shah Durrani at Udgir and
Panipat.257 While the Bhonsles grumbled that non-realization of revenues due to them in Bengal
and other territories made it impossible for them to pay off their creditors and maintain an army,
their failure to participate in military campaigns was understood by the Peshwa’s government to


be a major slight to the terms of their feudatory relationship. So did the fact that the Bhonsles owed the Peshwa’s government some twenty lākh rupees.

Competing loyalties, entangled succession disputes, and the non-fulfillment of financial and military obligations all required careful management to avoid the escalation of conflict between governments. Ruling families in the latter half of the eighteenth century increasingly turned to skilled agents, or kārbhārī, to manage such situations. The historian V.S. Kadam has called attention to the empowerment of the kārbhārī after the death of Balaji Bajirao, yet the devolution, delegation, and decentralization of authority within the Maratha polity was far more pervasive and deeply rooted than he acknowledges. In the late seventeenth century, the term kārbhārī referred to an administrator, usually Brahman or Kayastha, who handled the local revenue business of a Maratha nobleman’s fiefdom. But certain notable kārbhārī, such as Shivaji’s Deshastha Brahman assistant Dadaji Kondev, took on greater responsibility. The scribe-turned-kārbhārī Govindrao Khanderao Chitnis (d. 1785) under Chhatrapati Shahu Bhonsle became something of an all-purpose fixer in the Satara government’s dealings with feudatory and external powers. Moreover, as I will show in Chapter 4, he was the key figure in facilitating the transfer of executive power to Balaji Bajirao after the death of Shahu in 1749. This process of devolution only intensified during the settlement of Balaji Bajirao’s succession. Sakharam Bapu Bokil (1716-1775) and Baburao Ram Bhanu alias Baburao Phadnavis (d. 1772)

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258 SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 97, pgs. 81-3.


were the kārbhārīs charged with dispensing the main business of the Peshwa’s government.\footnote{Several letters from the daftar of the Purandare family suggest that they were working in concert from at least the late 1740s as Balaji Bajirao was establishing his control over affairs at the Satara fort. See Purandare Daftar, ed. K.V. Purandare, volume 1 (Pune: Bharat Itihas Sanshodhak Mandal, 1929), no. 168, pgs. 119-121.}

Their power was described in a July 6, 1761 letter in terms of the performativity of a kalambandī or a sanad that I analyzed in the Introduction: “Sakharampant says karār. Dada [Baburao Phadnavis] says it should be given (dyāve). Giving is still closed. But much “give, give!” is happening.”\footnote{MIS, eds. Rajwade and Deshpande, vol. 6, no 292, pg. 327.} Whereas the Peshwa had earlier reduced the Chhatrapati to the status of a figurehead, now the Peshwa himself was reduced to a figurehead. In his stead, kārbhārī executed the business of politics and administration.

Similar figures came to prominence in this period. Sakharam Bapu, whose career will be discussed below; Vitthal Sundar Parshurami (d. 1763), a minister of Nizam Ali Khan; Devaji Chorghode alias Divakarpant Purushottam (d. 1781), the Nagpur Bhonsles’ minister whose involvement in the Nagpur succession will be discussed later in this chapter; and Baburao Phadnavis’ nephew Balaji Janardan Bhanu alias Nana Phadnavis (1742-1800) were designated in popular historical memory as the sāde tīn śahāne, or “three and a half wise men.”\footnote{Nana Phadnavis is sometimes said to be half of a wise man because he did not fight, though it is more likely that his different status derives from his young age during the civil wars of the 1760s. See, for example, Shamburao Ramchandra Devale, Peśvāintīl Sādetīn Śahāne (Pune: Inamdar Bandhu Prakashan, 1963).} All of these “wise men” were Brahman administrators who rose to high office around the same time, though Nana Phadnavis, being the youngest, would not reach the peak of his influence until the 1790s. Other named kārbhārī – like Govindrao Khanderao and the Nagpur scribe Krishnarao Madhav (d. 1803) – were non-Brahman Kayastha Prabhus. Elective affinities, rather than ascriptive ones like caste, were what defined kārbhārī as a political class. Their shared vocation
demanded exceptional skill and intelligence in the art of political communication. Rulers trusted *kārbhārī* to carry out sensitive communications with rival governments in a careful and trustworthy manner. But negotiations between governments were unpredictable. It was not uncommon for a *kārbhārī* to lose the trust of a patron as a result of a deal gone wrong. If the line between loyalty and disloyalty was porous in the case of Maratha rulers, the line between intelligence and guile was equally so in the case of the “wise men.” Though the term *shahāṇa*—meaning wise, shrewd or clever—was used quite straightforwardly in eighteenth-century letters, it could also bear the wry sense of a potentially conniving or deceptive intelligence, one that would not be hemmed in by the agenda of a particular government or ruler. The three main *śahāṇe*—Bapu, Parshurami, and Chorghode—received more than their just deserts for their intelligent machinations in the seditious politics of the 1760s.

**Two Wise Men Down**

The politics underlying the civil wars of the 1760s arose out of a competition for influence between Madhavrao and Raghunathrao after the latter struck a deal with the Nizam to dissuade him from carrying out an attack on Pune in late 1761.264 This competition culminated in an armed standoff between their factions at Alegaon just outside Pune in late November 1762. When Madhavrao surrendered, his uncle overturned earlier distributions of state patronage to benefit his followers. He conferred the title of *pant pratinidhi* on his infant son Bhaskarrao with Naro Shankar as his assistant, thereby depriving Bhavanrao Kulkami and his family of their long-held patrimony. Baburao Phadnavis lost his place to Chinto Vitthal Rairikar, while Sakharam Bapu was made sole *kārbhārī* and granted the fort of Sinhagad for his residence.

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264 For Janoji Bhonsle’s support in this confrontation, the Peshwa promised to pay ten *lākh* rupees and to transfer some of Mudhoji’s territory to him as well as to make him the sole ruler of Berar, should the Nizam be completely defeated. “Nāgpūrkar Bhōṣlēyāṇcī Sāṃbandhācē Kāgadpatre,” ed. K.N. Sane and V.D. Oak, *Kāvyetihās Saṅgṛahā* 32 (Pune 1890), no. 35, pgs. 74-5.
Bapu’s family had a considerable history of service, and Bapu himself had penetrated the inner circle of the Peshwa and acquired an equal share with Phadnavis in handling his administration. But it was his relationship with Raghunathrao that led to his rapid promotion. So rapid, in fact, that he became a magnet for deeper anxieties about the nature of politics under conditions of delegated authority.

In another reversal of patronage, the stronghold of Miraj in southern Maharashtra was removed from the possession of the Patwardhan family and conferred in jagir on one of Raghunathrao’s partisans. In early February 1763, Govind Hari Patwardhan was forced to surrender the fort and take refuge in Mangalwedh, while his son Gopalrao joined the Nizam and Bhonsles’ insurrection. Govind Hari continued to report on the political situation from Mangalwedh. He maintained that his family was a loyal servant of the Peshwa who had no recourse but to seek out the Nizam’s patronage to meet the pecuniary demands of their army and their creditors. A couple months prior to leaving Miraj, he declared to his son in a December 1 letter: “We have not committed any treachery. We have loyally served those whose food we have eaten since birth.” For the Patwardhans, the defection was a desperate measure to maintain their status, not a rejection of the Peshwa’s authority as such. The Bhonsles also had significant financial incentive to defect. According to their April 11, 1763 agreement with Bhavanrao Kulkarni brokered by his agent Gamaji Yamaji Shivdev, the Bhonsles were to provide 25,000 troops in exchange for which they would receive territory worth a whopping

265 His grandfather’s brother Mahadji Yamaji Bokil was the deputy of Shivaji’s son Sambhaji’s wākanavīś. Three generations before Bapu’s time, Shivaji dispatched Mahadji Yamaji’s uncle Pantaji Gopinath Bokil to negotiate with Afzal Khan. See Purandare Daftar, ed. Purandare, vol. 1, 14.


267 See, for example, ALS, ed. Khare, vol. 2, no. 235, pg. 400. They considered the confiscation of their holdings to be tantamount to pushing them outside the Peshwa’s realm and thus rendering them homeless.
seventy-five ḍākh rupees should the scheme to unseat the Peshwa prove to be successful. The Nizam by means of a July 5, 1763 agreement granted revenue totaling over five ḍākh rupees from the tracts near Pavnar in Wardha district to Janoji Bhonsle. He also issued an order assigning the fort of Amner with an annual collection of 1,500 rupees to Janoji for the safe residence of his family.

Financial considerations aside, the terms of these agreements suggest that the defectors harbored some intention of overturning the Peshwa regime. Additional internal correspondence shows that there were significant doubts about the rights of the Peshwa family with respect to the Chhatrapati, who continued to serve as the symbol and fount of Maratha sovereignty.

In an April 22, 1762 letter to Janoji Bhonsle reaffirming his agreement with the Nizam, Bhavanrao Kulkarni asserted that the Peshwa had become a transgressor (amaryāda) and had discarded the established customs (rīt) of service (sevā) by placing Chhatrapati Ramraja in confinement at the time of Shahu’s death thirteen years ago. The later testimony of the Nagpur Bhonsles’ head scribe, recorded in the margins of an 1822 chronicle, corroborates this insinuation of a widely shared conviction that the Peshwa had treated the Chhatrapati with disrespect (be-adabī).

Thus, the Bhonsles’ support of the Nizam was in part a repudiation of the Peshwa’s right to execute the will of the Chhatrapati. Gopalrao Patwardhan conveyed as much in a July 17, 1763 letter in which he proclaimed that the Bhonsles were unlikely to join him in conciliating with the

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268 BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 94b-95a.

269 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 182a.


271 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 189a-191b.

272 BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 85a-b.
Peshwa and instead planned to assume the burden of government (rājqābhār). While it is difficult to know the specific end game of the Bhonsles, it is likely that they sought to establish a new hierarchy of authority in which the Peshwa’s position would be considerably diminished.

Complaints against the Peshwa’s supersession of the rights of the Chhatrapati dovetailed with a second critique: that the Peshwa’s government was partial to the interests of the Chitpavan Brahman sub-caste, which had come to new prominence in the western Deccan following the rise of Balaji Viswanath under Shahu. Especially illustrative in this regard is a letter sent to Raghunathrao in December 1762 by a group of Brahmans, probably Chitpavan, resident in Pune. Bemoaning the destruction of the government at the hands of those who defected to the Nizam, they offered a vivid picture of the anxieties of this political moment:

Your agent (kāryabhāgī) [Sakharam Bapu] has taught you every sort of trick and led you beyond the pale. He has split the entire circle [of nobility] and performed chicanery to present you with success. He has destroyed a government of three generations. He has given away the government’s forts. He has divided and given away all of the saranjām lands. He has given away the rest of the territories to the enemy. He has made loyal servants, commanders, and clerks destitute. Some are in hiding; some are in prison. He has made you a profit but ruined your house, which you do not realize. You will understand the consequences. He brought you to Satara and acquired the robes of the pratinidhi in your name. He made your commander [Naro Shankar] into your equal. The people of the Satara fort descended, and the guards were attached. The fort and the kingdom were lost. A prabhu [Chandraseniyā Kayastha Prabhu] effected this business. In an instant, everything was destroyed.

The letter-writers went on to declare that Sakharam Bapu’s original intention was to obliterate the name of the Chitpavan Brahman sub-caste.


275 Here the letter-writers are referring specifically to Mahipatrao Dada Chitnis, a grandson of Balaji Avaji who held the citnī title at Pune. He procured the peśvī title for Madhavrao Ballal from Sambhaji but later supported Raghunathrao. See Chapter 3.

Govind Hari Patwardhan echoed the Pune Brahmins’ sentiments about Bapu in his dispatches to his son in the field. He made him into a scapegoat for the disastrous measures taken by Raghunathrao’s faction. In particular, he focused on what he believed to be a deep-seated prejudice against Chitpavan Brahmins. His view was that Bapu had provoked the Maratha defection to the Nizam in order to aid the latter in his plans of carrying out an assault on Pune, which would result in the demolition of Shaniwar Wada, the palace of the Peshwas, and the surrounding vāḍās owned by various Chitpavan families, including the Patwardhans. Bapu’s ultimate aim was to bring about the demise of the Peshwa regime and thereby to displace the Chitpavans into a state of nomadic beggary (deśadhī) in which they would be physically and politically destitute.277 In several letters, he also claimed that Bapu had provoked Sadashivrao Bhau into rushing into war at Panipat so as to bring about the ruin of the Chitpavans. He even referred to him as Shakuni, the uncle of Duryodhana in the Māhabhārata often portrayed to be the mastermind of the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas.278

Whether or not Bapu desired the political ruin of the Chitpavans, his sudden rise to power became a flashpoint for tensions between competing elite groups because of the ethical ambiguities of his role as a political intermediary. For Patwardhan, these ambiguities were closely tied to his functional role within the Peshwa’s government. In his letters, he variously refers to Bapu as a kārbhārī and a kāryabhāgī, both of which roughly mean “agent,” “manager,” or “administrator.” While these terms could have been straightforward designations, they took on a more sinister valence when paired with qualitative characterizations of the kinds of measures Bapu took to realize his goals. For example, in a letter from April 1763, Patwardhan fumes, “The person [Bapu] who makes this much mischief with Miraj is one who destroys established things


278 Ibid., no. 72, pg. 106.
(kr taghna). That one does not fail to delude everyone to accomplish his schemes...He is a trickster (kuceshtakhora). Elsewhere, he notes that Bapu had become kṛ tkarme, or skillful. He compares Bapu’s schemes to the act of taking on an incarnation (avatarākṛtya), and in another letter dated June 10, 1763, he sardonically proclaims that Bapu had attained spiritual power through the practice of physical and mental austerity (tapascārya). Playing on his status as a Brahman, Patwardhan mocked Bapu for his pride in believing that a mere administrator can arrogate to himself the authority reserved for a sovereign ruler or a deity. In his view, Bapu had offered illusory, misleading counsel to Raghunathrao to achieve his personal apotheosis rather than to serve the needs of the state.

Bapu survived the fallout from his participation in the 1762-3 revolt, but not without serious consequences. After the Peshwa’s victory at the battle of Rakshasbhuvan, Madhavrao put Raghunathrao under house arrest and forbid his followers from meeting with him. He seems to have applied this same punishment to Bapu. According to the account in the Peshvyāncī Bakhar (1818), Bapu was ordered to remain at home under the watch of two guards. His work was reassigned to Moroba Phadnavis, while Moroba’s nephew Nana began to do the work of the phādnavis in earnest. Nevertheless, the Peshwa continued to summon Bapu every evening after the breakup of the formal court assembly to seek his advice on the day’s business.

The vicissitudes of Sakharam Bapu’s career were replicated in that of the Nagpur Bhonsles’ minister Devaji Chorghode. Both Bapu and Chorghode recovered from precipitous falls from grace to take part in the later politics of the Pune and Nagpur courts. Their fellow


280 Ibid., vol. 1, no. 135, pg. 206.

281 Ibid., vol. 2, no. 302, pg. 516.

Deshastha Brahman śahānā Vitthal Sundar would presumably have weathered the political consequences of the civil wars of the 1760s had he survived the battle of Rakshasbhuvan. Given these three administrators’ shared Deshastha Brahman caste background, and the anger expressed in Gopal Hari Patwardhan’s correspondence, it may be tempting to interpret the 1762-3 revolt as a reactionary political expression of the resentments of Deshastha Brahmins against the Chitpavans, who were relative newcomers to high administrative and political office. But these resentments, like those of Maratha families against the Peshwa’s reduction of the Chhatrapati, have limited purchase in explaining the political significance of the revolt because they were limited in their appeal. Moreover, as we outlined earlier, cruder, but no less deeply felt issues of money, territory, and succession were also at stake. Instead, these resentments are indicative of a more widely shared anxiety about the ways in which a segmentary, or partial, interest, whether of a caste, a faction, or of one’s own career, could lead a skilled administrator to overlook the interests of the political whole. It is on this stake that ruling families like the Bhonsles and the Patwardhans impaled their kārbhārīs when their political plans went awry; in turn, their responses reveal the stakes of kārbhārī management of loyalty and affiliation within the post-Panipat Maratha order.

The fall of the Bhonsles’ chief minister Devaji Chorghode is one of the strangest and most fascinating episodes in the civil wars of the 1760s. It also exemplifies the weight lent to political negotiations between Maratha governments and the unavoidable material risks of the vocation of politics. While Devaji’s origins remain somewhat obscure, it seems that he was a low-level clerk in the delegation deputed to Pune to secure the senā sā heb subhā title for Janoji
Bhonsle in 1755.\textsuperscript{283} Without the knowledge of his senior, he inserted himself into the negotiations and thereby attained the favor of both rulers.\textsuperscript{284} From that point onwards, he was a leading counselor in the Nagpur government who closely managed its relationship with Pune. But his fortunes began to decline even prior to the commencement of the wars. Several members of the court, including Raghuji Karande, blamed him for the prolongation of the succession dispute between Janoji and Mudhoji. Towards the end of 1759, he feared that he would be thrown into prison and desperately wrote to Peshwa Balaji Bajirao to save him. The Peshwa’s support seems to have been adequate to prevent his confinement.\textsuperscript{285} The Peshwa’s correspondents at Nagpur had described him as one of the only persons at court capable of paying the government’s arrears to its army and to the Peshwa because of his strong relationships with local merchants and revenue-collectors. He also held tremendous influence with the Bhonsles themselves. In the words of one correspondent, if someone else said something true, it was considered a lie, but if Devaji told a lie, it was considered to be true.\textsuperscript{286}

For the next several years, as the conflict between Pune and Nagpur intensified, Devaji seems to have been able to mollify his masters at both courts, despite almost certainly being integral to the 1762 alliance between the Bhonsles and the Nizam. His luck ran out, however, in 1769 when he traveled to Madhavrao’s camp to make one final attempt to avert war. As one

\textsuperscript{283} According to the Gupte bakhar, he was a šāgird, which was a kind of student (often under an ustad). His mentor was a clerk named Konherram Umredkar in the employ of the Bhonsles. See BL, Mss Marathi, B26, ff. 114; NBB, ed. Kale, 68-9.

\textsuperscript{284} Gupte further specifies Devaji’s intervention into the negotiations. After it had been agreed that Bhonsle would gift the Pune government one and a half lākh rupees to obtain the senā sāheb subhā title, the leaders of the delegation tricked Bhonsle into believing that the ante was upped to seven lakhs (presumably to their own pecuniary benefit). Devaji then surreptitiously told both Bhonsle and the Peshwa that the amount had been altered to two and a half lākhs, which made it seem to each party that it had gotten the better end of the deal.

\textsuperscript{285} SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, nos. 102, 104, pgs. 108-110.

\textsuperscript{286} SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 110, pgs. 113-4.
official reported on January 7, 1769, he supplicated the Peshwa to offer some money to the perennially cash-strapped Nagpur government, perhaps in exchange for the Bhonsles’ future cooperation. The Peshwa refused. Instead, Devaji was arrested and installed with the sundry laborers and followers of the army. Towards the end of the war, he was released and sent to the Bhonsles’ camp to initiate negotiations. Despite having worked to establish a peace settlement, the Bhonsles promptly put him under house arrest in Nagpur, sequestered his possessions, and imposed heavy fines on his relations and partisans, including Chimaji Rakhmagad, who, as we will see, Devaji had recruited to effect a reconciliation between the two governments.

The Bhonsles placed blame for their troubles squarely on Devaji’s shoulders. In particular, they accused him of fostering the treasonous friendships with rival states that had been at the center of their misunderstanding with Pune. The Peshwa’s correspondent Vitthal Shamraj in a September 26, 1769 despatch relayed Janoji Bhonsle’s frustrations with Devaji. Janoji had stated, “I am not able to speak of the earlier interconnections that resulted everywhere. But this action at least was not mine; rather it was Divakarpant [Devaji] who pulled the strings (sutre) in all directions. Whatever I used to tell him, his understanding exceeded [that] – God is not attained through irregular service, but rather through loyalty.” In pursuing a self-interested, albeit pragmatic politics of flexible affiliation, Devajipant had transgressed the norms of loyalty and obedience structuring traditional relationships of elite servitude. Janoji further said

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288 Ibid., no. 244, pg. 232.
289 Ibid., nos. 253, 265, 267, pgs. 242, 253-4, 255.
290 NBB, ed. Kale, 97.
that he considered his scheming to have been a calamity for the state and confined him to his house. He sought to reassure the Peshwa that by removing Devaji from political affairs, and by cutting him off from all of his former associates at court, he was putting the Nagpur government back on track. Seven years earlier, Madhavrao used a similar metaphor of pulling strings to describe the role of Sakharam Bapu in fomenting revolt: “Because of the perplexities caused by the administrator (kārbhārī), the wires (tanava) of our kingdom have snapped.” Like Bapu, Devaji was made into a political scapegoat.

But stranger things were afoot. Earlier that month on September 7, the Nagpur court had assembled to bid farewell to Janoji’s younger brother Sabaji, who, as part of the peace agreement, was departing for a term of service in Pune. Just as everyone was gathering outside – one or two hundred in the news-writer’s estimation – an ascetic (gosāvī) who had been wandering from place to place approached Janoji and told him that he would not stay in Nagpur but instead would proceed northwards. When Janoji asked what was troubling him, the ascetic replied that there was no justice in his kingdom. People simply did whatever came into their minds. He then accused Devaji along with another Brahman by the name of Mahadev Bhat Patwardhan of practicing witchcraft on the Bhonsles’ head general, who had recently died of a fever. The doctors attending him had declared that he had been the victim of a spell. Stranger still, fried lentil and wheat cakes were found in the ashes left over from his funeral pyre. Other reported unnatural occurrences, including a cow in the village of Ralegaon eating her own calf and the appearance of an earthen water jar stuffed with a black cat, thickened the air of the court


with suspicion of malevolent activity. Finally, a person by the name of Janardan Vaidya, perhaps a Brahman physician, who frequented Devaji’s company had recently been spotted performing a fire sacrifice over the course of several days, corroborating his involvement in a fiendish plan to disrupt the natural order of things.

Whether or not Devaji, in addition to politics, was expert in witchcraft is beyond our scope; however, what we can glean from this set of accusations is that his name and reputation had been so sullied by the recent political catastrophe that it became either necessary or desirable to bury him for good. For the Bhonsles, his counsel, especially his willingness to fraternize with rivals of the Peshwa, led them to stray from the straight and narrow path of devoted vassalage. By analogy, his mysterious influence lay behind the recent deviations from nature’s proper course. The case of Devaji is exemplary of the ways in which a conflict between allied Maratha governments, which was also fundamentally a conflict about the expectations and norms of political conduct, became concretized in the life of an individual practitioner. Practicing pragmatic politics – by surveying the field for strategic opportunities, offering advice in tricky situations, and massaging relationships with flattering words and gestures - could be lucrative, as it was for Devaji, but precisely because political work was so consequential, it was also risky. Maratha rulers were keen to recruit individuals who were not only intelligent and skillful, but also trustworthy.

The Terms and Sentiments of Peace

In the final months of 1768, the ruling circle at Nagpur realized that it was in desperate need of someone who could build trust with the Pune government. Although it had escaped a

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294 Shamraj also noted that the black cat was thought to contain a ghost (jhind) and that inscribed on the surface was the message “The village that receives this cat should feed it milk and deliver it onwards.” Janoji Bhonsole ordered the vessel to be sent north beyond the Narmada, where it could do no further harm to his kingdom, but Shamraj did not say whether or not he gave the cat its milk. See SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 198, pg. 192.
serious confrontation two years earlier, it was widely known that the Peshwa was planning a second campaign in Berar. In a last-ditch attempt to effect a reconciliation, Janoji Bhonsle, following the advice of Devaji Chorghode, enlisted his head scribe Chimaji Rakhmagad, to meet with Madhavrao. Based on available documentation, we can infer that this meeting occurred sometime between September and December 1768, just a couple months before the beginning of the war. The mission failed, which probably led to Devaji’s unfortunate decision to travel to the Peshwa’s camp, where he was promptly placed under arrest. Its significance, however, has less to do with whether or not it made a difference in the state of affairs between the Pune and Nagpur governments and more with what it indicates about the sort of qualities associated with a good political intermediary. Indeed, the choice to assign Chimaji to this job reflects the trustworthiness of his lineage, and, concomitantly, the enduring value of his family’s relationship with the Maratha Chhatrapati.

Chimaji Rakhmagad was the son of Rakhmaji Ganesh, a Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu scribe who was assigned to Raghuji Bhonsle by Chhatrapati Shahu during the period of his investment with the senā sāheb subhā title. Chimaji, like his father before him, held the title of ciṭnavīs, which designated him as the scribe in charge of the composition of Marathi correspondence. He does not seem to have had much involvement in politics prior to the 1768 mission. Yet he was perceived to hold a considerable degree of credibility not just because his father had been appointed to Raghuji’s circle by Shahu, but also because he was the cousin of

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295 On this appointment and the role of the ciṭnīs/ciṭnavīs in the Maratha state, see Chapter 3.

296 The terms ciṭnīs and ciṭnavīs are interchangeable. The former was in circulation at the courts of Satara and Pune, while the latter, whose suffix has more of the flavor of its Persian root, was preferred at Nagpur.

297 Both Chimaji and his father are listed in Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar’s 1821 bakhar amongst the circle of notables and advisers who accompanied Raghuji Bhonsle from Satara to Berar. See BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 28a.
Shahu’s head scribe and intimate confidante, Govindrao Khanderao. Given that Govindrao Khanderao had been the key intermediary between Balaji Bajirao and Shahu during the latter’s final days, this family connection was integral to Chimaji’s political value at this particular juncture. Govindrao Khanderao and his successors were viewed as members of the Chhatrapati’s inner circle who were willing to cooperate with the Peshwa. Chimaji was able to draw on this good faith when attempting to broker an agreement between the Pune and Nagpur governments.

Although Chimaji was ultimately not able to prevent the outbreak of war, his efforts to re-establish trust seem to have been appreciated. He was accorded the full honors and respect of a person of significance during his visit. In a letter to Janoji Bhonsle dated October 21, 1768, Madhavrao reflected on this visit:

The honorable Chimaji Rakhmagad came and explained everything. Based on what he said, any doubts that came with him left. It is a promise that there are no doubts remaining here (yetē śapatapuraskar sandēha rāhilā nāhī). However, your assurance (khātarjamā) is necessary. You must faithfully send the honorable Diwakar Purushottam [Devaji Chorghode]. Just as various issues were discussed with Chimappa, so he will provide assurance on your behalf once he arrives.

Another bakhar account of this visit echoes the Peshwa’s impressions. It states that as the equal of his cousin Govindrao Khanderao, Chimaji was accorded the honor and respect due to a member of his lineage. In addition, several villages that had been granted to his family were reassigned in his name. An original sanad dated November 18, 1768 confirms that at least the village of Varne in the pargana Got Mathargaon, which is located in today’s Buldhana district,

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298 For the precise family relationship, see Chapter 3.

299 See Chapter 4.

300 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 218-9.

301 NBB, ed. Kale, 94.
was removed from the management of Govindrao Khanderao and granted in mokāsā to Chimaji with the provision that anything over the base collection of 335 rupees was to be handed over to the Peshwa’s government.302

While Chimaji was ultimately not able to prevent the outbreak of war, and while he may have felt some of the impact of Devaji’s fall from grace, his efforts to re-establish trust between the Nagpur Bhonsles and the Peshwa redounded to his own credit. He established himself as a worthy member of a reputable line of state servants, one that would continue to be trusted in political matters. In his letter, the Peshwa invokes the phrase “with an oath” (śāpathpuraskar) to characterize the new understanding between the two governments, implying that his oath as well as Chimaji’s imbued this relationship with integrity and sincerity. As I argued in the Introduction, oaths and promises were critical to negotiation between parties with independent and sometimes conflicting agendas. The commendation of being able to trust one’s word, and as we have seen with Devaji, the corresponding condemnation of believing one’s word to be dishonest or disloyal, were integral to the fortunes of those who pursued the vocation of politics in the Maratha Empire. The value placed on trust in political communication indicates the extent to which competing Maratha governments understood that the resolution of conflict depended upon a non-violent arena for reconciliation and re-negotiation of the terms by which sovereign authority was distributed.

After his father’s death in 1771, Chimaji was re-confirmed in the office of cīṇavīs and admitted into the inner circle of Mudhoji Bhonsle. According to one story that is recounted in several chronicles, Chimaji was accompanying Mudhoji when the latter was violently accosted for funds by a group of Pathan servicemen. Mudhoji fled into the circular ditch of an oil-mill but was overtaken by one of his attackers and wounded on his thumb while trying to hold back the

302 PD, Ghadni Daftar, rumal no. 405, unnumbered sanad document dated 7 Razab 1169.
attacker’s knife blade. Finally, as one account suggests, it was Chimaji’s servant Shahji Podar who saved Mudhoji by killing the Pathan.\textsuperscript{303} Later, Chimaji’s fortunes took a turn for the worse. For reasons left unstated, Mudhoji began to think badly of him and put him under close watch until, through the intercession of another Kayastha Prabhu official Mahipatrapo Dinkar Gupte,\textsuperscript{304} he was released and allowed to live peacefully until his death in 1780 in the vicinity of the villages of Nimbgaon-Nandura in Buldana district, where he had earlier received his mokāsā privileges from Madhavrao.\textsuperscript{305} His work in politics was extended by his nephew and adopted son Krishna Madhavrao, who inherited his forebears’ citnavīs title but took a far more significant role in state affairs, serving in substance, if not in name as diwān alongside the chief munshī, Shridhar Laxman. Krishna Madhavrao’s career and those of other Kayastha Prabhu families employed by eighteenth-century Maratha governments will be explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chimaji Rakhmagad’s visit to the Peshwa was not the first time that parties at Nagpur and Pune made an effort to reassure each other of their good intentions. Sometime after learning that the Bhonsles had joined the Nizam, Madhavrao reached out to Janoji in an effort to put their relationship on the right track. He stated, “During the time of my dear departed father [Peshwa Balaji Bajirao], you acted assuredly and straightforwardly (nikhālas) in all things, but in the course of time, things that should not happen have happened. As such, you should now act assuredly in all things and wish for the wellbeing of this state.” Madhavrao elaborates on these sentiments in accordance with those expressed in a promise-bearing letter, or pledge

\textsuperscript{303} Other accounts of the same episode claim that it was Mudhoji’s retainer Devaji Dongardev or a local bhāng-seller that saved his life. See NBB, ed. Kale, 138-9.

\textsuperscript{304} On Mahipatrapo Dinkar’s career, see Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{305} For the end of his life, see Shridhar Narayan Huddar, Nāgpūrce Cītnavīs (Nagpur, 1971), 10-11, which is in turn based on an unpublished bakhar written at Nagpur by Khando Bhagvant Prabhu. I am grateful to Awantika Chitnavis for providing a copy of this text.
(śapathpūrvaka patra) Janoji had sent. In conclusion, he refers again to the former Peshwa:

“There is the promise (śapath) of the dear departed Nana Saheb and the promise of Shri Gajanan [Ganesh]. Just as you act loyally, so will your state expand.”

Madhavrao’s letter and the pledge that Janoji had earlier sent are exemplary of way in which invocations of oaths, often to a deity, were embedded in political communication and even associated with physical letters. Such letters were affective instruments designed to convey sentiments of assurance and confidence in periods of political uncertainty.

To do so, letter-writers often invoked oaths that had been taken in the past, usually by specific individuals at specific times and places, to repair ties of mutual trust that had been broken and to establish a precedent for amity in the future. They also referred to familial bonds, both real and fictive. Hence Madhavrao’s reference to his father, whose confidence in Janoji Bhonsle, as we have seen, was won by Devaji Chorghode at the time of the Nagpur succession.

Raghunathrao made similar references to existing oaths and family ties in his previously referenced December 27, 1762 letter to Janoji. Having acknowledged the elder (vadil) status of the Bhonsles, and the fact that the Peshwas were tied to them in a junior relation of filiality (leṅkurapanā), he offers his interpretation of the recent course of events:

Your chieftainship has been yours from the beginning. After the dear departed Shahu Maharaj, Raghjuji died. At that time, the dear departed Nana Saheb [Peshwa Balaji Bajirao] sent the robes of the senā sāheb subhā with due honor to your house. You were borne along with affection. When we looked upon you with such affection, an extraordinary time ensued in which the pratinidhi and others went over to the enemy. You also went. Because of this, the kingdom was damaged. Pune was burned. After that, you understood and came [to our side]. Harmony between us was restored, and by means of speech (bol) and holy basil (tulśī), oaths were taken (imān pramāṇ jhāhale). Not a shred of doubt remained. But the doubt in your minds would not leave. An oath of god (iśvarācī śapath) by words and holy basil had taken place. There should have been no uncertainty after that, but still, you insisted that the promise that you made should also be

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306 “Nāgpūrkar Bhōṣlyāṅcī Saṃbandhācē Kāgadpatre,” ed. Sane and Oak, no. 6, pgs. 18-9.
Raghunathrao’s missive testifies to the power invested in the ritual of oath-taking through the exchange of words and objects. These rituals rejuvenated sentiments of filial affection. But the letter itself was also a vehicle for Raghunathrao’s promise to meet the Bhonsles in person and assuage any doubts that they still harbored. Later accounts record that Raghunathrao did meet Devaji Chorghode sometime before the second war between Pune and Nagpur. This visit and the subsequent mediations of Devaji and Chimaji were not successful in resolving the conflict between the two governments. But the deployment of oaths and sentiments would continue to be a feature of communication between Maratha governments.

By mid-March 1769, the Bhonsles capitulated to the Peshwa. They had spent weeks on the run. Having fled to the dense jungles of Chandrapur, they moved southeastwards and came to a halt somewhere between Dharmapuri and Nirmal. Meanwhile, Devaji had been made to march with the camp followers of the Peshwa’s army but was also charged with negotiating a peace settlement between the two parties. Once he reached the Peshwa’s camp at Kankagiri-Brahmeshwar on the banks of the Godavari, he formally submitted on behalf of the Bhonsles. According to a March 17 report, he pleaded with the Peshwa to be merciful to the Bhonsles given the state of their dominion. Their lands had been looted and burned to such an extent that it would take five years to restore them. Their cattle had been carried off. Their armies were clamored for pay. The effects of the military-fiscal dimension of the conflict were keenly felt but difficult to describe. As one news-writer pensively put it, “I cannot put into words how many shocks have been dealt in this affair.” The peace was not formally settled until the two sides met in person in late April at Mehkar near Washim; however, the terms were probably more or


308 SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 257, pgs. 244-5.
less fixed prior to this meeting. Memoranda (yādī) documenting negotiations (jāb-sāl) in the form of a series of linked propositions (kalam) and resolutions (karār) were drawn up on March 13 and March 23, 1769, respectively (see Appendix B for the text of the latter memorandum).

In the Introduction, I considered the linguistic and performative aspects of political communication as encapsulated by the diplomatic practice of jawāb-suwał. Here I want to call attention to how the peace settlement addressed some of the grievances that precipitated the conflict between Pune and Nagpur and to outline some of the issues that would continue to preoccupy these governments.

Some of the demands in these agreements concerned outstanding claims to territory and revenue. The Peshwa’s government asked that certain tracts that been granted in jāgīr as well as Fattesingh Bhonsle’s holdings in Berar be ceded. It also demanded an annual gift of five lākh and one rupees and cloth from Balapur and Washim. In addition to sanads confirming their regular domains in Berar, Chanda, Gondwana, Warghat, Chhatisgarh, Chhota Nagpur, Bastar, Cuttack, Murshidabad, and Patan in Orissa, the Bhonsles requested that certain permanent land rights (vatan) be restored; that the Peshwa hand over the fort of Amner; that special letters be despatched instructing local rulers at Mandla and Bhopal to refrain from harrassing their holdings in these areas; and that the Peshwa’s government ignore the complaints of their creditors, who frequently harassed them about debts they could not yet pay back. Both sides referred to the recurring problem of ghāsdaṇā. Because ghāsdaṇā was an irregular levy falling outside of the regular administration of revenue, it was a constant item of complaint. The Bhonsles were authorized to levy ghāsdaṇā in an area on the banks of the Godavari known as Gangathadi with the exception of certain government tracts. Both sides in the 1769 agreements

310 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 204a-207a, 209a-211b; D33, ff. 104b-110b.
stated that damage from unauthorized ḡāsdānā should be avoided. The Bhonsles also complained of damages caused by government armies marching towards north India and by certain errant generals who ought to be chastised.

Beyond these issues of pecuniary and proprietary concern, the agreements sought to create the conditions for a more permanent peace between Nagpur and Pune. They articulated explicit guidelines for preventing the outbreak of conflict in the future. These guidelines were built on the experience of the civil wars of the preceding decade. So, the Peshwa’s agreement included items specifically concerning the employment of mercenary cavalrymen and the maintenance of an army commensurate with available funds. Correspondingly, the Bhonsles requested that the Peshwa’s government refrain from interfering with fraternal politics (bhāūbandāce rājāraṇ) and from lending a ready ear to the potentially false complaints of their officials. Any such complaints ought to be fully investigated before making accusations. Rather than resorting to clandestine or extreme political measures, they recommended that any public business be settled by means of jawāb-suwāl. A more general desire for loyalty and affection was expressed on both sides. Consider one exchange:

The dear departed Nana Saheb loved [us] like a son. You ought to maintain this affection sincerely. Do not deviate from this. You should behave loyally. Act in such a way to preserve the wellbeing of the state. Like family, you too will be loved and favored. There will be no difficulty in this. So resolved (yeṇe pramāṇe karār).

Like the oaths examined earlier, jawāb-suwāl thus expressed sentiments of affection, but it also employed a more formal set of ratifying conventions – like the promissory phrase yeṇe pramāṇe karār – to establish a more permanent basis for sustaining those sentiments in the future.

Finally, the agreements exhibited a special preoccupation with maintaining open and transparent communication with rival governments. The Peshwa discouraged the Bhonsles from

\[311\] BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 205b.
corresponding with the Mughal emperor and other powers in north India, including the
Company. Rather than engaging in politics (rājkāraṇ) with other external governments and
promoting rebellion, they were to perform loyal service when summoned and despatch Devaji or
a Bhonsle brother to attend on the Peshwa. As was customary, they were to station an envoy
(vakīl) at the court of Nizam Ali Khan to handle government business by means of jawāb-suwwāl;
however, they were not to create additional lines of communication without the knowledge of the
Peshwa’s government. With respect to the Nizam, the Bhonsles noted that their agreement for
the division of Berar revenues would be ongoing and that if the Nizam violated this agreement,
the Peshwa should come to their aid. “Our peace and conflict is your peace and conflict,” the
Bhonsles’ agreement put it succinctly.312 Separate clauses were included regarding the Bhonsles’
negotiations with the Company regarding Cuttack. The Peshwa authorized the continuance of a
vakīl for purposes of negotiation, but the Bhonsles went further, stating that their dispute with the
Company would not admit of a non-violent solution. The Peshwa’s corresponding resolution is
evasive, neither guaranteeing nor precluding the arrangement for a campaign to consolidate
control over the Bhonsles’ territories in Cuttack and Orissa.313

Between 1761 and 1803, the Pune and Nagpur governments exchanged about twenty
agreements.314 Many of these re-visited the terms of reconciliation established in the 1769
agreements while enabling new initiatives such as an alliance between Pune, Nagpur,
Hyderabad, and Mysore in anticipation of the First Anglo Maratha-War, which will be discussed
in Chapter 5. The reappearance of certain core issues helped to create substantive parameters for

312 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 207a.

313 Indeed the Cuttack issue was not resolved without violence. See Chapter 5.

314 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, ff. 184a-187a, 204a-222a, 225a-226a, 246b-254b, 256b-257b; Mss Marathi,
D36, ff. 11b-18a, 45a-46b, 53a-54a, 65a-79a, 91a-97a; PD, Ghadni Daftar, rumal no. 515, unnumbered
yādī document dated 1186, 1189, 1196, and 1197.
diplomatic reconciliation. Over the years, these governments developed a mutual understanding that the process of jawāb-suwaḷ, and the fulfillment of the various claims and concessions that it proposed, undergirded their amicable relations. Hence, jawāb-suwaḷ itself was an explicit area of concern in these agreements. The Pune government in a kalam from 1761 requested, “There is a government envoy at Delhi. You should station an envoy there, and under the government envoy’s supervision, conduct negotiations (jāb-sāḷ).”\textsuperscript{315} Another put forth by Nagpur in a September 22, 1779 yādī stated, “Your envoys should not neglect in giving respect, and they should not fill up the court pursuing their own politics. They should write truly and be humble,” to which the karār relied, “We will send an intelligent man, and he will act according to your wishes.”\textsuperscript{316} Occasionally, a kalam might even refer to previous settlements to justify the need for a new round of jawāb-suwaḷ: “When the agreement of Brahmeshwar took place, we obtained the favor of the late Raosahēb [Peshwa Madhavrao Ballal]. It was decided that within two years, we would seek to provide experience [of its operation]. But at that time talks stalled. Now you should say whether you acknowledge this.”\textsuperscript{317} Or, a kalam might refer to a face-to-face meeting, which was often a necessary step in putting a relationship on a better footing. Mudhoji Bhonsle noted in an opening kalam, “Earlier, my son Raghoji Bhonsle came to Purandar to meet you. On that occasion, a resolution of mutual friendship and unity occurred in so many ways, and then he returned to Nagpur…Now, I came to Pune, and on this occasion, the absolute best and most certain talks and agreements were settled and may remain for many days.”\textsuperscript{318} As a flexible,

\textsuperscript{315} BL, Mss Marathi, D35, 185b.

\textsuperscript{316} BL, Mss Marathi, D36, ff. 14b-15a.

\textsuperscript{317} BL, Mss Marathi, D36, ff. 11b.

\textsuperscript{318} BL, Mss Marathi, D36, ff. 65b.
dialogic instrument, the agreement transformed discrete instances of communication into a common set of facts and a meta-commentary on the process of jawāb-suwall.

**Conclusion: Towards a Social History of the Kārbhārī**

This chapter examined the Pune-Nagpur civil wars of the 1760s to reveal the stakes of communicative action between allied Maratha governments. It showed that such wars threatened to overwhelm the ability of the Peshwa’s kamāvīsdārs to control the operations of the military-fiscal economy as governments competed for control over resources. This military-fiscal crisis was in turn symptomatic of a crisis of confidence in the hierarchy of authority structuring the Peshwa’s relationship to the Bhonsles of Nagpur. Due to a constellation of recurring issues – prolonged succession disputes, indebtedness, demand for military aid – the relationship between these governments deteriorated. The kārbhārī charged with maintaining this relationship by managing political communication in an intelligent and trustworthy manner were held responsible for this crisis of confidence. It became clear that it was necessary to restore confidence by creating more regular mechanisms for regulating political communication and behavior. By means of oath-taking and treaty-making, rulers and their administrators sought to create the conditions for a more permanent peace, which would become the foundation for carrying out joint projects in subsequent decades.

According to an order issued on May 17, 1769, the homes of Piraji and Govindrao Konde Shivapurkar, which had been seized, and their family and property, which had been sequestered and sent to Sinhagad fort, were released in light of the agreement reached between the Bhonsles and the Peshwa.\(^{319}\) We can speculate that similar orders were issued for other individuals caught in the crossfire of the internecine conflict of the past decade. Devaji Chorghode was not so fortunate. He remained under house arrest for several months following the peace and only

\(^{319}\) *SSRPD*, ed. Vad and Sane, vol. 9, no. 154, pg. 139.
regained his influence at the Nagpur court following Janoji Bhonsle’s death in 1772. Prior to his death, Janoji endeavored to reassure the Peshwa of the sincerity of his affection. In addition to removing Devaji from his counsels, he sent his brother Sabaji to Pune to serve with the Peshwa in upcoming campaigns and forwarded his communication with the vakīl of Haider Ali of Mysore. At the same time, he complained of difficulties in realizing revenues from territories in Gangathadi and Gadha-Mandla and planned an expedition to Bengal with Mir Qasim and Shuja ud-Daulah to challenge growing Company dominance.320

As I will explore in Chapter 4, the dominant figures in these political negotiations between Pune and Nagpur were the Bhonsles’ Persian munshi Bhavani Nagnath, Bhavani Nagnath’s son Sridhar Laxman and the aforementioned Krishnarao Madhav. Eventually, the latter pair emerged as Raghuji Bhonsle II’s leading kārbhārī. In this capacity, they took on the responsibility of handling communication between Pune and Nagpur regarding their joint response to the threat of Company power. But before I take up the thread of politics between Pune and Nagpur, I must examine the social history of Chitnavis and his fellow Kayastha Prabhu scribes in more detail. The Chitnis family at Satara and the Chitavis and Gupte families at Nagpur were among the many Kayastha Prabhu scribal networks that leveraged their skills in spoken and written communication to become a significant force at Maratha courts by the end of the eighteenth century. Their story, and its implications for our understanding of Maratha politics and government, will be the subject of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 3: Pathways of Service in the Early Maratha State

Khando Ballal died. His eldest son Jivaji Khanderao will be useful to the government. But he will not experience the toil of writing. All of your burdens having fallen on the state, you made yourself of service and cared for your worldly affairs. Looking favorably on you, His Lordship offered the kārbhārī robes, but you did not take them and obediently fulfilled your duties.

- Copy of a 1739 order issued to Govindrao Khanderao Chitnis

Though Govindrao Khanderao ultimately refused it, the offer of the vestments of the kārbhārī honored his forebears Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal’s sterling records of scribal service. It also recognized their ambition to escape the toils and burdens of scribbling to pursue more autonomous and consequential endeavours in the political sphere. As discussed in the last chapter, the role of the kārbhārī had accrued significant political weight by the second half of the eighteenth century; however, within the seventeenth-century Deccan Sultanate contexts out of which the Maratha state arose, it was more closely associated with the humdrum operations of local revenue administration. The bridge from administration to politics, and the ways in which enterprising service people crossed that bridge, will be the subject of the present and following chapter. Govindrao Khanderao was among a select few who successfully made this transition. But his individual success reflected a broader historical transition in the social-functional organization and composition of the Maratha state. The tiers of administration, and over time, the highest circles of political decision-making, were increasingly occupied by literate service castes. In turn, their dominance within government enabled a more pragmatic mode of communicative politics suited to the realities of the fluid, decentralized world of eighteenth-century South Asia.

Typically, the rise of service people, or “service gentry,” within politics and government in early modern South Asia has been associated with the formation of a “Brahman rāj.”

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321 This copy was dated August 8, 1820 by James Grant, the political agent at Satara. See Čitni Gharāṇiyācī Saṅkṣipta Māhitī (hereafter CGSM), edited by B.S. Kulkarni, volume 1 (Mumbai: 1915), no. 19, pg. 35.
Kumkum Chatterjee, Karen Leonard, and Hayden Bellenoit have documented important exceptions to this trend in their studies of Kayastha service in Mughal and Sultanate governments in Bengal, the Nizamate regime at Hyderabad, and the early colonial state in north India, respectively.³²³ In the Maratha case, the scholarly consensus has been that Brahmans, and Chitpavan, or Konkanastha, Brahmans in particular, dominated politics and government, especially after the rise of the Chitpavan Brahman Balaji Viswanath to the office of peśvā; however, André Wink and Sumit Guha have acknowledged that Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhus seem to have been more present at the Nagpur and Baroda courts.³²⁴ My research has uncovered that their intimation is merely the tip of the iceberg of Kayastha Prabhu participation in administration and politics in the eighteenth century. While it is true that Brahmans proliferated in certain regimes, such as the Peshwa’s government at Pune, the label “Brahman rāj” does not accurately reflect the social complexity of the Maratha state.

By focusing on the case of the Kayastha Prabhus, I argue that the ascendancy of literate service people was a phenomenon not tied to Brahmans per se, but instead arose out of the dynamics of Maratha state-formation. These dynamics enabled Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhus to not only exercise their traditional skills in writing and record keeping, which has been the

³²² For a discussion of this argument, see Introduction.


³²⁴ Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, 69; Guha, “Serving the Barbarian,” 507.
focus of most scholarship, but also to exercise proximate skills in advising, diplomacy, and statecraft in the later eighteenth century. In the following chapter, I examine how clusters of Kayastha Prabhu officials at the Satara, Kolhapur, Nagpur, and Baroda courts shaped political strategy, and often, rivaled and challenged the influence of Brahmans. In this chapter, I demonstrate how their transition from administration to politics was made possible by the fundamental dynamics of Maratha state-formation. As a re-consolidated Maratha central government expanded and diversified under Chhatrapati Shahu, it recruited significant numbers of Kayastha Prabhus skilled in the literate arts of writing and communication. In particular, they were concentrated in a stratum of administrative offices collectively known as *darakh*. Many Kayastha Prabhus with service roots in the Bahmani and Deccan Sultanates took advantage of *darakdarī* office to establish their livelihoods and propel their careers. Foremost among them, the Satara Chitnis household amassed a substantial patrimony in rights to land revenue. This patrimony was a critical resource of social mobility. It transformed the family from employees to patrons, paved the way for exceptional individuals like Govindrao Khanderao to break into politics, and forged new pathways of service for junior relations, particularly Ganesh Rakhmagad and Rakhmaji Ganesh, the uncle and cousin of Govindrao Khanderao, respectively, and progenitors of the Nagpur scribal lineage.

“Scribal” Castes in Historical Perspective

The Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhus (colloquially known as CKPs) of western India constitute a regional sub-grouping of the broader Kayastha caste. Conventionally understood to be a scribal or writerly caste, the origins of the Kayasthas have been the subject of much debate

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Leonard’s work is an exception to this assumption. She demonstrates that Kayastha migrants from north India in the Nizam’s government at Hyderabad held a range of administrative and military offices and derived their status as much from landholding as from the literate arts. See Leonard, *Social History of an Indian Caste*, 31.
since the early modern period. Some scholars have speculated that the name “Kayastha” derives from the Sanskrit word kāya (body) and affix –sth (of or resident in), while prabhu means king or lord. This etymology and its significance are still very uncertain. Much clearer are the Puranic sources of the division between Chitragupta and Chandraseniya Kayasthas. As distinguished from the Chitragupta Kayasthas, who were considered to be the descendants of Chitragupta, son of Brahma and scribe to the god of the dead Yama, the mythical origin-story of the Chandraseniya Kayasthas derives from the Sahyādri-khaṇḍa of the Skanda-puṇaṇa. The Sahyādri-khaṇḍa, a famous and controversial narrative of Parshurama’s activities on earth, includes origin-stories for the Chitpavan and Karhade Brahman sub-castes as well as the Kayastha Prabhus. In the Reṇukā-māhātmya section of this text, the pregnant wife of the Kshatriya king Chandrasena flees to the ashram of the sage Dalbhya to seek protection from the rampage of Parshurama. When Parshurama discovers the ashram, Dalbhya offers the woman in exchange for her unborn child. Parshurama agrees to the exchange on the condition that the child will be trained in the arts of the pen rather than the sword so as to thwart the regeneration of the now-annihilated Kshatriyas. Ethnogenetic accounts in commentaries on the Manuṣmṛti claim that Kayasthas are the offspring of mixed anuloma and pratiloma marriages. Together with the Puranic narratives, these accounts were used to adjudicate the twice-born status of Kayasthas.

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within the four-fold varṇa order, which was tied to ritual privileges and entitlements such as the wearing of the sacred thread.

Distinct from the ethnological discourse on the Kayasthas is an historical one concerning their significant role in premodern Indian state and society.\textsuperscript{330} Since at least the sixth century CE, inscriptional and textual evidence attests to Kayasthas being wealthy donors who held government offices with the titles lekhaka (writer) and ganaka (accountant) among others. Importantly, kāyastha in this period was a functional category without fixed varṇa associations. Hence, those designated as kāyasthas may have included Brahmans. Chitrarekha Gupta also shows that there was considerable hierarchical differentiation within the functional category of kāyastha.\textsuperscript{331} By the late first millenium CE, north Indian Kayasthas had branched off into several sub-caste lineages (vāṃśa) (e.g. Mathura Kayasthas, Saxsena Kayasthas, Valabhya Kayasthas), and by the twelfth century, they had acquired substantial wealth and influence in regional polities in Bengal, Kashmir, and north India. Their sway over the Lohara kings of Kashmir in particular is treated with intense vitriol at several instances in the Rājatraṅginī of Kalhana (1148-50 CE).\textsuperscript{332}

Internal community accounts compiled in colonial gazetteers and ethnographies claim that substantial numbers of Kayasthas began to migrate southwards at the beginning of the fourteenth century during Alauddin Khilji’s campaign against the Yadavas of Devgiri (c. 1308-  

\textsuperscript{330} P.V. Kane, “A Note on the Kayasthas,” \textit{New Indian Antiquary} 2 (1939): 740-3; Sircar, “Kayastha”; Gupta, \textit{The Kāyasthas}.  

\textsuperscript{331} For example, a grāma-kāyastha might be a lower-level official attached to a particular locality, whereas a jyeṣṭha-kāyastha would have held a higher rank. See Gupta, 31-32.  

\textsuperscript{332} \textit{Kalhaṇa’s Rājatraṅginī}, translated by M.A. Stein, volume 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), 127,176, 364; vol. 2, 8, 12.
But the epigraphical record suggests that Kayasthas had settled in the Konkan and the western Deccan perhaps as early as the ninth century CE and more definitively by the eleventh century CE under the auspices of the Shilahara and Yadava dynasties. They seem to have obtained considerable titles and property under the Shilaharas in particular. For example, there is an inscription dated 1186 CE recording the Shilahara king Aparaditya’s grant of part of the income of the village Mahauli in Salsette to an official named Anantpai Prabhu. The epigraphical record of the Yadava dynasty also includes many references to Kayasthas as writers (lekha, kāranika). In addition, there is one inscription documenting a donation made by a Kayastha guild to the Vithala temple at Pandharpur in 1276-7. Christian Lee Novetzke has suggested that while Brahmans appear to have been more dominant in the gift economies of temples and monasteries, Kayasthas may have had stronger relationships with the Yadava royal court. Yadava-period texts like the Līlācaritra (c. 1278 CE) document conflict between Brahmans and Kayasthas as caste groups with similar social-economic and socio-functional characteristics rooted in their shared investment in the “economy of literacy.”

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, significant numbers of Kayasthas – now known as Kayastha Prabhus – were concentrated in the Konkan and the western Deccan,

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335 Novetzke, The Quotidian Revolution, 159.

336 In the inscription, the phrase is kāyatha saṅg, which has been transliterated as kāyastha saṅgh – the precise nature of this body is unclear. See Prācīna Marāṭhī Koṭīv Lekha, ed. S.G. Tulpule (Pune: Pune Vidyapith, 1963), 182.

337 Novetzke, The Quotidian Revolution, 158-60.
particularly in the hilly Maval region located in the shadow of the Western Ghats. Like their northern Indian counterparts, the Kayastha Prabhus acquired footholds in local revenue administrations, specifically of the Bahmani and Sultanate states of the Deccan. Sumit Guha has explained that these states staffed the lower levels of their bureaucracies with Brahmans, and to a lesser extent, Kayasthas, to interpret administrative documentation written in local languages such as Marathi, Kannada, and Telugu.\textsuperscript{338} By offering specialized skills in literacy, writing, and accountancy, these groups became integral to the central government’s capacity to extend its reach into villages and towns within local social and cultural contexts that were distinct but not disconnected from larger, more cosmopolitan urban centers. As Prachi Deshpande has beautifully illustrated, scribes’ cognitive and somatic mastery of the orthographic idiosyncracies of the Modi script and the many idioms, conventions, categories, and shortforms of bureaucratic documentation was inseparable from their embeddedness in and understanding of the complexities of a heterogeneous early modern language order that was fundamentally transformed by the British colonial epistemic regime.\textsuperscript{339} Though scribes often learned these skills first-hand by apprenticing with senior family members and associates, formal knowledge was systematized and transmitted in writing manuals, or mestakas. In conjunction with the myth that Hemadri, the famous thirteenth-century Brahman minister of the Yadavas, invented Modi, mestakas exhibit a Hindu, Brahmanical conception of shuddhalekhaṇ, or correct writing, according to which scribal practice would be a pious, disciplined form of life in a degraded age

\textsuperscript{338} Guha, “Serving the Barbarian,” 499-501.

of Islamic rule.\textsuperscript{340} But as I will demonstrate in this and the following chapter in line with Deshpande’s emphasis on multilingualism, this conception of scribal practice obscures the important socioeconomic and functional differences within Maratha secretariats and ignores the ways in which scribes transcended their social stations through politics to work across social, cultural, and linguistic boundaries.

Scribes’ indispensable role within local administration put them in a position to capitalize on the opportunities presented by Shivaji Bhonsle during his rebellion against the Adil Shahi Sultanate of Bijapur. As Rosalind O’Hanlon has argued, their access to opportunities and resources, in combination with their indeterminate location in the traditional varna order, made them into a paradigmatic case of social mobility in medieval and early modern South Asia.\textsuperscript{341} While O’Hanlon focuses on debates regarding their ritual status within the intellectual networks of Benares-based Maharashtrian Brahmins, who were centrally involved in efforts to legitimize Shivaji’s claim to Kshatriya status leading up to his coronation in 1674, she also gestures to their accumulation of offices, rights, and privileges in the Sultanate and Maratha periods. This process – whereby specific Kayastha Prabhu families leveraged their resources to advance themselves within the expanding Maratha state – will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

\textbf{Kayastha Prabhu Officials in the Maval}

Shivaji’s mobilization of the Maval and Konkan regions in the 1640s and 1650s laid the foundation for his movement for Maratha independence from Adil Shahi rule. His intimate relationship with the hardy people of the Maval, or the māvale, continues to be a robust site of

\textsuperscript{340} On mestakas, see Guha, “Serving the Barbarian,” 513-522; Prachi Deshpande, “The Writerly Self: Literacy, Transmission, and Codes of Conduct in Early Modern Western India,” \textit{The Indian Economic and Social History Review} 53, no. 4 (2016): 449-71; for the resurgence of shuddhalekhan ideology in the immediate postcolonial period, see Deshpande, “\textit{Shuddhalekhan: Orthography, Community and the Marathi Public Sphere},’’ \textit{Economic and Political Weekly} 51, no. 6 (February 2016): 72-82.

\textsuperscript{341} O’Hanlon, “The Social Worth of Scribes,” 564.
romance and nostalgia in the historical imagination of the Marathas. The historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar evokes this mood, "With his Māvlés young Shivaji wandered over the hills and forests of the Sahyādri range, and along the mazes of the river valleys, thus hardening himself to a life of privation and strenuous exertion, as well as getting an intimate knowledge of the country and its people." Sarkar alludes here to the remarkable topographical features of a region of the Western Ghats that is colloquially referred to the bārā māvale, or Twelve Mavals. While the number twelve is not meant literally, but rather conveys the sense of a significant number of areas, the word māvale may derive from the verb māvalaṇe – meaning "to set" – as the region lies to the west of Pune in the direction of the setting sun. Individual māvalas are often marked with the affix khore, meaning valley. Comprising an area about forty kilometers wide and one hundred and ten kilometers from north to south, these narrow river valleys are rocky, rugged and dense with vegetation. Because of these features, they could only be controlled by a network of town centers, forts and militias under the supervision of local chieftains and their administrators.

The chieftains of the Maval tended to be cavalrymen of Maratha clans who held the title of deśmukh, while their administrators, or kārbhārī, were either Brahmans or Kayastha Prabhus holding the titles of gāvakulkarṇī and deśkulkarṇī (more commonly referred to as deśpāṇḍe). In

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342 Jadunath Sarkar, Shivaji and His Times (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1952), 31.


345 Raeside, “A Note on the ‘Twelve Mavals,’” 393.
documentation from this period, Kayastha Prabhu officials are generally identified with the caste designation of *prabhu* or *parbhū*. While certain family surnames (e.g. Chitre, Randive, Dighe, Gupte, Vaidya, Pradhan) can be traced, these were almost never used in administrative documents – instead, titles like *citnīs* over time took on the role of surnames. A Shivaji-period list of *māvalas* records the names of Prabhu *deśpāṇḍes* and *deśkuḷkāṇīs* for Nane Maval, Paudkhore, Tamhankhore, Muthekhore, and Kanadkhore. Some Kayastha Prabhu families extended their reach to several *māvalas*. For example, a *vaṃśāvali* of the Dighe lineage suggests that its progenitor Gopal Prabhu, having been displaced from his *deśmukhī* vatan at Pali-Aminabad in the Konkan, re-settled in the village of Umbardi in Nizampur *tālukā* in the area corresponding to the Musekhore and Muthekhore *māvalas*. His sons and grandsons acquired the *deśkuḷkāṇī* rights to these *māvalas* as well as to the adjacent Paudkhore. The entry for the “*deśkuḷkāṇī parbhū*” office-holders of Kanadkhore in the aforementioned list notes that they held 33 villages, which corresponds to the number recorded in the the early eighteenth-century narrative of the Kanadkhore Vaidya *deśpāṇḍes* discussed by O’Hanlon. The progenitor of this lineage, Konda Prabhu, was in the service of Alauddin Hussain Bahmani, the founder of the Bahmani Sultanate. Konda’s descendant Timaji Prabhu joined Baji Pasalkar, the *deśmukh* of Musekhore, in supporting Shivaji’s conquest of Torna fort in 1643 and later became a *kārkhānīs*

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346 It is sometimes alleged that *parbhū* was a Brahman slur for Kayastha Prabhus because it can also refer to someone of foreign birth, though it also occasionally appears in seemingly non-partisan government documents.


(commissary) of Raigad fort. This lineage’s combination of local office and rights to revenue obtained under the Bahmani regime with new and more specialized posts in the early Maratha administration was a typical pathway of service for Kayastha Prabhu office-holders.

Beginning in the late 1640s, Shivaji and his famously devoted Brahman kārbhārī Dadaji Kondev began to recruit soldiers in the Maval to mount campaigns against Adil Shahi forts, including Torna, Chakan, and Kondana. This process opened up a “wide field of employment” in which Maratha commanders and their administrators attained favor and office in exchange for siding with Shivaji. Prior to Shivaji’s entry onto the political scene, the Jedhes and the Bandals vied for control over Hirdas Maval and Rohidkhore, adjacent māvalas thinly separated by the Nira River. Despite their rivalry, both clans defected to Shivaji, and their Kayastha Prabhu administrators joined them. These administrators were Dadaji Naras Prabhu (Gupte), the despande of Rohidkhore and Baji Prabhu (Pradhan), the despande of Hirdas Maval (see Appendix A for family trees). These figures are not unknown to students of Maratha history, yet far more attention has been paid to their Maratha lords. In this section, I examine the careers of Dadaji Naras Prabhu and Baji Prabhu and their descendants, highlighting the costs and benefits faced by Kayastha Prabhu officials who did or did not choose to align themselves with the nascent Maratha state. While many were rewarded for entering Shivaji’s service, they also felt the effects of political transformation as parts of the Maval region changed hands between the mid-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.


351 Sarkar, Shivaji and His Times, 27.

352 Jedhe Śakāvali Karinā, ed. A.R. Kulkarni (Pune: Mansanman Prakashan, 1999); also see Wink, Land and Sovereignty, 172-8.
When the Jedhes received a deśmukhī assignment at Rohidkhore from the Bidar Sultanate, the Khopades and their collateral relations, the Dagades, controlled the area. It is likely that Naras Prabhu was their deśkulkarṇī, as he is mentioned in a statement (karinā) to have helped settle a proprietary succession following the death of Ramaji Naik Dagade. Once the Jedhes defeated the Khopades to secure their deśmukhī, which included their main seat at Kari and the nearby hill-fort Rohida, they maintained Naras in the management of the deśkulkarṇī and gāvakulkarṇī. Naras' adopted son Dadaji inherited these offices. Dadaji accompanied Kanhoji Jedhe and his son Baji Sarjarao when they took up with Shivaji in the early 1650s. The precise nature of Dadaji’s involvement is difficult to specify because most of the extant documentation was forged as part of his descendants’ proprietary dispute with a Deshastha Brahman family hailing from Bhor who held the ministerial title of pant sacīva. As historian Gajanan Bhaskar Mehendale has shown, three letters that accord Dadaji a major role in mobilizing the people of the region to support Shivaji are fabrications. Mehendale also casts doubt on several later letters used to shore up their case; however, he concludes that the overall circumstances surrounding the dispute as relayed in the letters are verifiable. These circumstances show the effects of political change on the status and livelihood of Kayastha Prabhu officials.

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353 MIS, eds. Rajwade and Deshpande, vol. 2, no. 279, pg. 256; while Naras’ father in this statement is named Bhanji, different family trees name him Sav e.g. MIS, eds. Rajwade and Deshpande, vol. 2, no. 311, pgs. 292-293 and Sardesai, Aitihāsika Gharānyāńcyā Vamsāvājī, 28.


355 Gajanan Bhaskar Mehendale, Śrī Rājā Śivachatrapati, volume 2 (Pune, 1996), 899-936. Among the other important corrections that Mehendale makes is that the attribution of the deśpānde seat at Velvandkhore, just northeast of Rohidkhore, is probably false.
As a result of the tremendous confusion caused by the Mughal capture of Raigad in 1689 and subsequent re-conquest of the Maval, many people who had pledged themselves to Shivaji either defected or decamped to safer locations. Disloyalty was perhaps an uncourageous, but not an unwise strategy given the uncertain future of the Maratha polity. After all, Shivaji’s heir Sambhaji had been executed, and his other son Rajaram was forced to flee from Raigad to Gingee. Unlike his old employers, the Jedhes, who seem to have stuck with Rajaram, Dadaji Naras Prabhu absconded with his family. This decision had grievous consequences. In the early 1690s, Maratha forces re-took much of the territory that they had lost. Shankraji Narayan, Rajaram’s pant saciva and close adviser, along with Ramchandrapant Amatya were charged with leading this effort. In return, he received Rohidkhore and the surrounding areas in jāgīr, laying the foundation for the Maratha princely state of Bhor. Narayan confirmed the Jedhes in their old holdings. Seizing the opportunity presented by Dadaji Naras Prabhu’s flight, he seems to have reserved the most lucrative kulkarṇī rights in Rohidkhore for his own family’s maintenance.

Certain letters that do not appear to be forgeries suggest that Mataji Jedhe with the approval of Shankraji Narayan’s heirs Naro Shankar and Mahadji Shankar re-assigned kulkarṇī rights in three Rohidkhore villages to Dadaji’s sons Krishnaji and Yesaji after they had returned with their now-elderly father to the Jedhes’ deś Mukhi seat at Kari. An extant memo from the Satara central government daybook corroborates Krishnaji’s possession of certain inam lands in Karanje. Still, the family continued to press their claims for restoration with Shahu. Because

357 Ibid., no. 295, pgs. 271-3.
359 PD, Shahu daftar, rumal 9, no. 10154.
they had lost all of their papers in the wartime chaos of the 1690s, they forged new ones. In addition, they sought out new patronage from Mansingh More, Shahu’s senāpati. More wrote several letters to Jedhe in which he mentioned the family’s plight in general but sympathetic terms. For example, he pleaded, “The honorable Krishnaji Dadaji stays close to you for the sake of his vatan. In addition, he serves me for the sake of his sustenance. But you still have not released his vatan. It is not a good thing if you are haggling and bickering on the subject of their home. You should help them in every way possible.” Thus, one option available to Kayastha Prabhu officials in the newly re-constituted Maratha political order was to seek out new patrons if the old ones failed to make good on their commitments.

Another option was to seek out new forms of employment, as shown by the case of the Hirdas Maval despānde lineage. The despānde Baji Prabhu was part of the militia of desmukh Krishnaji Naik Bandal, who had recently fought several battles with the Jedhe desmukhs over territory within the mavala. Both sides accompanied Shivaji in his seizure of Javli and Rairi in 1655-6. When the Adil Shahi government commanded the Maval chieftains to help Afzal Khan capture Shivaji, they refused. Baji followed suit. After Shivaji assassinated Afzal Khan at Pratapgad in November 1659, Afzal’s son Fazal Khan and Siddi Johar were authorized to make a second attack. They besieged Shivaji in Panhala fort for about five months. Under cover of night,

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360 Rango Bapuji, a descendant of this Prabhu family, also re-opened the case in the nineteenth century as part of his work on behalf of the restoration of Pratapsinha Bhonsle. See Conclusion.


362 Baji Prabhu’s attachment to Bandal is conveyed in an undated representation (karinā) of one such battle: “Krishnaji Naik’s turban had fallen into a ditch while he was intoxicated [with the heat of liquor or of battle]. Baji Prabhu noticed the turban, dismounted from his horse, and stashed it in his horse mouth-bag (tobarā). Then Krishnaji Naik said, “Baji Prabhu, there have been one or two battles, but today we were victorious. Jedhoji has retreated.” Baji Prabhu replied, “You are the victor in the twelve mavals, and you will accomplish other things. Saying this, he dismounted, removed the turban from his bag, and tied it [on Krishnaji’s head]. Naik held Bajibuwa’s waist and said, “Baji Prabhu, you have done a great thing.” See MIS, eds. Rajwade and Deshpande, vol. 2, no. 363, pgs. 349-50.
Shivaji escaped with a small force and made his way towards Vishalgad, about seventy kilometers to the west. Realizing that the Bijapuri army was hot on his trail, he assigned Baji and his militia to guard Pavankhind pass, a narrow ravine leading to the fort that is the present-day location of his samādhi. Shivaji was able outpace his pursuers, but Baji died in the ensuing battle on July 13, 1660. As the Jedhe Śakāvalī Karinā (c. 1697-8) put it, “…Panhalā was given up to Salabat Khan [Siddi Johar]. Swami [Shivaji] went to Khelni [Vishalgad]. At that time, the army of Siddi Johar was on his trail. The crowd and press of war ensued. Badal’s people fought with great effort and exertion. The battle subsided. Baji Prabhu deśkulkarnī died.” Baji’s heroism continued to be the subject of much praise in subsequent histories.

The careers of Baji Prabhu’s descendants are exemplary of the character of Kayastha Prabhu employment, which will be explored in greater detail in the next section. While Kayastha Prabhus performed both civil and military services for Maratha rulers, they tended to be concentrated in posts associated with the function of writing. Baji Prabhu had eight sons by his two wives, Sonai and Gautamabai. After his death, his and Gautamabai’s son Babaji Baji alias Buwaji was appointed to the office of jamenīs (accountant) of the Maratha senāpati. As we will see in the next section, this office predominated in Kayastha Prabhu employment. According to an order dated August 27, 1692, Babaji served in this role under Hambirrao Mohite, Shivaji’s sarnaūbat (drum-master) and senāpati. He earned 2000 hons per year. Sixteen hundred hons


went towards his personal remuneration, while four hundred were to support additional staff under his supervision. This staff included twelve palanquin-bearers, two torchbearers, an umbrella-bearer, and several guards.\textsuperscript{367} The \textit{jamenīs} was re-assigned to one Kashiram Prabhu when Babaji failed to accompany Chhatrapati Rajaram to Ginjee in the Karnatak after Aurangzeb’s invasion of the Deccan. Thanks to the mediation of his brother Mahadji, he was reinstated to the \textit{jamenīs} under Santaji Ghorpade in August 1692. Mahadji’s son Baji Mahadev was appointed to the office of \textit{kārkhanīs} at Rajgad fort, and his brother, Antaji,\textsuperscript{368} who had been a cavalry commander in the Karnatak with the rank \textit{sahastrī} (one-thousand), was promoted to the very high rank of \textit{paṁcasahastrī} (five-thousand), which appear to be Sankrit-derived versions of the Mughal designations \textit{hazārī} and \textit{panjhazārī}.\textsuperscript{369} By 1702, Antaji had risen to the rank of \textit{saptasahastrī} (seven-thousand) and entered the army of Jaisingh Jadhavrao.\textsuperscript{370}

Like those of Dadaji Naras Prabhu, the family fortunes of the Hirdas Maval \textit{despāṇḍes} were impacted by the repeated shifts in political control over the Maval region. Baji Prabhu’s sons and cousins inherited his \textit{despāṇḍe} rights, but it seems that they did not realize the full revenue to which they were entitled.\textsuperscript{371} In a 1692 order, Chhatrapati Rajaram carried out a request made by Mahadji Baji that the tax revenue from three villages in Hirdas Maval be

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{367} MS, ed. Bendrey, vol. 2, no. 185, pgs. 213-4.
\item \textsuperscript{368} Alternative names listed for this individual in the family tree published in Bendrey are Santaji and Mataji. See Ibid., no. 486, pgs. 531-2.
\item \textsuperscript{369} Ibid., no. 186, pgs. 214-5.
\item \textsuperscript{370} Ibid., no. 235, pg. 273.
\item \textsuperscript{371} For example, Babaji Baji and Krishnaji Phulaji are listed as \textit{deśakulkarnīs} of Hirdas Maval on a document co-signed by CKP officials dated August 1695. See Ibid., no. 200, pg. 231.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
secured to the family after having lapsed in the tumult of the intervening years.\textsuperscript{372} Six years later, Rajaram commanded Shankraji Narayan to continue their property in the īpniś (accountant) office, which, he explained, had been cut off when the Maval was conquered by Shivaji.\textsuperscript{373} Many of these orders implied that the government owed a debt to the descendants of Baji Prabhu in return for his selfless loyalty to Shivaji. Individual acts of political service could lay the groundwork for a more lasting career.

Because of its centrality to early Maratha state-formation, the focus of this section has been on the Maval; however, it should be noted that the Konkan littoral was also a major area of Kayastha Prabhu recruitment during Shivaji’s campaign in the late 1650s. This narrow coastal strip, bordered on the east by the Western Ghats and the west by the Indian Ocean, extends roughly four hundred kilometers from Alibag to Malwan. It was administered by the Bahmani and Deccan Sultanates as a province called Tal-Konkan. Following their dissolution, it became the site of intense rivalry between numerous parties, including Shivaji’s Bhonsle dynasty at Satara; two doggedly independent southern Maratha clans, the Angres and Sawantwadis; the East African-descended Siddi dynasty at Janjira, who paid fealty to the Adil Shahis and the Mughals; and the seafaring English and Portuguese company states based at Bombay and Goa. Like their upcountry caste fellows, Kayastha Prabhu families resident in the Konkan successfully weathered the storms of regime change to attain remunerative employment in the new Maratha state.

Representative of their endurance were the Chaubal deśkuḷkarṇīs of Chaul. According to their own family history, the founder of the lineage, Narayan Krishna Chaubal, held the gāvakuḷkarṇī and deśkuḷkarṇī rights to three tracts in Chaul under Sultan Ahmad Shah Bahmani.

\textsuperscript{372} MS, ed. Bendrey, vol. 2., no. 188, pgs. 215-6.

\textsuperscript{373} Ibid., no. 214, pg. 256.
When Shivaji arrived from Kalyan to demand soldiers and tribute, his
descendent Malhar Narayan led a band of Kayastha Prabhu soldiers in the conquest of the forts
of Shrivardhan and Manranjan and helped to construct the seafort of Padmadurg. The family
relocated to Padmadurg and enjoyed the earnings from new kārkhanīs and potdār posts in
addition to their old revenue rights. But unable to withstand the attacks of the Portuguese and the
Janjira Siddis, they were eventually displaced, imprisoned, and thrown into severe financial
strait. Malhar Narayan’s son Govind Malhar sought the protection of Jivaji Khanderao, the
grandson of Shivaji’s Kayastha Prabhu scribe Balaji Avaji, himself a native of Rajapur in the
Konkan. Jivaji had been deputed to Colaba to negotiate with Kanhoji Angre, during which time
he seems to have arranged for the family’s care. This account also states that Jivaji married
Govind Malhar to a daughter of his uncle Nilo Ballal, though this claim is uncorroborated. Jivaji
and his brother Govindrao Khanderao also secured the release of the family of a Kayastha
Prabhu diwān Raghunath Hari, who had been confined by Kanhoji’s son Sambhaji Angre, and
arranged his nephew’s marriage with a girl in their family. Thus, as later sections of this
chapter and the following chapter will continue to explore, family ties extending from the
Konkan to the upland areas of the western Deccan were important resources for Kayastha Prabhu
office-holders.

Village and district-level government was an important existing sphere of employment
through which Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu officials accessed new patronage under Shivaji.

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374 Information about the Chaubals was sourced from a bakhar in the possession of their descendant
Cauuba (Ceulkar Yāñehya Gharāñyācyā) Itihāsa,” Kāyastha Prabhūcyā Itihāśācī Sādhane (hereafter
KPIS) (Mumbai: 1881-2), 1-16.


376 See Chapter 4.
With the re-consolidation of a central Maratha government under Shahu Bhonsle in the early eighteenth century, Kayastha Prabhu families were able to obtain an even greater share in administrative appointments. The remainder of this chapter will delineate the functional niche that Kayastha Prabhus occupied within the Maratha state, follow the trajectories of several Kayastha Prabhu office-holding families, and, honing in on the Satara Chitnis lineage, explore how they advanced their social status by accumulating heritable rights to title, office, and property.

Pathways of Kayastha Prabhu Service in the Early Maratha State

Scholars typically trace the origins of a central Maratha government to Shivaji’s council of eight ministers, or ashta-pradhana. Much of what is known about the specific duties of these ministers derives from the bakhar literature and a set of regulations found in the papers of Chhatrapati Pratapsinha Bhonsle (1793-1847). It is now believed that the number and composition of this council was not fixed. Some positions were occupied by individuals, such as Ramchandra Nilkanth alias Ramchandrapant Amatya, who wielded outsized influence in political decision-making. Other titles, such as pant pratinidhi, held by Pralhad Niraji and then Parshuram Trimbak Kulkarni, and sena saheb subha, held by the Bhonsle clan of Hingani-Beradi who went on to become the rulers of Nagpur, were created in the early eighteenth century to reward families who backed Rajaram and Shahu and technically fell outside the ashta-pradhana. The title of senapi tended to be the province of prominent Maratha clans like the Mohites, the Gujars, the Ghorpades, and the Dabhades. Brahmans generally monopolized the remaining seats

377 Viz. peśvā, amātya, mantri, sumanta, sacīva, paṇḍitrāva, senāpati, nyāyadhiśa.

on the *ashta-pradhana*. While Deshastha Brahmans were dominant during the reigns of the first three Chhatrapatis, Chitpavan Brahmans began to migrate in substantial numbers from the Konkan following the rise of Peshwa Balaji Viswanath Bhat. Though some accounts allege that the scribes Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal, who held the title of *ciṭnīs* (see below), were considered to be the peers of these officials, and even that the Chhatrapati sought to award them with a seat on the *ashta-pradhana*, there is little evidence that Kayastha Prabhus ever gained access to these more august titles.\(^{379}\) But, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, title and office were not necessarily indicative of political influence.

The bulk of Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu appointments in this period were part of a class of secretarial official known as *darakdār*. *Darak* was a generic term for a salaried public office that was heritable and transferable. By the early nineteenth century, it had become customary to recognize eight *darakdār* offices, as with the *ashta-pradhana: diwān*\(^{380}\) (administrator), *majmūdār* (accountant), *phaḍnīs* (deputy accountant), *sabnīs* (clerk), *kārkhanīs* (commissary), *ciṭnīs* (scribe of Marathi correspondence), and *jāmdār* (treasurer).\(^{381}\) Additional offices belonging to this category were *pārasnīs* (scribe of Persian correspondence), *potnīs* (treasurer), *khāsnīs* (private accountant), *jamenīs* (military commissary), and, at one level below, *kārkun* (clerk). If the *ashta-pradhana* was a symbolic representation of the ministerial class, the *darakdārs* formed the secretarial class of the early Maratha state. Whereas the *ashta-pradhana* had a political function, the intended function of the *darakdārs* was administrative.

\(^{379}\) I am skeptical of the claim that such an offer was made given the bureaucratic hierarchies of the time. For second-hand references to it, see PD, San.Ni.Ka. Daftar, rumal 41, no. 22137; also see CGSM, ed. Kulkarni, vol. 1, no. 2, pgs. 17-8.

\(^{380}\) Sometimes also called *kārbhārī* or *mutāliq/mutālik*.

\(^{381}\) Grant Duff, *History of the Mahrattas*, vol. 1, 237.
It is evident from the titles alone – many have the Persian affix nīs/navīs, signifying “writer” – that these offices were functionally related insofar as they were grounded in the practice of writing. *Darakdārs* were responsible for the everyday processes of documentation, enumeration, and communication that allowed government to operate accurately and efficiently. Thus, there were functional continuities with the revenue officials – *kuḷkarṇi* at the village level and *deśpānde/deśkuḷkarṇi* at the district level – that we encountered in the Maval as well as with the *kārbhāris* of Chapter 2, though the latter had both political and administrative functions. One or more *darakdārs* might be assigned to manage the business of a royal household, a military company, a fort, or even a higher-level minister. When in their home districts or on campaign, and thus away from the gaze of the Chhatrapati, each member of the council of eight was to carry out his main business through *darakdārs*.382 Similarly, military commanders and revenue collectors posted to distant parts of the countryside had a *darakdārī* staff. For example, a military grant of *saranjām* to Mahipatrao Kavde in 1762/3 specified the titles and salaries of eight *darakdārs*.383 In most cases, *darakdārs* were appointed by and accountable to the central government, thus acting as a check on the authority of their supervisors. Because it was pervasive and politically anodyne, this class of official was especially accessible to Kayastha Prabhus seeking employment and status within the Maratha state.

Kayastha Prabhu access to government service was associated in Shivaji’s lifetime with the staffing of forts. Like the employment of small and speedy militias of Maval soldiers, the conquest, construction, and maintenance of forts, especially hill-forts, was central to Maratha

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382 *APYV*, ed. Sardesai, Kale, and Vakaskar, no. 2, pg. 4.

Each fort was managed by a *havāldār* or *kiledār*, usually Maratha by caste, under whose supervision a staff of *darakdārs* was responsible for the fort’s administrative operations. According to the *Sabhāsad Bakhar* (1697), this staff should include a Brahman *sabnīs* and a Kayastha Prabhu *kārkhanīs*. The *kārkhanīs* may have had more direct jurisdiction over the financial management of goods and supplies such as grain, but in practice, both *darakdār* officials would have dealt with multiple types of accounts. In fact, similar pairings of Kayastha Prabhus and Brahmans occupying similar roles were very common. Part of the function of pairing officials in this way was to strengthen the process of review and approval of administrative processes. Hence, the regulation memorandum referred to above states that any account issued by the *sabnīs* or the *kārkhanīs* was to have the seal and signature of the corresponding official in addition to the supervising *havāldār*.

There is considerable evidence that the *Sabhāsad Bakhar*’s prescription reflected an actual concentration of significant numbers of Kayastha Prabhus in the office of *kārkhanīs*. The Kanadkhore *deśpānde* history adduced in the previous section states that one Timaji Prabhu served in this office alongside the *tipnīs* (accountant) Moropant Pingle during the construction of Raigad. Another family history of the Sashtikar Guptes records that their forebear Ramaji Nagnath migrated from Murud on the coast to find work, eventually becoming the *kārkhanīs* at

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384 On forts and the Maratha state, see Gordon, “Forts and Social Control,” in *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation*.


Raigad.\textsuperscript{389} While neither of these specific claims can be substantiated, we may infer that it was customary for the Raigad kārkhanīs to be a Kayastha Prabhu. It is elsewhere attested that members of the latter lineage held the office at Salsette (Sashti) fort until its cession to the British in 1782.\textsuperscript{390} Vitthal Dadaji, an ancestor of the twentieth-century historian Yashwant Rajaram Gutpe, was the Kayastha Prabhu kārkhanīs of Purandar fort under Shahu and Balaji Bajirao.\textsuperscript{391} Directives issued in 1732, 1734, and 1735 specify that because Vitthal Dadaji was a loyal servant, his inām rights to lands in the villages Kaldari and Vanpuri should be secured for the maintenance of his family.\textsuperscript{392} Some years later, the post passed out of the hands of the family, during which time he found work as the cītīs of Fattesingh Bhonsle of Akkalkot.\textsuperscript{393} It was later restored to his grandson Dadaji Ramchandra by an order dated December 12, 1773 with an annual salary of 397 rupees to support himself, his children, and a subordinate official named Narayan Shivaji Sabhasad.\textsuperscript{394}

Though it was somewhat less common, Kayastha Prabhus also served in a military capacity as generals and senior commanders of forts. In the early 1750s, an individual by the name of Appaji Bhauji Prabhu served under Fattesingh Bhonsle, reportedly commanding an army of 4,000-5,000 soldiers in a scuffle against one of the members of the Somvamshi clan.

\textsuperscript{389} Y.B. Gupte, Sāshtīkār Gupte Yaṅcī Bakhar (Mumbai, 1912), 17-8.

\textsuperscript{390} Ibid., 6-8.


\textsuperscript{393} “Gupte Gharānyācyā Kāhī Sanada,” ed. Gupte, 128.

\textsuperscript{394} Ibid., 129.
bearing the martial title of sarlashkar. More famously, Prayagji Anant Phanse, the commander of Satara fort, nearly died while defending the fort against Aurangzeb’s siege in 1700. In the later eighteenth century, his grandsons became ministers at the Maratha Gaekwad court at Baroda. Additional cases of Kayastha Prabhus who commanded troops, rode in cavalry, or combined soldiering with administrative and political duties will be discussed in the following chapter.

Another office frequently held by Kayastha Prabhus was that of jamenīs (commissary). Mirroring the arrangement for forts, the Sabhāsad Bakhar relays that each company of 1,000 troops (hazārī) was to be staffed with a Maratha commander, a (presumably Brahman) majmūdār, and a Kayastha Prabhu jamenīs. The standard duties of a jamenīs may be inferred from a November 7, 1764 sanad to one Balkrishna Hari, the jamenīs of Moraji Shinde, an officer in Ratnagiri. His duties included determining the revenue demand based on the survey of agricultural and garden lands by inspecting officers and announcing it to the kārbhārī; receiving all revenue accounts and duly noting collections and arrears; making any increases or decreases in the revenue due from any village; issuing orders for the recovery of arrears; issuing agreements for bringing new lands under cultivation; maintaining a ledger of amounts received and amounts due based on the day-book of the phadnīś; supervising a team of kārkuns (clerks);

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396 Malhar Ramrao Chitnis, Śrimant Chatrapati Sambhājī Mahārajā Āni Thorale Rājarām Māharājā Yāṅčī Caritre, ed. K.N. Sane, 3rd edition (Pune, 1915), 58.

397 For the later history of this lineage, see Chapter 4.

398 Curiously, the commander is designated as kārbhārī. See Śiva Chatrapatiñe Caritra, ed. Herwadkar, 31.

399 SSRPD, ed. Vad and Joshi, vol 7, no. 520, pgs. 123-5.
and conducting any other necessary revenue business. In sum, the _jamenīs_ managed any and all financial concerns for the individual or outfit to which he was assigned.

In the last section, I mentioned that Babaji Baji Prabhu of the Hirdas Maval _deśpānde_ lineage was the _jamenī_ of the _senāpatīs_ Hambirrao Mohite and Santaji Ghorpade. Babaji’s son Khando Babaji continued in the office under Shahu’s _senāpatīs_ Jaisingh Jadhavrao and Khanderao Dabhade with an increased annual salary of 5,000 _hons_. During the Maratha campaigns against the Siddis of Janjira at Gowalkot and Anjanwel in the early to mid 1730s, the _jamenī_ of Santaji Jadhav, the son of Ghorpade’s comrade-in-arms and fellow _senāpatī_ Dhanaji Jadhav, was one Malhar Prabhu. According to a September 25, 1727 entry in the central government journal ( _rojkīrd_), one Madhavrao Prayag Prabhu occupied the _jamenī_ post under Janoji Nimbalkar with an annual salary of 2000 _pādsāhī hons_ and an assistant ( _mutālik_ ) named Narso Ganesh Prabhu. These cases are corroborated by twelve original grants of _jamenīs_ to Kayastha Prabhus that have been preserved in the Shahu Daftar section of the Maharashtra State Archives in Pune. The concentration of such grants suggests that there was a significant expansion in the employment of Kayastha Prabhus in this office in the first half of the eighteenth century. This expansion may have been partly driven by the sustained efforts of Maratha military commanders to stake independent claims to new territories outside of the core areas of Maratha control. Historians have hitherto examined this process as a centripetal force leading to the decentralization and eventual destabilization of the Maratha state, yet they have overlooked

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403 PD Shahu Daftar, rumal 1, no. 7; rumal 2, nos. 1552, 1644, 1672; rumal 3, no. 2457, 2822; rumal 4, nos. 2970, 3595, 3636, 3637; rumal 9, no. 10214.
the way in which it may have accelerated the incorporation of service castes into the ranks of
government service.

Most of the *jamenīs* grants that have been preserved provide little information beyond the
names of the recipient and the employer. Some specify an annual salary, often 1,000 rupees but
ranging from 700 to 3,000 rupees. Such a wide range in salary suggests a feature of *darakdārī*
office that will be explored more below: its bureaucratic location alone does not explain the
varied powers, privileges, and resources accessible to a talented individual who occupied it.
Grantees of *jamenīs* might be afforded special privileges on top of their salaries. For example,
Raghunath Gangadhar Prabhu, assigned to the *jamenīs* of Yesaji Krishnaji Bhonsle, was given
the assistance of a *mutālik* named Govind Bapuji Prabhu.\(^\text{404}\) For an enterprising and well-
connected individual, an assistantship could be a stepping-stone to higher office, as I will explain
later with respect to the case of Ganesh Rakhmagad, *mutālik* to Govindrao Khanderao. Another
grant issued to Vinaji Nilkanth Prabhu for the *jamenīs* of Ranoji Bhonsle augmented his salary
with the *mokāsā* revenues of several villages in *sarkār* Narnala in Berar.\(^\text{405}\) Bhonsle’s *ciṭnīs* also
seems to have been a Kayastha Prabhu by the name of Yesaji Krishna with rights to the *mokāsā*
of the village Vadali in the same district.\(^\text{406}\)

Closely related to the *kārkhanīs* and *jamenīs* was the *potnīs*, or treasurer. The founder of
the lineage that held the *potnīs* under Shahu was Baji Murar Umrao, an Adil Shahi noble whose
surname Mahadkar suggests origins in the Konkan. His son Murar Baji Deshpande Mahadkar
served under Shivaji’s antagonist Chandrarao More before signing up with the independent

\(^{404}\) PD, Shahu daftar, rumal 4, no. 3636.

\(^{405}\) PD, Shahu daftar, rumal 4, no. 2970.

\(^{406}\) PD, Shahu daftar, rumal 6, no. 6948.
Maratha movement. When Aurangzeb’s Rajput general Mirza Raja Jai Singh besieged Purandar fort in late March 1665, Murar Baji was the commander of the fort and led a māvaḷe band against the Mughal army before perishing on the battlefield.\(^{407}\) In honor of his sacrifice, his son Baji was vested with a similar command of soldiers and granted villages in the māvaḷa Musekhore, including the village Uravade.\(^{408}\) Murar Baji had four brothers: Sambhaji, Trimbakji, Mahadji, and Shankraji.\(^{409}\) Sambhaji was permanently injured while fighting with Shivaji in the battle of Salher near Nashik in 1672. Recognizing this service, Rajaram on October 22, 1695 acceded to Trimbakji Baji’s son Vitthal’s request for a *sanad* for the *inām* revenues of village Gugulwada, *taraph* Atone in Chaul province for the family’s maintenance.\(^{410}\) This *inām* was continued to Sambhaji Baji’s son Gangadhar Sambhaji and grandson Krishnaji Gangadhar.\(^{411}\) In addition, Vitthal Trimbak was employed as Chhatrapati Sambhaji’s *khāsnīs* (private accountant) in charge of the finances of his household.\(^{412}\) He seems to have arranged for the marriage of his brother to Putalabai, the daughter of Khando Ballal Chitnis.\(^{413}\) In the 1730s, his relation Nilkanth Trimbak...

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\(^{407}\) To this day, there is a statue of Murar Baji at Purandar. Sabhasad narrates that when Murar Baji was offered a treaty of safe passage (*kaul*) in exchange for his surrender, he boasted, “What does your agreement (*kaul*) mean? I am a soldier of King Shivaji. Do you really think I will take this agreement?” See *Śiva Chatrapatiṁce Caritra*, ed. Herwadkar, 51.

\(^{408}\) Chitnis, *Saptaparakaranaṁtaka Caritra*, 147, 310.


\(^{411}\) Gangadhar Krishnaji inherited the *inām* in 1732. See PD, Shahu daftar, rumal 4, no. 3719; *MS*, ed. Bendrey, no. 388, 427.

\(^{412}\) Chitnis, *Saptaparakaranaṁtaka Caritra*, 238.

\(^{413}\) *CGSM*, ed. Kulkarni, vol. 1, 8.
began to carry out political negotiations for Shahu’s cousin and rival Sambhaji II of Kolhapur. Mahadji Baji, another of Murar Baji’s brothers, had three sons: Anandrao, Yashwantrao, and Bajirao. According to the Chitnis bakhar, Anandrao obtained the posts of khāsnīs and potnīs under Shahu, but after committing some offence, he and Bajirao fled into Portuguese territory. Yashwantrao Mahadev received his brother’s titles and, working closely with Govindrao Khanderao Chitnis, became influential in court politics towards the end of Shahu’s lifetime in the late 1740s (see Appendix A for family tree). These political roles will be described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Finally, Kayastha Prabhu families laid claim to posts that closely aligned with the designation “scribe”: cīṭnīs and for Persian letters, pārasnīs. The cīṭnīs was responsible for composing letters on behalf of the ruler as well as official sanad documents for individuals who had been granted rights to village revenues. In this latter capacity, he worked hand in glove with the phaḍnīs, who kept government accounts. The list of regulations mentioned above specifies that documents should be prepared by the cīṭnīs and phaḍnīs for each category of revenue grant. Shivaji’s cīṭnīs was Balaji Avaji, a member of a Kayastha Prabhu family with the surname Chitre based at Rajapur. Internal family accounts claim that Balaji’s father Avaji Hari served as the diwān-majmūdār of the Siddis of Janjira. Through a series of political

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415 Chitnis, Thorale Šāhū Mahārāja Yānce Caritra, 13, 79.

416 Sanads and Letters, ed. Mawjee and Parasnis, no. 16, pgs. 127-8. Also see Chitnis, Saptapraṇātmaka Caritra, 229-30.

417 While I will include details that are mentioned in multiple accounts, they ought to be treated with some skepticism, as we cannot know what oral and textual sources they used. See CGSM, ed. Kulkarni, vol. 1, 1-16; KPIS, no. 1 (August 1881): 1-16; Chitnis, Saptapraṇātmaka Caritra, 42-5; Śiva Chatrapatiṁce Caritra, ed. Herwadkar, 102.
machinations, the Janjira rulers were persuaded to remove him from his office and punish him with death. His wife narrowly escaped being sold into slavery by agreeing to work in the household of her brother, the merchant Lingoji Shankar.\(^{418}\) Her sons Balaji, Shamji, and Chimnaji received a proper education in the literate arts and found employment under Shivaji sometime after his conquest of the Konkan. Balaji became Shivaji’s cītnīś; Shamji obtained the post of phādnīś under Shivaji’s majmūdār Nilo Sondev; Chimnaji that of the kārkhanīś of Raigad fort. Balaji and his brothers were among those executed for opposing Sambhaji’s succession, but his sons Khando and Nilo Ballal were later reinstated. Khando was restored to the cītnīś post after his service in the Goa campaign of 1683 and ascended rapidly through the ranks of the administration, acquiring an array of new revenue rights and privileges that will be detailed below. His brother Nilo became an administrator for Rajaram’s son Raja Karna and later for Bahirao Moreshwar Pingle. In the late 1740s, his son Govindrao Khanderao worked with the potnīś Yashwantrao Mahadev as one of Shahu’s closest advisers (see Appendix A for family tree).

The writer of Persian correspondence, variously called munshī and pārasnīś, of Shivaji and his successors was also a Kayastha Prabhu. As with many other service households, their descendants crafted an account of their origins.\(^{419}\) According to this account, Nilkanthrao Yesaji – better known as Nil Prabhu – was the deśkulkarnī of taraph Khandale in Chaul before entering

\(^{418}\) According to the Chitnis bakhar, Lingoji Shankar later arranged for the transportation of Rajaram’s queens Tarabai, Rajasbai, and Ambikabai via sea from the western Deccan to the south when Aurangzeb invaded in the 1690s. Sardesai viewed copies of inām grants made to Lingoji Shankar and his relations Pralhad Lingoji (presumably his son) and Murar Ramchandra as a reward for this act of service, suggesting that this claim may be accurate. See Chitnis, Sambhāji Mahārāja Āṇi Thorale Rājarām Māharāja Yāṇe Caritre, 47-8; SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 31, nos. 60, 135, pgs. 55, 111.

\(^{419}\) MS, ed. Bendrey, vol. 2, 536-8; also see Chitnis, Saptaprakāranātmaka Caritra, 100; Chitnis, Thorale Śāhū Mahārāja Yāṇe Caritra, 47.
Shivaji’s service sometime after 1660. During his tenure, he composed many important Persian letters for Shivaji, including a famous petition to Aurangzeb to end the jizya tax on non-Muslim subjects. These letters were collated into a volume of inšā’ that will be discussed below. In addition, he assisted the dabīr, or pant sumanta, a member of the council of eight ministers. These posts were inherited by his sons Govindrao and Babaji Nilkanth and grandson Ramchandra Babaji. Like certain members of the Prabhu potnīś family, this family executed diplomatic missions on behalf of Sambhai II of Kolhapur, for which Ramchandra Babaji alias Ramchandra Buwaji received inām rights to Halyal pargāna in the Karnatak and Govindrao Nilkanth to several additional villages. In the 1740s and again in the 1760s, Ramchandra Babaji was a critical element in the protection of the Kolhapur rājā’s dominion in certain districts of the Karnatak from the incursions of local chieftains and rulers, including the upstart Mysore sullān Haidar Ali.

The foregoing review of the pathways of Kayastha Prabhu office-holding families within the early eighteenth century Maratha state has revealed four signal features of Kayastha Prabhu employment. First, Kayastha Prabhus tended to hold secretarial offices requiring specialized forms of writing integral to the basic operations of the Maratha state. Secondly, there are strong continuities between the figures of the Maval despānde and the darakdār in terms of function

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420 Two additional sons are attested for Nil Prabhu. One who went by the nickname of Chitkoba performed the work of cīmnī for Trimbakrao Somvanshi, a general under Shahu holding the title of sarlaśkar. He and his mistress (rākha) died at the hands of his employer in 1737. Another, Avaji Nilkanth alias Dadaji Chitnis, is attested in the Chitnis bakhar and in an entry from the daily journal (rojniśī) of the Peshwa’s government (often referred to as the Peshwa’s diaries). It appears that he was serving as the Peshwa’s Marathi scribe (cīmnī) when he died on March 28, 1736 from consumption. Two years prior, it was recorded that he was working as the sabnīś in the army of Malharrao Holkar. See Chitnis, Sambhājjī Mahārāja Āṇi Thorale Rājarām Māharāja Yāncī Caritre, 67-8, 72; SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 22, no. 315, 365, pgs. 172, 182.

421 SSRPD, ed. Vad and Parasnis, vol. 1, nos. 74-5, pg. 30; SSRPD, ed. Vad and Sane, vol. 9, nos. 14, 33, pgs. 10, 28; SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 26, nos. 15, 17-29, pgs. 11-2, 14-30; vol. 28, nos. 61-2, 209, pgs. 79-81, 244-5; vol. 40, nos. 107-8, pgs. 96-9.
and position within the hierarchical division of labor and authority. While his Maratha employer was a military officer whose basic role was to rule and fight, the despāṇḍe or the darakdār was a civil official whose role was to administer. This functional division between administrative and political work was an important structuring principle in the sociology of Maratha state-formation that began to be challenged by Kayastha Prabhus. Thirdly, the darakdār operated within a network of literate specialists with similar functional roles – remember the pairs of officials that I mentioned: kārkhaṇīs and sabnīs, citnīs and phaḍnīs, etc. Finally, by creating a creditable record of competent service within a professional and familial network, a relatively low-level Kayastha Prabhu official could demonstrate his worth to the overall administrative enterprise and advance into a more significant role. By the middle of the eighteenth century, exceptionally talented Kayastha Prabhu officials, most notably Govindrao Khanderao and Yashwantrao Mahadev of Satara, rose above their stations to acquire a foothold in the highest circles of political decision-making.

**Status, Property and Mobility in the Satara Chitnis Household**

Kayastha Prabhu writers starting out in government service hoped to further the agendas of their employers, but it required a combination of money, land, and family ties to burnish their reputations within the competitive ranks of the bureaucratic establishment. Even a relatively well-placed secretary attached to a military leader or a prince, perhaps earning one thousand rupees a year, was not free from financial pressures. The expenses of secretarial officials ranged from maintaining a household, supporting one or more subordinate clerks, and offering gifts.
upon the occasion of a royal marriage. One’s salary depended on the unpredictable whims of a patron. As a fragile and dependent means of livelihood, a salary bore a lesser status compared to more permanent wealth accrued through hereditable, vested rights in land. Kayastha Prabhu secretarial officials pushing paper for Maratha governments ultimately sought to escape the risks of salaried employment by accumulating a constellation of such rights, commonly termed vatan. As many scholars have shown, the possession of a vatan was integral to elite identity and status in early modern South Asia. In addition, access to the permanent income flowing from a vatan increased one’s ability to promote the careers of family members and associates.

The brothers Babaji and Govindrao Nilkanth of the Kayastha Prabhu pārasnīś household at Kolhapur evoke the financial pressures of salaried employment in letters included in a volume of inshā’ titled Durj al-Gawāhar. Inshā’ was a Persian genre of belle-lettres frequently used in training munshīs in the conventions of epistolary composition. The majority of the letters in the Durj, which were first compiled by Govindrao Nilkanth, pertain to the dealings of the Kolhapur ruler Sambhaji II; however, about twenty-five of them reveal the personal and financial concerns of the writers themselves. In several letters, Govindrao encourages his nephew Ramchandra

422 While the category of “family” in previous sections has predominantly referred to lineages of male office-holders, this section expands this category to the wider household. This household commonly included not only lineal, but also affinal relations as well as individuals, including slaves, servants, concubines, and celās, related neither by birth nor marriage. On the importance of recognizing the diversity of dependencies in the early modern household in South Asia, see Sumit Guha, Beyond Caste, 121-125.

423 In Arabic and Persian, the term wajan bore the meaning of home, country or dwelling. In the Maratha context, the term primarily denoted one’s patrimony, but it also connoted the sense of belonging at the core of these later meanings. For a fuller explication of its status under the Marathas, see Kulkarni, Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji, 28-31.

424 Govindrao Nlkanth refers to the text by this title, which may be translated as Casket of Jewels, in one of the letters. In an attempt at pluralization, he mispells gauhar (pearl) as gawāhar. On the manuscript and its publication, see Tarabai Papers: A Collection of Persian Letters, ed. A.G. Pawar (Kolhapur: Shivaji University, 1971), i-xx.

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Babaji, who he affectionately calls Annaji, to study Persian, emphasizing the importance of acquiring elegance of style (\textit{inshā’ pardāzī}) by studying and imitating exemplary Persian writings (\textit{nuwishtājā}).\textsuperscript{425} He also recommends the worship of books on Dasara (\textit{roz-i noroz-i dasarah}).\textsuperscript{426} With these practices in mind, Govindrao understood himself as someone who performed the skilled work of a scribe (\textit{munshīgarī}), which was related to but distinct from that of a record-keeper (\textit{daftārdārī}).\textsuperscript{427} Both Govindrao and Babaji complained that their incomes were insufficient, and on multiple occasions, Babaji pled for temporary loans of cash.\textsuperscript{428} The family’s financial situation may have improved after Babaji’s son Ramchandra received a sizable \textit{inām} from Sambhaji II, but during his youth, they had to depend on each other to make end’s meet.

While many Kayastha Prabhu office-holders were the recipients of permanent rights to revenue in one or more villages, most continued to rely on salaried employment for their livelihood. The Satara \textit{ciṭnīś} household, however, managed to amass an exceptionally diverse assemblage of rights, honors, and perquisites that enabled them to extend patronage to collateral family members and exercise a remarkable degree of professional flexibility. Balaji Avaji received little more than his wages and a pen and ink case (\textit{kalamdān}) when he was first appointed \textit{ciṭnīś}, but by the time of Shivaji’s coronation in 1674, he had been awarded permanent rights to the business (\textit{dhandā}) of \textit{ciṭnīś}, \textit{jamenīś}, and \textit{kārkhānīś} along with revenues from

\textsuperscript{425} Tarabai Papers, ed. Pawar, nos. 224-6, pgs. 56-7.

\textsuperscript{426} Ibid., no. 221, 56.

\textsuperscript{427} Viz. \textit{Man salāmat-i īn ṭaraf khidmat-i munshīgarī wa az ān ṭaraf daftārdārī to bā to mutaṣīl dārad}. Tarabai Papers, ed. Pawar, no. 226, pg. 57.

\textsuperscript{428} Tarabai Papers, ed. Pawar, nos. 246-7, 265, pgs. 62 and 67.
certain villages in Dabhol province, which Shivaji had conquered in 1661.\textsuperscript{429} These rights, perhaps by design, made him the peer of the higher ministers in Shivaji’s royal council. In addition, the implication of the grant of dhandā was that Balaji was able to offer secretarial employment to his family members and caste-fellows through the provision of particular darakdārī services to the Satara rulers and their vassals and affiliates. It is possible that this grant led to the aforementioned expansion in Kayastha Prabhu employment in jamenisī recorded in Shahu-period documents.

The Chitnis household’s growing proximity to power and rising socioeconomic status are even more evident in the lifetimes of Balaji Avaji’s heirs Khando Ballal and Govindrao Khanderao. Initial intimations of this upward mobility can be gleaned from their participation in the gift economies of the Satara and Pune courts. Khando and his son Malhar Khanderao appeared on a June 9, 1719 list of individuals who received turbans (tivaṭa) and scarves (śelā) on the occasion of the marriage of Shahu’s adopted son Fattesingh Bhonsle. Also included on this list is Ganesh Rakhamagad, an assistant writer under the Chitnises who would become the progenitor of the Chitnavis scribal lineage at Nagpur (see below).\textsuperscript{430} Similar instances of festive and ritual gifting from members of the Chitnis household are recorded from the early eighteenth century onwards. For example, Malhar Khanderao made a gift of four rupees to the Chhatrapati

\textsuperscript{429} A sanad conferred on Balaji Avaji by Shivaji is attested in the catalogue of the San.Ni.Ka. Daftar of the Pune Archives, but it was not locatable during my period of research. Two published sanads dated rājyābhisheka śaka 1 (1674) record the grants of dhandā and revenue in Dabhol, particularly in the villages of Dabhol, Katran, Shirvan, and Donavali. See CGSM, ed. Kaulkarni, vol. 1, nos. 1-2, 17-8.

\textsuperscript{430} SPD, ed. Sardesai. vol. 7, no. 33, pgs. 22-23.
for the Vijayadashami holiday in 1726.Govindrao Khanderao was among those who offered presents to Bhikambhat Vaidya, a young member of a prominent Chitpavan Brahman merchant-moneylending and diplomatic family, when he received his sacred thread in 1746. On such occasions, the Chitnises displayed their wealth and maintained their connections to the royal family and other highly placed individuals by participating in festive gift economies.

But the most substantial evidence for the family’s rising socioeconomic position is the expansion and diversification of their vatan. Khando Ballal was compelled to hand over his holdings in Dabhol during the siege of Gingee; however, once Shahu assumed power, he was richly compensated with a grant of the sardeśmukhī and nādgauḍa shares of the revenue of Panhala and Chaul provinces. Nādgauḍa was a Kannada term for a district headmanship seat, roughly the equivalent of a deśmukh. An artifact of the Adilshahi administration in the southwestern Deccan, it was repurposed by Shahu to reward his supporters in the succession

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431 SSRPD, ed. Vad and Parasnis, vol. 1, no. 403, pg. 230; for subsequent Vijayadashmi gifts made to the Peshwa by members of the Chitnis household, see SSRPD, ed. Vad and Joshi, vol. 7, no. 21, pg. 362; vol. 8, no. 1148, pg. 294.


433 By all accounts, Dabhol was transferred to the Shirkes to prevent their defection to the Mughals. See CGSM, ed. Kulkarni, vol. 1, nos. 5, 8, pgs. 20-1, 23-4.
dispute with Tarabai. The *sardeśmukhī* and *nādgauḍa* shares in Panhala and Chaul became the foundation of the family *vatan* in subsequent years.

During the remainder of his tenure under Shahu, Khando Ballal was allotted additional revenue shares in over forty villages (see Figure 10). Usually classified as *mokāsā* or *saranjām*, they were not technically hereditable and therefore were contingent upon the ruler’s continuing favor. But, in fact, they were incorporated into Khando’s permanent *vatan* and passed down to his sons, as sanctioned by a long and detailed *abhayapatra* reaffirming the family’s patrimony in light of Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal’s records of service. Many of the villages were located near Shahu’s capital at Satara in the fertile tracts straddling the Krishna and Koyna Rivers in the old Mughal *sarkār* of Parnala, which was renamed Panhala under Shivaji. Other holdings were located in the nearby sub-districts of Supa-Baramati and Junnar and as far afield as the sub-districts of Chandwad in Nashik, Dharur in Beed, and Sangameshwar and Lanja in Ratnagiri. Certain villages in Panhala, such as Borgaon in *pargaṇa* Shirale and Dhamner in *karyāta* Koregaon, were quite productive, and became more so over time, but the revenue yields of most remained relatively stable (see Figures 11 and 12).

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434 It was a regular deduction, amounting to three percent, made from the total *jamā* of the Maratha share of twenty-five percent, or *cauth*, of the total *jamā* of the Mughal provinces of the Deccan and was assigned to various officials and *sardārs* who supported Shahu’s succession, including Khando Ballal. See Tārābāīkālīnā Kāgadpatre, ed. A.G. Pawar, volume 1 (Kolhapur: Shivaji Vidyapith, 1969), no. 217, 302-4; H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms, and of Useful Words Occurring in Official Documents Relating to the Administration of the Government of British India*, (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1855), 361; *Selections of Papers from the Records at the East-India House Relating to the Revenue, Police, and Civil and Criminal Justice under the Company’s Government in India*, vol. 4, 654, cited in Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 311.

435 PD, Shahu Daftar, rumal 3, file 4, nos. 2523; file 5, nos. 2603, 2661; file 6, 2706, 2732; Kulkarni, *CGSM*, nos. 3-4, 18-9.


437 PD, Shahu Daftar, rumal 3, file 1, no. 2225; file 2, no. 1336; file 4, no. 2648; file 5, no. 2612; file 15, nos. 19839-40.
Figure 10: Villages in Panhala Sarkār Held by Khando Ballal Chitnis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Sub-District</th>
<th>1766 CE Jamā (Rs)</th>
<th>1811 CE Jamā (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khojewadi</td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaitapur</td>
<td></td>
<td>700</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamdabaj/Hamdabaz</td>
<td>Satara</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigdi</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degaon</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borgaon</td>
<td>Shirala</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majgaon/Mazgaon</td>
<td>Talbid</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murud</td>
<td>Tarale</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhamner</td>
<td>Koregaon</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>1734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 11:** Revenue Estimates (Ākār) of Chitnis-held Villages, 1766 and 1811

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1770</th>
<th>1780</th>
<th>1785</th>
<th>1790</th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1810</th>
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<td>2874</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3607</td>
<td>3787</td>
<td>3627</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaitapur</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>436.76</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majgaon/Mazgaon</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1216</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 12:** Revenue Estimates (Ākār) of Chitnis-held Villages, 1770-1810

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440 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal nos. 301-8 (Dhamner), 1746 (Jaitapur), 1054 (Mazgaon), various *ākārbanda* documents dated from 1145-1219 (1744-1818 CE)
Following Khando Ballal’s death in 1726, the family’s land revenue portfolio diversified significantly. According to a 1766 statement that reflected losses incurred during the rebellion of the Bhonsles of Nagpur, Govindrao Khanderao’s total *saranjām* was estimated to be worth a *jamā* of Rs 51,425.441 In subsequent years, estimates for the *saranjām* ranged from Rs 75,000 to over one *lākh*.442 Much of the family’s additional income came from more distant and tenuous *saranjām* holdings in parganas Jamner, Dabhadi, Ghatboli, and Roshangaon in Khandesh and Aurangabad. But the Chitnises held their most enduring claims to villages in the Panhala region. Even after Peshwas Sawai Madhavrao and Bajirao II had confiscated and reassigned much of their revenue, the family was entitled to a nominal share of the yield of their main holdings in Panhala, termed *vatanī amal sardeśmukhī va nādgauḍī*.443 The family’s *vatan* and financial base continued to be roughly coterminous with the core territories of the Chhatrapati’s domain.

Until the Peshwa’s orders of sequestration in 1788, the Chitnises held the reins of government of villages in which they were assigned rights to *saranjām*. This government was based in their main seat of Borgaon and conducted through *kamāvīṣdārs* who were responsible for the day-to-day business of collecting, distributing, and reporting village revenue. The use of a seal (see Figure 13) for the village administration of Jivaji Ramrao Chitnis suggests that its authority was generally recognized. The language of the seal is a fairly standard Sanskrit

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441 PD, Ghadni Daftar, rumal no. 498, *hiseb* document for Govindrao Khanderao Chitnis dated 1167 (1766 CE).

442 PD, Ghadni Daftar, rumal no. 498, *yādi* documents for various Govindrao Khanderao, Malhar Ramrao, and other Chitnises dated 1170 (1769 CE), 1212 (1811 CE), and 1214 (1813 CE), which records an earlier estimate for 1189 (1788 CE).

443 For example, the estimated revenue statement (*ākārbanda*) for Nimani in pargana Kavathe near Miraj for 1811 lists an amount of 184 rupees and 12 annas for the *vatanī amal sardeśmukhī va nādgauḍī* of Ramrao Jivaji Chitnis, Khando Ballal’s grandson. This figure reflected separate *sardeśmukhī* and *nādgauḍī* shares as well as smaller amounts for priestly and clerical fees. See PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal no. 686 (Nimani), *ākārbanda* document dated 1212 (1811 CE).
encomium to Chitnis and his lord: “श्री जिवाजी प्रभु पुत्रम्य रामरायम्य धीमता-मुद्दा सर्वगुणोपेतां
राजसम्मानवर्धिनी (Seal of Jivaji Prabhu, son of Ramraya, ever-worshipful servant of the virtuous
king).”

In addition to deducting the Chitnis share, kamāvisdārs allocated lands to support
expenses and fees associated with the general maintenance and protection of the villages and
their residents. These included lands assigned to ināmdārs (tax-free landholders), balutedārs
(village servants), the pāṭil (village headman), the kulkarnī (village accountant), and military
and religious specialists who serviced the entire village. For example, in 1759 in Dhamner, eleven bighās of land were reserved for the pāṭil and
kulkarnī; twenty-seven bighās for a group termed gāvavīka, which included a Hindu mendicant
(gosāvi), a Muslim mendicant (fakīr), a Muslim cleric (mulānā), and a village watchman (berad);
and seventeen bighās for the local Mahar community. Additional lands were set aside for
swordsmen (dhārkāri) and cudgel-men (soḍkā) as well as for religious establishments
(devasthāne) and village gods (grāmadeva). Under the designations gāva-nisbat-kharca and
gāva-nisbat-sādīlvār were listed miscellaneous but regularly occuring expenses such as cloth and

444 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 301 (Dhamner), jamīn-jhāda document for Ramrao Jivaji Chitnis
dated 1158 (1759 CE).
foodstuffs for the holidays Navaratri, Gokulashtami, and Champashtami as well as the occasional donation to the shrine established at the samādhi of Sant Ramdas in Parali-Sajjangad.445

The Chitnises also ensured that Brahman priests, local holy men, religious establishments, and long-serving officials were afforded permanent sustenance through rights to land. Ramrao Jivaji (d. 1805) in 1773 issued a grant for eight bighās of new inām lands in Borgaon to Vamanbhat Sawade of Rajapur in recognition of the completion of certain rituals involving sacred grass and water (kuṣodam) on behalf of his uncle Govindrao Khanderao and the latter’s wife Bayashri. Bayashri had died on pilgrimage to Benares, where Sawade made his request for an inām for his family’s permanent livelihood.446 Ramrao’s brother Devrao in 1799 ordered the kulkarnī and mokādam of Dhamner to reserve twenty-five bighās of land for the upkeep of Vitthala and Ramchandra idols in the village.447 Grantees could be individuals of local significance. For example, a Hindu ascetic (gosāvī) called Bapujibuwa Nigadikar, perhaps hailing from the Chitnis-held village of Nigadi, was granted a dharmadāya of four bighās near the fort of Santoshgad.448 Trusted officials could also be the beneficiaries of the Chitnises’ munificence. In 1802, Ramaji Bhagwant, the kulkarnī of Mazgaon, traveled to Borgaon to petition Ramrao for an inām, pleading that earlier ināmpatre issued by Govindrao Khanderao from Jaitapur had been lost. His petition was granted.449 Through such acts of largesse, in

445 For the latter, see, for example, PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 307 (Dhamner), tālebanda documents for Ramrao Jivaji Chitnis dated śaka 1732 and 1733 (1810 and 1811).

446 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1857 (Borgaon), grant issued by Ramrao Jivaji Chitnavis to Vamanbhat bin Mahadevbhat upanāma Sawade dated 1174 (1773 CE).

447 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 304 (Dhamner), letter from Devrao Jivaji Chitnavis to Gangadhar Bhagwant dated śaka 1721.

448 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 303 (Dhamner), order dated 1196 (1795 CE).

449 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1054 (Mazgaon), unnumbered letter from Ramrao Jivaji Chitnis to Ramaji Bhagwant Kulkarni dated 1203 (1802 CE).
conjunction with the management of village government, the Chitnis family transitioned from
acting as mere stipendiary service-providers to beneficent patrons with delegated local authority.

Though subject to the oversight of the central Maratha governments at Satara and Pune,
the Chitnises wielded authority at the local level by mediating and resolving disputes among
proprietors and officials in their villages. Even the redressal of minor grievances reinforced this
authority. On August 16, 1799, Ramrao Jivaji ordered the headman of Mazgaon to desist from
imposing a tax in the amount of ten rupees on the inām of a local Brahman ritualist (purohīt)
Gopalbhat as this property was a religious gift (dharmadāya) and therefore tax-exempt.450 Other
quarrels erupted between family members struggling for control over rights to land. For instance,
Krishnajipant, a kulkarṇī of the aforementioned village, informed Malhar Ramrao Chitnis that
his relation Babaji prevented the timely sowing of his fields by co-opting the labor to plant seeds
in his own fields. In response, Chitnis asked the provincial governor to effect some settlement
between them.451

Even after the Peshwa annulled the Chitnises’ local patrimonial rights, they remained
authoritative sources of knowledge about the rights of village office-holders. In one case,
Damodar Khirsagar, a member of the most affluent pāṭil family in the Chitnis-held village of
Dhamner, traveled to Pune in 1807 to lodge a complaint against one Raghunathbhat Bhagwant,
who had managed the village revenue for the past five to six years.452 He protested that
Bhagwant had dishonored him by striking him from the village rolls, which resulted in a loss of

450 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1054 (Mazgaon), ājnāpatra issued by Ramrao Jivaji Chitnis to
mokadam dated 1199 (1798 CE).

451 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1054 (Mazgaon), letter from Malhar Ramrao Chitnis to Baba Tilak
Subhedhar dated 25 Jilkad.

452 Piraji Khirsagar and his sons Damodar, Raoji, and Kusaji each held 5-10 bighās at a time, and there
were at least 15-20 members of their bhāubanda. See PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 304 (Dhamner),
various documents and rumal no. 306 (Dhamner) for khātavanī dated 1213 (1812 CE).
his mokādam (village headman) title, sixty-rupee salary (muśāhirā), five-rupee robes (tasrīph), and associated privileges, including control over Mahar labor, access to gardens and orchards, and seniority in placing a polī cake on the hutāśanī bonfire closing out Holi festivities.\footnote{Collectively, such headman rights were known as mān-pān. See Guha, \textit{Beyond Caste}, 88.} Bhagwant, having been summoned to respond to the complaint, stated that the Khirsagars violently arrogated the Holi cakes and other property to themselves without his approval. But since he had no documents to back up his confiscation of their rights, the Pune government called upon Narharrao Malhar Chitnis, son of the last Chitnis landholder Malhar Ramrao. He testified that while the village had been out of their hands for nine or ten years, Damodar’s family had held the headmanship for almost one hundred years, both during their administration and prior to it. The kamāvīsdār Mahadji Vinayak Phadke corroborated Bhagwant’s account of the family’s behavior during Holi but also stated that his inquiries in Borgaon confirmed their claims to the headmanship.\footnote{PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal nos. 304 and 308 (Dhamner), yāḍī documents dated 12 and 23 Saban.} Bhagwant eventually reinstated the family’s rights.\footnote{PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal no. 306 (Dhamner), abhayapatra dated 12 Rabilawal 1208 (May 21, 1807).}

Property disputes broke out not only between subordinate officials, but also within the Chitnis family itself. An assemblage of rights and privileges attained by a successful office-holding family was not necessarily distributed equally among its members. As determined by the norm of patrilineal succession and the quirks of favor and temperament, the actual title of cītnīś and the associated rights to revenue were possessed at any given time by a senior male e.g. Khando Ballal, Govindrao Khanderao Chitnis, Ramrao Jivaji Chitnis. Brothers and cousins put forward their own claims that caused conflict with some regularity. At the bare minimum, documentation at the village level suggests that certain individual costs for the payment of
servants, the feeding of horses during short trips, and the celebration of marriages, festivals, and other ritual occasions, usually grouped under the designation *swārī kharca*, were covered by the family’s *inām* revenues.\(^{456}\) Junior family members also held small parcels of land. Two Chitnis relations, referred to simply as Dadasaheb and Tatyasaheb, were regularly recorded in the list of revenue-payers (*kulārag*) in Mazgaon during Malhar Ramrao’s administration in the first two decades of the nineteenth century.\(^{457}\) Together, they held around seventeen *bighās* of land in 1817.\(^{458}\) Bayashri, the wife of Govindrao Khanderao mentioned above in connection with a grant of land to a family priest, received a small portion of the revenues of Jaitapur.\(^{459}\) In this fashion, male peers within the Chitnis lineage, and more irregularly, senior women, laid claim to shares of the *vatan* amassed by their forebears.

Chitnis family tradition indicates that financial tension was a chronic problem among the relations and descendants of Khando Ballal.\(^{460}\) It was stated earlier that while Khando occupied his father’s *cītnīs* post under Sambhaji and Rajaram, his brother Nilo Ballal worked as the *diwān* of the latter’s son Raja Karna. As recounted in a partial *bakhar* covering the early years of the

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\(^{456}\) For example, at the time of Dadasaheb Chitnis’ traveling from Majgaon to Borgaon, he incurred *svārī kharcha* in the amount of five rupees, which the costs of a servant (*khijmatgār*), an offering to an idol, and grain for his horses. See PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1054 (Mazgaon), *ākārbanda* document of Ramrao Jivaji Chitnis dated 1191 (1790 CE).

\(^{457}\) Available documentation suggests that Dadasaheb was Devrao Jivaji, Malhar Ramrao’s great uncle, and Tatyasaheb was his father’s cousin’s son Haibatrao Bahirav.

\(^{458}\) PD, Satara Jamav daftar, rumal 1054 (Mazgaon), *yādī* document for Tatya Saheb ad Data Saheb dated 1218 (1817 CE).

\(^{459}\) PD, Satara Jamav daftar, rumal 1746 (Jaitapur), *hiseb* documents dated 1183 (1782 CE) and 1159 (1768 CE).

\(^{460}\) Two partial family histories – one provided by Mahipatrao Dada Chitnis of Pune to explain the separation of the Satara and Pune branches and one probably penned in 1797-8 by Raghunathrao Laxman Chitnis – allow for a more detailed reconstruction of intra-family property disputes. The first was part of the collection of Jivanrao Trimbak Chitnis, and the second that of Balwantrao Raghunath Chitnavis of Jaitapur and Narhar Narayan Deshpande of Urwade. Both were been edited and published by Balkrishna Sakham Kulkarni. See *CGSM*, ed. Kulkarni, vol. 1, pgs. 1-16; vol. 2, pgs. 1-23.
family’s history, their relationship was acrimonious due to Nilo’s profligate habits. Khando begged him to curtail his spending, but Nilo refused. They cut ties, even going so far as to buy cloth from different merchants.\textsuperscript{461} The implication of the \textit{bakhar} is that their separation was the root of the development of an independent Chitnis branch at Pune, whose most notable member, Mahipatrao Dada Chitnis, was a partisan of Peshwa Madhavrao’s brother and opponent Raghunathrao.\textsuperscript{462}

Another major family quarrel had its origins in the early death of Jivaji Khanderao, Khando Ballal’s son and immediate heir, in 1743. Although Jivaji’s son Ramrao was the next in line, he was very young, which seems to have provoked a struggle among Jivaji’s brothers for control over the family business. Eventually, Govindrao Khanderao won out and became the accepted patriarch.\textsuperscript{463} To ward off further disputes, Govind in 1767 obtained the Peshwa’s approval of a formal settlement of the \textit{saranjām} between his four successors: Ramrao Jivaji, Khanderao Bapuji, Laxmanrao Govind, and Baburao Khanderao. Of the estimated Rs 60,000 in \textit{saranjām}, Rs 15,000 was reserved for the eldest heir, Ramrao Jivaji, and the remaining Rs 45,000 was split three and a half ways with the youngest, Baburao Khanderao, receiving the half-share.\textsuperscript{464} It would also be Ramrao’s name that authorized any documentation related to village administration, and his son Malhar Ramrao would inherit the \textit{ciṭnīs} title. Govindrao Khanderao seems to have been able to enforce the terms of the settlement, but because leadership of the family had shifted away from Jivaji’s (and therefore Ramrao’s) line, the formal rules of

\textsuperscript{461} CGSM, ed. Kulkarni, vol. 1, 8-10.

\textsuperscript{462} See pg. 105, fn. 283.

\textsuperscript{463} One family history claims that another brother Bapuji Khanderao tried to acquire the \textit{ciṭnīs} title for his own son by telling Chhatrapati Shahu that Jivaji had no sons. When Shahu discovered the truth, he placed Jivaji’s sons in the care of Govindrao. See KPIIS, no. 1, 11-12.

succession may have seemed less binding to young and aspiring would-be heirs. After Govind’s death in 1785, the family was divided by a property dispute that dragged on for over a decade.

The principal source for this dispute is another partial family history penned in 1797-8 by Raghunathrao Laxman Chitnis, the son of the aforementioned Laxmanrao Govind. Since the writer and his father were parties to the dispute, his account is quite obviously composed with an eye to supporting their bid for possession of the Chitnis *saranjām*. Their case was two-fold. First, Raghunathrao complained that Ramrao Jivaji began to openly treat them with contempt after Govindrao Khanderao’s death, courted the attentions of the family’s clerical staff, and cut them out of the business of the *saranjām*. Secondly, he contended that even though Ramrao was the eldest heir, and therefore he and his son Malhar Ramrao technically had the most rightful claim to the *saranjām*, they did deserve to inherit the largest share because their line was less distinguished in its service. Rather, given that he and his father were the progeny of Govindrao Khanderao, who had been the one to maintain the illustrious tradition of his father and grandfather Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal, they should be accorded a greater share in his patrimony.

Despite these objections, Raghunathrao relates that in accordance with his father’s wishes, he fell into line with Ramrao Jivaji’s direction for several years. Eventually, he made contact with Malhar Ramrao and asked an elderly clerk of his grandfather’s, Avaji Bapuji Musekhorekar, to prepare a petition (*yādi*) with articles of agreement (*kalambandi*) that would effect a new and more equitable division between the two branches of the family. He notes that the original document stayed with Malhar, and a copy was kept with Malhar’s assistant Narayan Ramchandra. Ramrao balked at entering into the agreement on the grounds that any such document prepared by a mere servant (*cākar*) was dead on arrival. So Raghunathrao sent his
younger brother Rajeshwarrao, who as it turns out had recently married in Nagpur, to convince Sadashiv Anant Abhyankar, the right-hand man of Nana Phadnavis, to intercede on their behalf. Their new plan was more creative. Recalling that Govindrao Khanderao in the lifetime of Shahu and Tarabai had been assigned an assistant (mutālik) with his own saranjām, they hoped that Nana Phadnavis could be sweet-talked into making a similar assignment for Laxmanrao Govind. They found (or forged) a dākhlā (note) stating that Ganesh Rakhmagad, the brother of Khando Ballal’s wife, had been the recipient of the assistantship along with a grant of revenue from several villages.465

Abhyankar presented this evidence to Nana Phadnavis in Pune. He approved Raghunathrao’s request for a mutālik saranjām on the condition that he pay a gift to the government. Short on cash, Raghunathrao turned to Parshuram Bhaupatwardhan, the ruler of Miraj and a friend of his father, who in turn called upon his cousin (culat bandhu) Gangadharrao Govind, then managing the government of the Chitnis-owned village Borgaon, to provide the funds. He agreed. Word of the final agreement was passed to Raghunathrao’s brother Rajeshwarrao. He notified Abhyankar, who in turn called upon the kiledār of Satara fort to procure the ceremonial pen-case (kalamdān) and robes of office from the Chhatrapati. Despite his success in creating a position for himself, it seems that Raghunathrao continued to be sidelined by his uncle. Whereas Ramrao resided in Pune and parlayed his connections with the Peshwa’s circle, Raghunathrao could only afford to live in provincial Borgaon. After the battle of Kharda of 1795, which the writer claims he and Ramrao both witnessed, he passed along his misgivings to Nana Phadnavis, but nothing seems to have come of his efforts. In fact, he claims that his income was once again confiscated, forcing him to consider re-locating for work.

465 It appears that this document was a forgery. See PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1859 (Borgaon), ājñāpatra dated 1196 (1795 CE); KPIS, no. 1, 13.
The fruits of Raghunathrao’s labors to create (false) evidence of a bureaucratic precedent for his claim to the Chitnis saranjām were short-lived. Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao on May 20, 1792 authorized the transferrance of Ganesh Rakhmagad’s mutālik post to Laxmanrao Govind Chitnis. Three years later, Ramrao Jivaji divulged that the supporting documentation had been forged. As a result, the post, the associated saranjām of three and a half villages, and even the honorary kalamdān were removed from Laxmanrao’s possession and re-assigned to Ramrao. But what is striking about Raghunathrao’s narrative, which he must have written in part to acquit himself of the serious offence of forgery, is its vivid depiction of an intricate network of scribes, clerks, and assistants whose fluency in the tools and techniques of government administration enabled him to advance his proprietary and professional interests. These lower-level functionaries in turn took advantage of the resources of the Chitnises to carve out positions for themselves. The surviving documentation of the Chitnis saranjām regularly records the names of individuals who were identified with darakdārī posts such as citnīs, jamenīs, and kārkhanīs or were known generically as clerks (kārkun) or employees (asāmyā). Two figures from Raghunathrao’s account stand out in this regard. The first is Narayan Ramchandra, the helpmate of Malhar Ramrao who stored a copy of the short-lived agreement between him and Raghunathrao. He was indeed a senior clerk in the employ of Malhar in the early nineteenth century and may have gradually taken on the important responsibility of

468 For example, see PD, Ghadni Daftar, no. 498, unnumbered yādī document for Govindrao Khanderao, Ramrao Jivaji, Khanderao Bapuji, and Bahirav Khanderao Chitnis listing asāmyā alongside Rs 77,387 in saranjām revenue.
managing the Chitnis saranjām. An 1807 account for Jaitapur lists him as overseeing the village’s revenue in that year on behalf of Chitnis.\textsuperscript{469}

Similar, but even more central to the trajectory of the Chitnis family, was the path-breaking mutālik Ganesh Rakhmagad. Even though Raghunathrao Laxman had forged the papers documenting the particulars of this title, it really did exist. Not only was Ganesh Rakhmagad (Randive) the assistant to Govindrao Khanderao, he was also his maternal uncle by marriage. Govind’s father Khando Ballal had married Ganesh’s sister.\textsuperscript{470} It is likely that this family relation gave him a leg up in the secretarial hierarchy of Shahu’s administration. Under Govind’s supervision, he occupied a post variously described as lihinār dimmat ciṭnisī, mutālik ciṭnisī va lihinār, and mutālik lihinār dimmat ciṭnisī, all of which roughly mean assistant writer under the supervision of the scribe.\textsuperscript{471} In the later eighteenth century, the duties of the ciṭnis were routinely delegated to a staff of salaried writers bearing similar designations of dimmat ciṭnis or nisbat ciṭnis.\textsuperscript{472} Through his connection to the Chitnis family, Ganesh Rakhmagad was able to supplement his scribal income with rights to mokāsā revenue in the Chitnis-held villages of Khojewadi near Satara; Varude in Junnar prānt; and Kololi and Karkhel in Supe-Baramati

\textsuperscript{469} PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal no. 1746 (Jaitapur), hiseb document for Malhar Ramrao Chitnavis vidyamāne Ramchandra Narayan dated 1208 (1807 CE).

\textsuperscript{470} Multiple sources attest to their familial relationship. See NBB, ed. Kale, 43; Huddar, Nāgpūrce Ciṭnavīs, 5-6; Nāgpūrce Ciṭnīvis Gharāne: Vamsāvalī (Nagpur, 1971), 3.

\textsuperscript{471} PD, Shahu Daftar, rumal 15, file 3, no. 19863, 19857; San.Ni.Ka. Daftar, rumal 19, file 12, no. 11514. There is one reference to him as being employed by the rājānjā, a minister in the Satara government in PD, Shahu Daftar, rumal 4, file 5, no. 3515.

\textsuperscript{472} One noteworthy example was Balaji Ganesh, the a Pune-based clerk bearing the title kārkūn nisbat ciṭnis and the author of a 1783 bakhar on Maratha history, that found its way into the hands of the British resident C.W. Malet. For this bakhar, see Chapter 5. For documents attesting to the annual salary and associated perquisites claimed by Balaji Ganesh and Jivaji Ballal, see PD, Ghadni rumal no. 389, 407, saranjām documents for Balaji Ganesh kārkūn nisbat ciṭnis dated 29 Sawal 1176; SSRPD, ed. G.C. Vad and K.B. Marathe, volume 8 (Poona, 1911), no. 1150, pg. 303.
This connection also played a central role in the appointment of his son Rakhmaji Ganesh to ciṭnīs under Raghuji Bhonsle, the recently elevated senā sāheb subhā of Nagpur. Being a leading member of the rājmaṇḍaḷa, Govind may have been instrumental in directing Shahu’s attention to Raghuji when he was staffing the latter’s new government at Nagpur in the 1730s. At this time, he seems to have recommended Rakhmaji for the ciṭnīs post. At Nagpur, Rakhmaji was the progenitor of another successful Kayastha scribal-diplomatic lineage. His son Chimaji Rakhmagad, who went on the hastily conceived diplomatic mission to Pune on behalf of Janoji Bhonsle described in Chapter 2, inherited the ciṭnīs post. His adopted grandson Krishnaraao Madhav Chitnavis, as I will show in subsequent chapters, became a top adviser and diplomat under Raghuji Bhonsle II of Nagpur.

Conclusion: The Perils of Sequestration

Starting in 1783, and continuing intermittently until the fall of the Peshwa regime in 1818, the central government at Pune put the Chitnis saranjām under sequestration and re-assigned its choicest portions to various followers of the Peshwa. Immediately following the sequestration, the government agreed to forgive the Chitnises for their seditious offences (phiturāce aparādha) in exchange for a gift of Rs 100,001. But in 1788, the government circulated fresh orders to district officials re-assigning Chitnis-held territories to new kamāvīsdārs on the basis of a transgression (amaryādā). While the nature of the transgression is not recorded, we can speculate that the Chitnises were punished for siding with the disgraced

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473 He split the revenues from Kololi with another writer by the name of Jagnath Chintamani. See PD, Shahu Daftar, rumal 15, file 3, no. 19863, 19857; rumal 2, file 5, no. 1661.


475 PD, Ghadni Daftar, rumal 498, yādē document dated 1184 (1793 CE).

former Peshwa Raghunathrao. Many of Raghunathrao’s partisans were either imprisoned or heavily fined at different points following his implication in Peshwa Narayanrao’s assassination in 1773. The Chitnises seem to have been linked to his faction through Sakharam Hari Gupte, a prominent Kayastha Prabhu general and father-in-law of Malhar Ramrao Chitnis. Their standing with the Pune government may also have been diminished by recurring fights with Brahmans regarding the ritual status of Kayastha Prabhus, which will be reviewed in more detail in the next chapter.

Some idea of the effects of government sequestration on the Chitnis household and their tenants is offered by documentation from the family seat of Borgaon. The kamāvīs of this village was assigned to Khanderao Jadhav, the superintendent of Pratapgad fort, with the authorization of a sanad dated May 22, 1803. In August and September 1805, the residents of the village led an insurrection (bakheḍā) against Jadhav’s administration. Evidently with the assistance of their former landlords, they took up armed posts around the village and ousted Jadhav’s officials. Jadhav’s people tried to convince the Chitnises to call off the rebels, but they refused to answer his communications. It appears that the village was languishing due to the incursions and collections of state-issued debt bonds (rokhe) by proximate commanders and officials. A party sympathetic to the Chitnises, one Krishnarao Mankeshwar, on August 22 reported that upon stopping at Borgaon while on pilgrimage, he noticed that the village was desolate. Work had come to a halt; property was being destroyed; and villagers flocked to the temples to complain.

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477 CGSM, ed. Kulkarni, vol. 2, 3. Also see Chapter 4.

478 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1861 (Borgaon), yādī document dated 1206 (1805 CE).

479 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1865 (Borgaon), letters exchanged by Jotirao Gaekwad and Ramrao Jivaji Chitnis dated 22 and 27 Jamadilawal.

480 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1865 (Borgaon), letters sent by various individuals dated 17 Moharram, 21 Razab, 7 Sawal, 27 Jamadilawal, 17 Ramzan.
In addition, when Malhar Ramrao took him to the Chitnis home, he noticed that their condition had much detiorated. Mankeshwar urged the government to listen to Malhar’s petitions at Pune to restore the family’s patrimonial rights.\textsuperscript{481}

Part of the Chitnis \textit{saranjām} was eventually released to Malhar Ramrao by Peshwa Bajirao II, but the family would never enjoy the same degree of financial, professional, and political flexibility that they once did. This position of relative weakness may have motivated Malhar to pen the remarkable series of historical reflections on the Maratha polity and his family’s contribution to it that will be the focus of Chapter 6. His son Balwantrao was a favorite of Pratapsinha Bhonsle, the last Chhatrapati of Satara, and received new grants of \textit{inām}, including land in Shukrawar Peth in Satara city for the construction of a garden. But because Pratapsinha was essentially the figurehead of a puppet administration under the Company resident James Grant, Balwantrao’s relative comfort and intimacy with Pratapsinha did not translate to effective political influence. The bond between property, status, and influence that propelled the ascendancy of Kayastha Prabhu households within the Maratha state – the Chitnis’s foremost among them – had been severed. The political dimension of this ascendancy will be the focus of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{481} PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal 1865 (Borgaon), letter sent by Krishnarao Mankeshwar dated 25 Jamadilawal.
CHAPTER 4: Soldiers and Scribes into Diplomats

Having concluded his daily bath and worship on the morning of August 12, 1792, the Nagpur rājā Raghuji Bhonsle II took his usual seat by the shrine of his household god for a round of private consultation (khalbat) on the most urgent political matters of the day. He was joined by his Marathi and Persian scribes Krishnarao Madhav and Shridhar Laxman. They talked for about an hour. In the evening, he visited the home of the soldier-diplomat Mahipatrao Dinkar to celebrate the Hindu festival of Gokulashtami. Known more today for the pyramids of young men stretching to reach pots of yogurt during the popular festival of Dahi Handi, the activities at Mahipatrao Dinkar’s home included praying and singing songs, feasting on special foods, and enjoying pān before setting out into the night. Among the officials in attendance were the two scribes as well as Krishnarao Madhav’s distant relation Babaji Govind. Three days later, Krishnarao Madhav reciprocated the invitation to Mahipatrao Dinkar and his guests for his own Gokulashtami celebration. Each morning, he continued to join his fellow scribe for discussions with the rājā. They held these discussions in anticipation of a diplomatic mission to the court of Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao at Pune. Their diplomacy was critical to not only maintaining the now decades-long harmony between the Pune and Nagpur governments, but also to ramping up a nascent multilateral strategy of defense against the threat of the British East India Company.

Krishnarao Madhav, Babaji Govind, and Mahipatrao Dinkar were all members of Kayastha Prabhu lineages whose strong records of scribal and military service enabled them to take on weightier political responsibilities. As the Gokulashtami newsletter from Nagpur suggests, politics was deeply embedded in the social life of Maratha courts. The routines and rituals of both discussion and celebration reinforced relationships between individuals of different backgrounds with common expertise in matters of state. While one might assume that a

482 Deccan College Museum, rumal 96, file 1, no. 4.
Brahman and a Kayastha, two Hindu scribes and a Muslim minister, or, as in Chapter 1, a Maratha rājā and an Afghan nawāb, might be antagonists, this chapter shows that politics facilitated the formation of working relationships to achieve strategic goals. As I began to show in Chapter 1 with respect to the Bhonsle rājās and the Panni nawābs, political affiliation was not epiphenomenonal to social and religious identification. These identities were of course deeply felt with respect to matters like ritual entitlements and played an important role in public life; however, the need for cooperation in the practical arena of politics fueled the creation and re-creation of a form of elite sociality transcending divides of caste and community.

This chapter puts the Maratha court under a microscope to trace the political careers of its Kayastha Prabhu scribes, outline the types of issues they managed, and explore the relationships they forged to manage them. The first section mounts a critique of the historiography on grāmanyā disputes between Kayasthas and Brahmans to justify a fresh perspective on the sociality of politics. The second section examines the activities of Kayastha Prabhu scribal officials circulating between Satara, Kolhapur, and the Konkan in the first half of the eighteenth century, culminating with the transformative moment of the Satara cīnīs Govindrao Khanderao’s facilitation of Peshwa Balaji Bajirao’s assumption of the burden of government (rājyābhār). The third section shifts the focus to Nagpur. I describe Raghuji Bhonsle’s recruitment of Kayastha officials from Satara and analyze the professional formation of a group of Kayastha soldier-diplomats who became entangled in the murderous politics of the later Peshwas. Finally, the last section prepares the ground for Chapter 5 by honing in on the diplomacy of Raghuji II’s scribal-counselors Krishnarao Madhav and Shridhar Laxman, who compared to their predecessors operated in a far more multi-polar world requiring constant calculation of the consequences of
any political action. It became increasingly clear that one of these consequences might be submission to the monopolizing rule of the East India Company.

**Caste, Politics, and the Problem of Grāmaṇya in the Eighteenth Century**

The history of Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu participation in the political life of the Maratha Empire has been largely subsumed by the historiography on grāmaṇya. The term grāmaṇya itself refers to any local caste dispute; however, in the context of Maratha history, it specifically signifies a dispute between Kayasthas and Brahmans. Grāmaṇya concerned the access of Kayasthas to Vedic recitations (vedokta) during the performance of core life-cycle rituals (saṃskārā) as well as related secondary issues such as the number of saṃskārās to which Kayasthas were entitled. These decisions about ritual entitlements were inextricably tied to the broader question of whether or not Kayasthas should be considered Kshatriyas and therefore of twice-born status. While the number of recorded disputes attested by historians has varied, certain canonical grāmaṇya of the Maratha period have come to define the historiographical discourse. Principally, these are the Benares-based Brahman pāṇḍit Gagabhatta’s support of the ritual claims of Kayasthas around the time of Shivaji’s coronation in 1674; the 1789-90 protest of the Brahmans of Pen to perceived violations of Peshwa Narayanrao’s earlier restriction of Kayastha ritual performance; and the appeals of several prominent Pune Brahmans, including Nilkanth Shastri Thatte, Chintamanrao Patwardhan, and Balajipant Natu, to the decision of the Shankaracharya of the Sankeshwar matha affirming the Kshatriyahood of Kayasthas in 1826-

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483 On ethnological debates about the Kayasthas, see Chapter 3.
Closely related to these grāmanya were concurrent disputes about the Kshatriya-Rajput genealogy of the Bhonsle rājās and their claims to Vedic consecration rites, which came to be known as the “Vedokta controversy.” Together the debates surrounding the Kshatriya status of Kayasthas and Marathas continued to be important reference points for non-Brahman politics well into the twentieth century.\footnote{For detailed reconstructions, see Deshpande, “Kṣatriyas in the Kali Age?”; N.K. Wagle, “The Cāndraseniya Kāyastha Prabhus and the Brahmans: Ritual, Law, and Politics in Pune, 1789-90,” in Indology and Law: Studies in Honour of Professor J. Duncan M. Derrett, ed. Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Parameswara Kota Aithal (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), 303-329; Wagle, “Ritual and Change in Early Nineteenth Century Society in Maharashtra: Vedokta Disputes in Baroda, Pune, and Satara, 1824-1838,” in Religion and Society in Maharashtra, ed. Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle, 145-177.}

Not least because of the connection with non-Brahman politics, the historiography on grāmanya has tended to be highly polarized. V.K. Rajwade, himself a Chitpavan Brahman, asked why Kayasthas continued to demand the privilege of conducting Vedic rituals even after the Kāyasthadharmadīpa of Gagabhatta, which was composed after Shivaji’s coronation, prescribed non-Vedic formulas for Kayastha ritual practice. His answer was that Kayasthas were motivated by long-held resentments against Brahmans for having displaced their hold on the revenue administration following the rise of Islamic rule in the Deccan. K.T. Gupte attacked Rajwade’s characterization of Gagabhatta’s position, and it has been demonstrated that the original composition of the Kāyasthadharmadīpa likely did allow for Vedic ritual.\footnote{Rosalind O’Hanlon, Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 24-41.} Rajwade’s corollary historical argument about the persistence of grāmanya is equally difficult to substantiate. As I discuss in Chapter 3, while Brahmans and Kayasthas were prevalent in the revenue administration of the Islamic sultanates, Kayastha employment increased under Chhatrapati Shahu Bhonsle in the early eighteenth century. Rather, the fact that Kayasthas maintained their
claims to higher ritual status in the face of Brahmanical orthodox opposition attests to the stability of their position within the social and political order.

The disagreement between Rajwade and Gupte about Gagabhatta’s Kāyasthadharmadīpā is merely one example of the ways in which the polarization of the grāmanyā debate has tended to produce highly ideological narratives and counter-narratives as well as efforts to prove or disprove the Kshatriya status of Kayastha Prabhus and Marathas. Nineteenth-century source collections and accounts such as the periodical Kāyastha Prabhūncyā Itihāsācī Sādhane sought to rectify the lack of adequate source material and to defend Kayasthas against the perceived insults of the Brahman community. Later accounts reflected this polarization along lines of caste and ideology. Rajwade argued that the recurrence of grāmanyā had deleterious effects in the political realm, most spectacularly in the capture and execution of Sambhaji Bhonsle, the murder of Peshwa Narayanrao, and the overthrow of Pratapsinha Bhonsle. While caste elevation (jātyunatti) through intermarriage had once been possible, caste boundaries had become so rigid by the Maratha period as to disallow any form of individual mobility and to render extreme collective action into a necessity.

In his Complete History of Gramanya, or The Rebellion of the Bureaucracy (Gramānyānca Sādyanta Itithāsa Arthāth Naukarshāhice Bānda) (1919), the Kayastha Prabhu historian and activist Keshav Sitaram (Prabodhankar) Thackeray rejected the view of Maratha history represented by Rajwade as overly sanguine. Considering grāmanyā to be a crime that had to be reckoned with in moral terms, he held Brahmans, and particularly the Peshwa, responsible for the failures of the Maratha state and the perpetuation of caste envy (jātimatsara) into the modern era.

Despite their differences, Rajwade and Thackeray agreed that the relationship between Kayasthas and Brahmans had evolved historically into an

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488 K.S. Thackeray, Gramānyānca Sādyanta Itithāsa Arthāth Naukarshāhice Bānda (Mumbai, 1919), 1-52.
inexorable antagonism. As nationalist historians of different stripes, they both believed that the pursuit of a common good in the political realm was impossible as long as irrational attachment to caste interests – whether in the form of ambition in Rajwade’s case or envy in Thakeray’s – created antagonism in the socio-ritual realm.

More recent scholarship on grāmānya has focused on the ways in which they reflect social, intellectual, and political aspects of caste and community formation in eighteenth-century western India. First, as Madhav Deshpande and Rosalind O’Hanlon have shown, participants within these disputes frequently staked their positions on the authority of Hindu sacred texts as interpreted by Brahman paṇḍit communities. Particular Brahman priestly lineages, such as the Takle and Bhatta lineages of Benares, were called upon to authenticate competing claims to ritual status.489 Secondly, to enforce the authority of textual opinion, Kayastha and Brahman disputants turned to the Peshwa’s government at Pune. While this government by the late eighteenth century had come to be dominated by Chitpavan Brahmans, it was not necessarily dogmatic or uniform in its judgments. In the 1789-90 grāmānya for example, Nana Phadnavis admonished the Penkar Brahmans to desist from their agitation against a group that had been able to defend itself against previous efforts at regulation.490 Nevertheless, the history of grāmānya supports the scholarly consensus that the Peshwa government’s orientation to inter-caste relations was generally interventionist, wary of innovation, and responsive to both custom and textual authority.491


491 Fukazawa, “The State and the Caste System (Jati),” The Medieval Deccan, 91-114; Wagle, “The Cāndrasenīya Kāyastha Prabhus and the Brahmans.”
Stipulating these important points with respect to grāmānya, how should scholars understand the relationship between Kayasthas and Brahmans, and concomitantly, the relationship between caste and politics, in eighteenth-century western India? Susan Bayly has argued that eighteenth-century South Asia saw the rise of a “Brahman rāj” in which skilled, literate service groups, including scribes, merchants, and ritual specialists, propagated a Brahmanical Hindu ideal of purity through the instruments of the state. The quintessential example of this phenomenon for eighteenth-century western India would be the Peshwa government’s expansion of the distribution of alms (dakṣinā) to Brahmans. For Kayasthas, Bayly’s argument ultimately resembles Rajwade’s: Kayasta Prabhus pursued social and political advancement in order to consolidate their ritual status. Rightly abandoning this Dumontian Brahman-centered model, Sumit Guha in his recent study Beyond Caste points to a broader interlocking of the social and political orders: “The crucial element in the formation and continuation of this political tool [caste] is the maintenance of internal structures of authority and external boundaries [his italics].” Guha goes on to explore the ways in which caste was a tool of social organization at different levels from the household to the village to the nation-state. Guha’s argument is important because it suggests the utility of re-introducing questions of politics and government into a scholarly literature that has predominantly conceived of Kayastha-Brahman dynamics in terms of ritual concerns. Indeed, as Dirks argued back in 1987 with respect to Pudukkottai, “neither society nor polity can be understood when looked at as separate domains or entities.” While Dirks emphasized proximity to the “little king” as the major organizing principle of both social and political relations in Puddukottai, I highlight the centrality of a common practice of civic communication, or jawāb-suwāl, that often only

492 Guha, Beyond Caste, 41.

tangentially involved the person and symbol of the ruler. Politics was not merely a means for reconstituting sovereignty or reproducing internal and external boundaries, but rather, as I argue, it was a set of communicative conventions that was accessible to different caste groups with broad similarities in terms of their functional competencies and professional attitudes.

To further elaborate these insights, it will be useful to think through how dynamics within the socio-ritual and socio-political domains converged and diverged at different moments of historical development. In the late eighteenth century, it is undeniable that socio-ritual life was increasingly shaped by a renewed Brahmanical orthodoxy, which on many occasions received the Peshwa’s endorsement and in its collision with prevailing custom resulted in the sectarianism of grāmaṇya. But I argue that these outbursts of discord did not index the overall evolution of the socio-political domain. This domain was constituted by collaborative participation in projects of concern to the government and its territories and subjects, principally succession, diplomacy, warfare, conquest, and revenue management. These projects were usually conceived at court centers e.g. Satara, Pune, Nagpur, but they could only be executed through official networks linking the court to district towns and villages. Because eighteenth-century South Asia was marked by intense competition over limited resources, rulers increasingly relied on their advisers, secretaries, and diplomats – in sum, the bureaucracy – to address recurring political problems in an efficient and pragmatic manner, particularly through verbal and written instruments of reconciliation and mediation. This bureaucratic revolution in politics and government encouraged a high degree of practical linguistic adaptation, such as in the use of Persian terminology within Marathi political discourse, as well as cooperation across lines of caste, community, and ethnicity. Adaptation and cooperation of this kind manifested both collectively and individually. While caste or ethnic groups, typically referred to as mandalas, did
draw on particular sets of skills and resources and act collectively on behalf of their own interests, individuals also defied caste-based divisions in particular projects and in their overall career trajectories.

The distinction between the socio-ritual and socio-political domains helps to explain the contradictory position occupied by powerful Kayastha Prabhu households like the Chitnises. It was not only that in many grāmanya, “political factionalism, lobbying, and individual efforts could also be instrumental in altering the course of justice.”

 Rather, the Chitnises and other Kayastha Prabhus elites were often working in tandem with Brahmans to shape the outcomes of political questions like succession even as they joined their caste fellows in grāmanya disputes. Govindrao Khanderao Chitnis, as I will describe in more detail below, expressed his opposition to a grāmanya raised by Jagjivanrao Pratinidhi’s agent Yamaji Shivdev; however, at the same time, he persuaded the ailing Chhatrapati Shahu to entrust the burden of the administration (rājyābhār) to Peshwa Balaji Bajirao, effectively transferring executive decision-making power to the most influential Chitpavan Brahman in the land. Mahipatrao Dinkar and the Kashi brothers helped fund the plot to assassinate Peshwa Narayanrao, who promulgated the nine articles, or nau kalamī, against Kayastha ritual practice, yet they likely did so to convince Narayanrao’s uncle Raghunathrao to enter into an agreement of defense with their employer Mudhoji Bhonsle. Govindrao Khanderao’s son Laxman Govind led the resistance to the 1789-90 grāmanya of the Penkar Brahmans, yet he was also a loyal partisan of Nana Phadnavis who negotiated with Raghunathrao at Surat on his behalf. However much Kayasthas and Brahmans felt the urgency of the opposed ritual entitlements of their castes, they also felt the need to collaborate on difficult questions of government and to protect their hold over the power to resolve such questions. Caste envy (jātimatsara) tended to be superseded by their shared interests as a political class.

Scribal Diplomats at Satara, Kolhapur, and the Konkan, c. 1726-1751

Through the death of Shahu in 1749, the succession of the Chhatrapati was the site of perpetual struggle between claimants within the Bhonsle royal household. Tarabai Bhonsle, Rajaram’s widow and regent to her son Shivaji II (1700-14), challenged Shahu’s bid for power, but due to the defection of many notables, including the citnīs Khande Ballal, she was unsuccessful. Forced to flee Satara, she established a rival court at Kolhapur only to be deposed and confined in Panhala fort in 1714 by a rival queen, Rajasbai (d. 1761) and her son Sambhaji II. In subsequent years, Rajasbai and Sambhaji II endeavored to mobilize the support of Nizam ul-Mulk of Hyderabad – himself a recent defector from Shahu’s side – for an increased share in the Maratha domains. Having bested the Nizam’s forces at Palkhed, Shahu coerced his half-brother to resign himself to a junior kingdom at Kolhapur. Around twenty years later, all of these parties once again converged around the issue of Shahu’s successor. Lacking a natal son, Shahu and his queens Sakwabai and Sagunabai considered several options, including Sambhaji II and Mudhoji Bhonsle of Nagpur. But, in an ingenious scheme to engineer her return to dynastic politics, Tarabai, now more comfortably imprisoned at Satara, claimed that she had a grandson named Ramraja who, though living in obscurity, ought to sit on the throne. Ramraja (r. 1749-1777) succeeded, but the troubled early days of his reign led to the effective eclipse of the Chhatrapati.

Due to the gradual diminuition of the Chhatrapati’s authority and the spectacular rise of Balaji Viswanath to the office of pešvā, these succession disputes have generally been associated with the political rise of Chitpavan Brahmans. Yet, they were not the only group who shouldered the burden of government. The securing of the succession, and relatedly, the management of the competing priorities of rival dynasts, created a significant opening for the

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political participation of Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu scribal and secretarial officials whose family histories were featured in Chapter 3. Babaji and Govindrao Nilkanth and the former’s son Ramchandra Babaji of the Kolhapur pārasnīs lineage and Nilkanthrao Trimbak of the Mahadkar Kayastha Prabhu lineage were centrally involved in helping Sambhaji II to consolidate an independent state on the southern side of the Maratha country. Conversant in the conventions of Persian letter-writing, Babuji and Govindrao composed letters to Nizam ul-Mulk, Sambhaji II’s principal sponsor in opposing Shahu, many of which were included in the Durj al-Gawāhar.\footnote{496} Through the pens of his letter-writers, Sambhaji II appealed to the Nizam to preserve the life and sovereignty of his kingdom:

Thank God, the giver of justice, that his empire (salties) and its creatures have been made strong and firm such that all mankind in the home of justice and liberality are contented and peaceful through the rule of powerful sovereigns (farmān-rawāyān-i buland iqtadār) and well-born kings (rājahā-yi wālā tabār). How can it be that the overturning of that true destiny and bringer of good fortune [has come to pass]. It is clearer than the sun that my older brother King Shivaji [Shahu] is a man of tyranny and affliction and that his elevation has caused the foundation of the realm to be shaken…As their troubles were growing day by day, the loyal petitioners (khauhān-i yāk-rang) by cunning and dissimulation left, and all the chiefs of the army (sardārān-i lashkar) were unable to fulfill their duties to the government. They [the petitioners] have no thoughts other than serving our faithful masters who protect this God-given kingdom (rāj) that is the home of notable lords, especially this illustrious house…With the benefit of the patronage of the most exalted Nawab, we will perform the service of the management of the territory of the Deccan (bandobast-i mulk-i dekhan), and by constant communication, we will become friends and be happy and contented.\footnote{497}

The brothers used their communication skills to help Sambhaji to foster a nascent friendship with Nizam ul-Mulk and, as this letter demonstrates, to position his rebellion against Shahu as a just rebuke of a despotic ruler. Babaji’s son Ramchandra Babaji continued in this line of work, for which Sambhaji II and the Nizam awarded him the inām of Halyal pargaṇa in the district of Torgal in Bijapur. The ināmpatre, dated October 11, 1738, specifically mentions that

\footnote{496}{On this text, see Chapter 3.}
\footnote{497}{Viz. Tarabai Papers, ed. Pawar, nos. 32-4, pgs. 8-9.}
Ramchandra, building on his father’s noted skill in the languages of Sanskrit, Persian, Hindi, and Kannada, used his own Persian learning (fārsī vidyece nipunte) and his cleverness (buddhikausālyā) to mediate between the two rulers.\textsuperscript{498}

In early 1726, Sambhaji II’s Kayastha Prabhu adviser Nilkanthrao Trimbak met with Nizam ul-Mulk to procure his military assistance in a proposed assault on Shahu.\textsuperscript{499} In epistolary references to the meeting, he is characterized as a minister (diwān) who exhibited the virtues of bravery (jalādat) and boldness (tahauwur).\textsuperscript{500} Addressing one Bahadur Dil Khan, he elaborates, “In this country, my uncle makes great efforts and exertions to go to war. With respect to remedying this situation, I have sent my intrepid minister Nilkanthrao to request financial help and assistance at a meeting with the eminent Nawab. I also have written and continue to write about this.”\textsuperscript{501} Nilkanthrao’s meeting with Nizam ul-Mulk solidified an alliance to which many Afghan and Maratha generals lent their forces. In early March 1728, the Nizam defeated the army of Peshwa Bajirao I at Palkhed. Accepting the reality of his position, Sambhaji II sent Babaji Nilkanth and Nilkanthrao Trimbak to Satara in 1730 to sue for peace. Babaji came at Tarabai’s request to encourage the cultivation of warm and affectionate sentiments, while Nilkanthrao helped iron out the specific terms of the territorial settlement between the two rulers. The resulting treaty, finalized in April 1731 on the banks of the Warna River, fixed the permanent boundaries of Sambhaji II’s new kingdom, running from the Warna at one end


\textsuperscript{499} Nilkanthrao Trimbak of the Mahadkar Kayastha Prabhu lineage descended from Umrao Baji Prabhu was a relation – a nephew in the Chitnis bakhar’s recounting – of Vitthal Trimbak, the khāsnīs of Chhatrapati Sambhaji, and, more distantly, of Yashwantrao Mahadev, the potnīs and adviser of Shahu. See Chitnis, Thorale Śāhā Mahārāj Yāñce Caritra, 82; also see MS, ed. Bendrey, no. 218, pgs. 260-1.

\textsuperscript{500} Tarabai Papers, ed. Pawar, nos. 59, 71, 97, 115, pgs. 15, 18, 25, 29.

\textsuperscript{501} Tarabai Papers, ed. Pawar, no. 115, pg. 29.
southwest to Shri Rameshwar and southeast to the Tungabhadra River at the other. It also averred that the two rulers would assist one another against shared enemies and refrain from luring away each other’s followers.502

Having extinguished the threat of a royal schism, Jivaji Khanderao and his brother Govindrao Khanderao and Yashwantrao Mahadev of the Satara cīnīs and potnīs households, respectively, distinguished themselves in Shahu’s dealings with subordinate Maratha rulers. All three helped to coordinate a campaign with the Angre clan to take the coastal forts of Anjanwel and Gowalkot from Siddi Sat, a commander under the Mughal-backed Siddi rulers of Janjira. Jivaji Khanderao and Yashwantrao Mahadev met with Sekhoji Angre, the eldest son of the late Kanhoji Angre, in May and June 1733 to initiate plans for the campaign.503 These negotiations were complicated by the fact that Sekhoji was simultaneously settling the particulars of an agreement with the Siddi-aligned English at Bombay through a Kayastha Prabhu envoy by the name of Bawaji Ballal.504 After Sekhoji unexpectedly died in August, a succession dispute was unleashed between his two brothers Manaji and Sambhaji Angre. The Satara government established lines of communication with both claimants. To reach out to potential backers, Manaji Angre drew on the services of scribal office-holding members of two Kayastha Prabhu households. The Persian scribe (pārasnīs) Mahadji Ram and his sons Trimbak and Vitthal

502 AP, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Kulkarni, nos. 13, 15, pgs. 13-4; for the agreement between Shahu and Sambhaji II with proposed boundaries, see APYV, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Vakaskar, nos. 14, 18-21, pgs. 39, 42-4.

503 SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 33, nos. 11, 43, pgs. 8-9, 35-6; for a plausible but unsubstantiated claim that Yashwantrao was also involved in re-taking Raigad fort by seditious means, see Chitnis, Thorale Śāhū Mahārāj Yānçe Caritra, 79, 99-100.

504 The Company government at Bombay sought an agreement with the Angres to convince them to desist from capturing English ships and exacting fees for trading permits, known as kāulāvāna. See SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 3, nos. 34, 42, 63, pgs. 31, 36-8, 55-6; vol. 33, no. 65, pgs. 54-5. For more on relations between Bombay and the Maratha state, see Chapter 5.
Mahadev, hailing from the village of Nagaon, brokered an alliance between Angre and the English. Angre’s scribe Sabaji Tukaji (ciṭnīṣ) met with Govindrao Khanderao at Satara, which led to the conferral of the title of marātab vazāratmāb on Angre. Sabaji Tukaji and his brother Krishnaji received an inām for the village of Chavare in tāḷukā Umathe for his work.505

Meanwhile, Jivaji Khanderao Chitnis was the Satara government’s primary intermediary with Sambhaji Angre in resolving the succession and securing his participation in an ongoing campaign against Anjanwel fort. On April 6, 1734, he presented the title of senā sarkhel to Sambhaji at Jaigadh fort about fifty kilometers south of Anjanwel. Several days later, he and fifteen hundred to two thousand of Sambhaji’s men and a handful of cannons decamped. Sambhaji himself with four to five hundred additional soldiers and a fleet of ships would follow him in the coming days. By April 10, Jivaji had initiated the siege. Fearing that his small army would be no match for Anjanwel’s fortifications, Jivaji eagerly awaited Angre’s ships, but strong winds on the Indian Ocean, perhaps stirred up by the coming monsoon, delayed their arrival. In June, Jivaji turned back towards Satara, leaving Anjanwel and Gowalkot in the hands of the Siddis.506

Jivaji Khanderao’s diplomatic and military efforts in the Konkan took on a personal dimension after the aborted siege of Anjanwel. Sambhaji Angre’s minister was a Kayastha Prabhu named Raghunath Hari who had served his late brother Sekhoji. Raghunath Hari had helped to maintain Bajirao’s confidence in Sekhoji during moments of delay and uncertainty in the Konkan campaigns. For example, when Sekhoji became too ill to take the field, it fell to

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505 For Sabaji Tukaji, see MS, ed. Bendrey, vol. 2, no. 427, no. 451, pgs. 461-7, 484; SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 33, nos. 325, 453, pgs. 281, 375; for Mahadji Ram’s lineage, see Sardesai, Aitihāṣika Gharānyāṇcyā Vamśāvaḷī, 82.

506 SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 33, nos. 182, 184, 189, pgs. 153, 155, 158-9; vol. 3, no. 9, pg. 7.
Raghunath Hari to reassure the Peshwa that his master remained loyal. But after Sekhoji’s death, this affiliation became a liability. In late 1735, Sambhaji locked up Hari’s family, alleging that he intended to desert him and join the Peshwa. Jivaji and his brother Govindrao notified the Peshwa of Hari’s family’s condition, and the Peshwa in turn attempted to convince Sambhaji to release them. He initially refused. But we may infer that he eventually relented because in April 1737, Hari’s niece was married to Jivaji’s nephew in Pune. These two Kayastha Prabhu office-holding families, both having attained high office under Maratha rulers, were now joined in marriage. In addition, before his early death in 1746, Jivaji’s military service at Anjanwel was recognized in the form of a 1738 grant for the citnisī, jemenisī, and kārkhnisī of the newly conquered Konkan territories.

Govindrao Khanderao and Yashwantrao Mahadev were responsible for receiving, composing, and reciting letters from field commanders containing information regarding the state of affairs in the Janjira campaign. They were part of the regular circle of individuals at court who helped Shahu to understand and process this information so that he could make a decision about the best course of action. For example, it was reported on December 12, 1735 that Yashwantrao read out a letter from a commander to Shahu, sharing the news that the Siddis had taken the fort of Bankot and that infantry and cavalrymen ought to be sent to augment the force available to Chimaji Appa, Peshwa Bajirao I’s brother and a leading general in the campaign.

507 SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 3, nos. 70, 76, 83, pgs. 61, 65, 68; vol. 33, no. 85, pg. 76.


510 APYV, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Vakaskar, no. 28, pg. 21; Chitnis, Thorale Śāhū Mahārāj Yānche Caritra, 112, 122-23; on the Chitnis’ management of business (dhande) of the citnisī, jemenisī, and kārkhnisī, see Chapter 3.
Three days later, Yashwantrao conveyed that these reinforcements had not yet arrived.\(^{511}\)

Sometimes it was necessary to travel to the field to procure the most accurate information. In October 1735, Govindrao Khanderao and Bhaskar Vaidya surveyed the forces under the Angre brothers’ command.\(^{512}\) Summing up the uncertain situation, they stated, “The English (\textit{iṅgra_js}), the Portuguese (\textit{firaṅgī}), and the Siddis (\textit{habiśī}) have united... The Angres’ people have not kept up their spirits. Without a powerful man to make sure they behave appropriately, the plan will not come to fruition. Troops and followers are needed. Without them, the siege will not be laid.”\(^{513}\) This fact-finding mission turned out to be productive. Shahu despatched the Maratha generals Pilaji and Santaji Jadhav – with their Kayastha Prabhu \textit{jamenīs} named Malhar in tow – to help the Angres and Chimaji Appa in a siege of Gowalkot. As Govindrao and Bhaskar had suspected, the Angres proved to be wayward allies, withdrawing from the siege in mid-December long before its conclusion.\(^{514}\)

By the late 1740s, Govindrao Khanderao and Yashwantrao Mahadev along with Devrao Meghshyam had become Shahu’s key political intermediaries. Aside from the Angres, they negotiated partitions of revenue, territory, and authority with a number of the Chhatrapati’s largest fief-holders, including the Peshwas Bajirao I and Balaji Bajirao, the Dabhades and Gaekwads of Gujarat, and Raghuji Bhonsle of Nagpur. After the latter and Fattesingh Bhonsle deposed and captured Chanda Saheb, the ruler of Trichinapoly, in the Karnatak campaign of 1742-3, Govindrao Khanderao in mid-1744 brokered part of his ransom. Raghuji’s primary

\(^{511}\) \textit{SPD}, ed. Sardesai, vol. 3, no. 138, 149, pgs. 118-20, 127; vol. 33, nos. 9, 51, pgs, 6-7, 43.

\(^{512}\) On additional links between the Vaidya banking family and the extended Chitnis/Chitnavis household, see Chapter 5.

\(^{513}\) \textit{SPD}, ed. Sardesai, vol. 33, no. 327, pg. 286; also see vol. 3, nos. 123, 125, pgs. 101-5.

creditors at Satara, Viswanathbhat and Balambhat Vaidya, arranged for several different Satara-based merchant-money lenders to contribute to the payment of his ransom, which was fixed at the estimated value of Chanda Saheb’s territories, or Rs 750,000. Govindrao was the Vaidyas’ go-between in realizing a Rs 100,000 contribution from a merchant by the name of Vitthoba Naik Wakade.515 Another illustrative example of the kind of brokerage services that Govindrao and Yashwantrao performed is a January 16, 1744 agreement (yādī) between the Satara government and Balaji Bajirao. The agreement stipulated that in exchange for a payment of Rs 150,000, the Peshwa should have permanent jurisdiction over the northern provinces of Agra, Prayag, and Ajmer; part of Patna; the former Portuguese territories of Vasai and Sashti, together fittingly called Firangan; and Malwa. Govindrao and Yashwantrao were listed in the category of gumāsta as the individuals deputized to realize this payment.516 Soon after, they effected a fleeting reconciliation between Yashwantrao and Trimbakrao Dabhade and their commander Damaji Gaekwad, who had long been working to seize his employers’ territories in Gujarat.517 They were even consulted regarding Shahu’s opinions on Bajirao’s immoderate personal habits, which included heavy alcohol consumption and an infamous affair with Mastani, the daughter of the Bundela king Chhatrasal.518

Towards the end of his life, Shahu heavily relied on Govindrao Khanderao in particular to resolve several thorny issues, which included the Peshwa’s ongoing feud with the Dabhades; the restitution of Manikgadh fort to Manaji Angre after its seizure by the Peshwa’s follower


516 AP, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Kulkarni, no. 37, pg. 27.

517 AP, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Kulkarni, no. 40, pg. 28.

Ramaji Mahadev in 1748; and the liquidation of his own debts with the Peshwa.\textsuperscript{519} Given his intimacy with Shahu, it is not surprising that he was also deeply involved with the interrelated questions of the succession of the Chhatrapati and the future of his government. The Chitnavis and Gupte \textit{bakhars’} accounts suggest that Govindrao advocated for the succession of Mudhoji Bhonsle, the son of Raghuji Bhonsle.\textsuperscript{520} Several facts lend plausibility to this suggestion. Raghuji’s wife (and Mudhoji’s mother) was a cousin of Shahu’s wife Sagunabai and, along the lines of Fattesingh Bhonsle, Raghuji was understood to be a kind of adopted son to Shahu.\textsuperscript{521} In addition, Govindrao himself had previously established a working relationship with Raghuji. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, he had recommended his cousin Rakhmaji Ganesh to be Raghuji’s \textit{cĩ̃nãs} and had been centrally involved in the financial settlement of Raghuji’s recent campaign against Trichinopoly. Govindrao by early 1745 had at least outwardly capitulated to Tarabai’s scheme to install her supposed long-lost grandson Ramraja on the throne.\textsuperscript{522} But as Govindrao’s enemies grew bolder in the wake of Shahu’s death and Ramraja’s uneasy succession, Raghuji Bhonsle was one of the few individuals who remained in Shahu’s counsel.

One of Govindrao’s main enemies at court was Yamaji Shivdev, the agent of the \textit{pant pratinidhi} Jagjivanrao Parshuram. In 1747-8, this pair incited a fresh \textit{grāmanyā} by instructing Brahman assemblies in Karhad, Pen, Mahuli, Wai, Nashik, and other sacred sites to stop performing the customary rituals for Kayastha Prabhus. He also invited Brahman \textit{paṇdits} from Benares and the Sringeri \textit{matha} to congregate in Satara with new textual evidence against the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{520} BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 23b; Y.M. Kale, ed., \textit{NBB}, 60-1.
\item \textsuperscript{521} On this fictive kin relationship, see Chapter 1.
\item \textsuperscript{522} \textit{MIS}, eds. Rajwade and Deshpande, vol. 1, nos. 170-1, pgs. 136-7.
\end{itemize}
Kayastha Prabhus’ case. The latter were represented by Govindrao Khanderao and Yashwantrao Mahadev as well as by a Brahman priest by the name of Mahadev Bhat Athale. After a debate between the two sides, it was decided on the basis of a new interpretation of the Sahyādri-khaṇḍa that the Kayasthas were descendants of the sage Dalbhya and his female slave (dāsī). It was also proclaimed that they were entitled to only five samskāras instead of the customary sixteen.523 As such, they would be Shudras and therefore forbidden from soliciting the performance of Vedic mantras. Ultimately, however, Shahu interceded on Govind and Yashwantrao’s behalf.524 With the support of Peshwa Balaji Bajirao and his chief Brahman priest Raghunath Panditrao, he issued orders countermanding Yamaji’s previous injunctions and enjoining the continuation of existing Kayastha ritual practice.525 Because of Govindrao’s role in this grāmanya, historians have pointed to caste sentiment to explain his and Yamaji’s antagonism.526

But, in fact, there was also a strong political rationale for this antagonism. Along with Shahu’s aunt Tarabai and senior wife Sakwarbai, Yamaji was part of a substantial faction who opposed the Peshwa’s growing influence. Even Shahu, chafing under his demands for territory and repayment of debts, removed Balaji Bajirao from the peśvā post for a short period of time in 1747. Govindrao Khanderao was one of the few among Shahu’s intimates who remained favorably disposed to the Peshwa, which so displeased Sakwarbai that she apparently yearned for

525 KPIS, vol. 2-3 (September-October 1881), 12-13.
526 Thakare, Gramānyāṅcā Sādyanta Itihāsa, 22-30.
his imprisonment or execution. Govindrao eventually persuaded Shahu to preserve his trust in the Peshwa’s fitness to shoulder the burden of government. This final act of mediation – one so critical to the future of the Maratha polity – was enunciated in two succinct orders (ājñā), considered by historians to have been handwritten by Shahu in Govindrao’s presence in early to mid October 1749:

Order to the Honorable Balaji Pradhan Pandit [Balaji Bajirao]. You should secure the army. Everyone was [so] commanded, but it was not their fate (daiva) [to do so]. The Maharaja [Shahu] is in pain. He will not get well. The burden of government (rājyaḥbār) must be borne. So my kin (vamśa) should be seated [on the throne]. Do not act for that of Kolhapur [Sambhaji II]. [Whatever] is said to the citnīs [Govindrao Khanderao] should be done. The king’s circle (rājmaṇḍaḷa) should proceed according to the orders of the kin who will [succeed]. The citnīs is the master’s [Shahu’s] confidante (viśvāsū). The kingdom (rāja) will be protected by his and by your consideration. The kin who will [succeed] will not disturb you. May you be wise.

Similarly, the second order conveyed Shahu’s trust (bharamsā) that the Peshwa’s ability to shoulder the rājyaḥbār would not be impeded by his heir or by any other party, particularly in light of the citnīs’s reassurance (khātarjamā) in these matters. These orders and related agreements (vādī) made with the Peshwa in 1749 articulate two substantive promises that necessarily depended upon a mediating third term: the Peshwa would govern; the new Chhatrapati would not disturb him in governing; and Govindrao would assure as much. This devolution of the weight and responsibility of government to the Peshwa is typically understood to be the founding stage of the sovereign authority of the Peshwa. But what these sources reveal is that the inception of this sovereign authority was contingent on the citnīs Govindrao’s favor and cooperation. Moreover, as I demonstrated in Chapter 2, this devolution of

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528 The original orders were in the collection of Yashwantrao Rajaram Gupte. They were published in the journal Itihāsa Sangraha (vols. 4-6, November 1915-January 1916) and later by Herwadkar. See Chitnis, Thorale Śāhū Maharāj Yānce Caritra, 151-2.

authority did not stop with Balaji Bajirao, but rather, it continued after his death and fraught succession, producing the spectacular rise and fall of several kārbhārī who mediated between the Peshwa and allied Maratha governments. In effect, if not in name, Govindrao Khanderao was the first kārbhārī. By enabling the emergence of a decentralized, and ultimately, depersonalized notion of governance (rājyābhār) within a political field characterized above all by skill in mediation, he was a seminar figure. Though of course not accessible to all groups, political power in the wake of Govindrao’s critical intervention was less associated with the hereditary rights of the Chhatrapati or of any other dynasty, and more associated with those who actually did the work of politics and government.

Nevertheless, Govindrao stood at a rather delicate and uncertain juncture when Shahu died on December 15, 1749. In the days following his death, Ramraja was brought to Satara and installed on the throne. Because Sakwarbai Bhonsle had committed sati, and Sagunabai had died the previous year, Tarabai was the seniormost member of the Bhonsle royal household of Satara. Having also succeeded in conferring the Chhatrapati title on her chosen heir, she quickly worked to consolidate her position against Govindrao, Yashwantrao Mahadev, Raghuji Bhonsle, the Purandares, and others within the Peshwa’s faction. Both sides sought to control the movements of the newly installed Chhatrapati Ramraja and the comings and goings of their supporters to Satara fort. Having been repeatedly importuned by his correspondents at Satara to make haste, Raghuji Bhonsle finally planted his camp at Satara in April 1750. He, Govindrao, and Yashwantrao met privately on a regular basis. The two officials attempted to persuade Raghuji

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530 These discussions included Raghuji’s displeasure with Yashwantrao’s son-in-law Mahipatratrao, to whom he had entrusted the payment of outstanding debt with one Bansipuri Gosain so that the latter would cover the expenses of Raghuji’s son Janoji’s wedding. The payment and consequently, the wedding was delayed. See SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 6, no. 25, pgs. 18-9.
to follow the Peshwa’s guidance and attend Ramraja at court to create a semblance of normalcy, but he vacillated and threatened to leave Satara.\textsuperscript{531}

By June 1750, it had become apparent that there were significant tensions between Ramraja and the Peshwa’s faction. Ramraja was vexed by their lack of consistent attendance at court, suspecting that they were scheming to replace him. His suspicions were not entirely unjustified. Govindrao and Yashwantrao’s circle alternately avoided and placated Ramraja while making arrangements for more extreme measures, should he prove to be ungovernable.\textsuperscript{532}

Ramraja did in fact show himself to be difficult to govern. He demanded Panhala fort, a possession of Sambhaji II; imprisoned Shahu’s daughter Santubai and expropriated her property; delayed business until his sister Daryabai Nimbalkar’s \textit{saranjām} was properly established; and pressed Govindrao, Yashwantrao, and others for cash to cover his expenses.\textsuperscript{533} In one especially dramatic episode, the Peshwa’s newswriter on June 10, 1750 relayed that when Ramraja was hunting, he noticed two Kannada footmen passing by. When he asked who they were, they stated that they were servants of Govindrao who had come to take control of the fort. Infuriated, Ramraja began cursing at the people around him. These included Raghuji Bhonsle, who also started cursing. The fight would have escalated to the point of arms had two other prominent Maratha \textit{sardārs}, Khanderao Jadhav and Burhanji Mohite, not taken their weapons away.

Raghuji threatened to depart from Satara, and Ramraja protested that the Brahmans and the Kayastha Prabhus had joined together and co-opted the Marathas to cause trouble in his kingdom. Four days later, Ramraja again chastised Raghuji for his part in a perceived

\textsuperscript{531}SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 6, nos. 26, 29, pgs. 19-20, 22.

\textsuperscript{532}Ibid., nos. 42, 49, pgs. 30-1, 34-6.

\textsuperscript{533}Ibid., nos. 37, 69, 74, 82; pgs. 28, 59-60, 66, 70-1.
conspiracy, and Raghují acknowledged that Govindrao had been a source of disorder.\textsuperscript{534} The latter considered sending his family to Pune to escape Ramraja’s wrath.\textsuperscript{535}

Tarabai was no less dissatisfied with the state of affairs. Although she joined Ramraja and Raghují Bhonsle for a meeting with the Peshwa at Pune in August 1750 to re-confirm the new dispensation, she ultimately hoped to replace him with Sambhaji II of Kolhapur, who no doubt harbored his own dreams of succession. But the Peshwa’s faction was dead-set against this plan. On November 14, 1750, the Peshwa wrote, “If Sambhaji is brought to the fort, everything will be destroyed. The fort should be searched from top to bottom. Govindrao should carry out a full investigation and bring news of Sambhaji through Bal Prabhu.”\textsuperscript{536} In late November, Tarabai convinced the superintendent of Satara fort to put Ramraja under confinement. She also laid plans to imprison Govindrao and Yashwantrao, who were working to re-establish their control over the superintendent and to free Ramraja.\textsuperscript{537} Govindrao’s relationship with the Peshwa had become strained due to this turn of events. Fearful for their safety, he smuggled his family out of the city and sought the Peshwa’s guarantee that they would not be subject to any punitive action.\textsuperscript{538} In a January 1751 letter to Sadashiv Trimbak Purandare, the Peshwa elaborated, “I reminded Govindrao that he had been entrusted with the politics of the fort (ga\textit{ḍ}ce rājkāra\textit{n}) and asked him why things had fallen apart. We spoke about this at length. He made the promises that

\textsuperscript{534} \textit{SPD}, ed. Sardesai, vol. 6, nos. 46, 50, pgs. 36-7, 40-1; also see nos. 59, 79, pgs. 51-2, 69.

\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., nos. 56, pg 48.

\textsuperscript{536} \textit{Purandare Daftar}, ed. Purandare, vol. 1, no. 236, pg 171.

\textsuperscript{537} Ibid., nos. 243a, 243b, 259, 268, 271, pgs. 176-8, 191, 197-8, 200.

\textsuperscript{538} Ibid., nos. 273-3, pgs. 200-2.
needed to be made.” Govindrao on February 8, 1751 lamented to the Peshwa’s brother Sadashivrao Bhau:

Since the aforementioned [Mahadji Ambaji Purandare] came to Pune, he has not sent me even one letter, and I also have not written. My master [the Peshwa] might think badly of me, but he should be confident [in me]. I am very dejected…Please give [him] the reassurance that a servant has no support in the three worlds without his master. I will behave in accordance with any order that I receive. If I am ordered to present myself, I will come. There is no trouble with us servants. Wherever my master places [me], and whatever service he demands, I will do.

Despite these entreaties, it seems that the Peshwa’s faith in Govindrao’s ability to manage the situation at Satara never fully recovered.

Govindrao became a relatively marginal figure in the last stage of the prolonged succession struggle at Satara. In January and February 1751, while continuing to plot with Sambhaji of Kolhapur, Tarabai mobilized troops to take Satara by force. The Peshwa easily put down this insurrection, though a February 2, 1751 despatch stated that cannon fire from the fort had struck Govindrao’s and a goldsmith’s houses! More consequentially, Tarabai’s most powerful supporter among the Maratha mobility, Damaji Gaekwad, had conceded to the Peshwa by the rainy season of 1751. While all parties for the time being had been coerced into resignation, the Kulkarni pant pratinidhi family and their agent Yamaji Shivdev, who had lost much influence and territory after Shahu’s death, continued to look for opportunities to rebel, as I explored in Chapter 2. Having been instrumental to the establishment of the Peshwa’s executive authority, Govindrao and Yashwantrao on an individual basis seem to have had little influence in the years following Shahu’s death. Rather, it was at the court of the Bhonsle rājās of


542 *SPD*, ed. Sardesai, vol. 6, no. 146, 127.
Nagpur that Kayastha Prabhu officials, including members of the scribal lineage of Govindrao’s cousin Rakhmaji Ganesh, became major political players.

Soldier-Diplomats and Succession Politics at Nagpur, c. 1751-1795

In the following two sections, I draw on the Chitnavis and Gupte bakhars along with published and original documentation to explore the service histories of Kayastha Prabhu households at Nagpur.⁵⁴³ As in Shahu’s administration, Kayastha Prabhus held several darakdār secretarial positions in the government of Raghuji Bhonsle, who had received the title of senā sāheb subhā in 1723. Just as Govindrao Khanderao recommended his uncle and assistant’s son Rakhmaji Ganesh for the position of Raghuji’s ciṭnavīs,⁵⁴⁴ Yashwantrao Mahadev put forth the name of Shankraji Rakhmaji to be Raghuji’s potnīs in charge of the treasury (jāmārkhānā) and storehouse (koṭhī).⁵⁴⁵ One Narsingrao Chimaji Prabhu assisted Rakhmaji in his scribal work.⁵⁴⁶ Rakhmaji’s heirs Chimaji Rakhmagad (d. 1780) and Krishnarao Madhav (d. 1803) acquired additional political duties, though they continued to hold the ciṭnavīs title (see Appendix A for family tree). While the first three diwāns of the Nagpur kings – Konherram Kolhatkar, Devaji Chorghode, and Bhavani Nagnath – were Deshastha Brahmans, Krishnarao Madhav ascended through the bureaucratic hierarchy to become one of Raghuji Bhonsle II’s top advisers.

In addition to the Chitnavis household, a separate cluster of Kayastha Prabhu households left Satara to take up service with the Bhonsles. One such household was that of one Trimbakrao

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⁵⁴³ For methodological considerations involved with using narrative sources of this kind, see Introduction.

⁵⁴⁴ As I noted in Chapter 2, the Nagpur scribes were known as ciṭnavīs, rather than ciṭnīs.

⁵⁴⁵ BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 14a; NBB, ed. Kale, 43-4. According to Kale, Shankraji Rakhmaji’s nephew (putanya) Sundar Bahrirji continued to work in the treasury department. The latter’s son Bhagwantrao Sundar was involved in negotiations between the Bhonsles and the Nizam, and his grandson Khando Bhagwant composed a partial bakhar under the supervision of the ciṭnavīs Gangadharrao Madhav. See NBB, ed. Kale, 2.

Kanhoji Bhalerao. Trimbakrao was a member of a lineage holding the deśmukhī seat at Murbad in prānt Kalyan-Bhiwandi. Through a connection with the Mohite clan, Trimbakrao’s grandfather had come into the service of the first senā sāheb subhā Parsoji Bhonsle and relocated to Satara. Trimbakrao became a member of the staff of what was known as the devadī or khās-devadī – the private quarters the royal women. Around the time of Raghuji’s visit to Satara, he was instrumental to arranging the marriage between Raghuji’s daughter Bakabai and Mansingh Mohite, which helped establish an enduring relationship between the Bhonsle and Mohite clans. Subsequently, he and his family relocated to Berar. Trimbakrao’s descendants Govindrao Trimbak and Narayan Yashwant served under Krishnarao Madhav Chitnavis. Narayan also married Krishnarao’s daughter and eventually inherited his title.547

Another family with the same surname started their careers in military service. Narsingrao Bhavani Prabhu was an early follower of Raghuji commanding bodies of horse whose cousin (culat bandhu) Kashirao Laxman had been Sagunabai Bhonsle’s phaḍnīs and therefore another employee of the Satara devadī. Kashirao later participated in negotiations between Pune and Nagpur. His sons Laxmanrao and Vyankatrao Kashi became diplomats for the Nagpur government. The three Gupte brothers Dinkar Vinayak, Shivaji Vinayak, and Umaji Vinayak were also part of the group of commanders that accompanied Raghuji in his marches.548

In 1750, while passing through the Balaghat range after paying his respects on the occasion of Shahu’s death, Raghuji was challenged by the sardār Santaji Athavale Samsher Bahadar. Bhonsle successfully solicited the central government to compel Athavle to bow to Bhonsle’s

547 BL, Mss Marathi, D29, ff. 34a-b; NBB, ed. Kale, 62.
rule.\textsuperscript{549} As these events are recounted in the Chitnavis and Gupte bakhars, Dinkar Vinayak and Shivaji Vinayak reached out to Athavle’s diwān Yashwantrao Dattaji, who was their kinsman, to procure this order.\textsuperscript{550} Whether or not this claim is accurate, it is clear that the Vinayak brothers made themselves useful enough to earn a place in the cavalry of the Raghuji’s teenage son Mudhoji Bhonsle, serving him on tribute-taking expeditions to the eastern coastal territories of Rajahmudry, Sikakulam, and Vizianagaram as well as on a 1755 campaign to capture the fort of Gawelgadh in central India.\textsuperscript{551}

It was during this formative period in Mudhoji Bhonsle’s princely adolescence that “Dinkar Vinayak’s son Mahipatrao Dinkar, while accompanying his father, became acquainted with Mudhoji Bhonsle. Because they were companions in riding horses (ghoḍī pherne) and shooting guns (bandukha cālavine), Mudhoji Bhonsle developed a strong affection for him.”\textsuperscript{552} During the succession dispute between Janoji and Mudhoji in 1755-6, Umaji Vinayak had defected to Janoji; Shivaji Vinyak had died in battle; and Dinkar Vinayak had remained by Mudhoji’s side.\textsuperscript{553} Given Dinkar’s loyalty, and their adolescent martial companionship, Mahipatrao Dinkar was the obvious choice for the ṣubahdār post in Mudhoji’s new fiefdom at Chandrapur in the southern part of Berar. Over the course of his thirty-year career, Mahipatrao suppressed numerous challenges to his government in Chandrapur. For example, in 1762-3, two

\textsuperscript{549} See order dated September 19, 1750 from Peshwa Balaji Bajirao to Santaji Athavle in BL, Mss Marathi, D35-6, ff. 110b-111a and Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 42b-43a; for the Athavles and the Bhonsles, see Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{550} BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 14b; NBB, ed. Kale, 46. These accounts suggest that the incident took place during Raghuji’s campaign against his uncle Kanhoji Bhonsle, but the orders cited above show that it happened years later.

\textsuperscript{551} BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 22a-b; NBB, ed. Kale, 62, 65.

\textsuperscript{552} BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 22a.

\textsuperscript{553} For Umaji Vinayak’s defection, see NBB, ed. Kale, 78; for Shivaji Vinayak’s death, see BL, Mss Marathi, G33, 31b. Shivaji’s son Nimbaji Shivdev inherited his father’s cavalry post.
individuals in the administration of Chandrapur fort, Abaji Bhonsle and Gangadharpant, joined
with Mudhoji’s then-diwān Sadashiv Hari in a plot to hand over the fort to Janoji; however,
Mahipatrao persuaded the diwān to desist, in part by bribing him with a position for his brother
Vishnu Hari.\footnote{NBB, ed. Kale, 83-5.} After Janoji’s death in 1772, Mahipatrao suppressed another potential rebellion
led by Raja Ballal Shah, son of Nilkanth Shah and the Gond ruler of Ballalpur, to re-take
Manikgadh fort.\footnote{BL, Mss Marathi, G33, 56b-57a; NBB, ed. Kale, 103-4.}

While monitoring the Chandrapur government, Mahipatrao Dinkar provided counsel to
Mudhoji Bhonsle and coordinated diplomatic missions on his behalf. To do this work, he relied
on the diplomatic services of the Kayastha Prabhu brothers Vyankatrao and Laxmanrao Kashi.
Mahipatrao was a distant relation of their father Kashirao Laxman. Knowing Kashirao to be in
good standing with the Peshwa, Mahipatrao recruited him to repair Janoji and Mudhoji’s
relationship with Raghunathrao in the lead up to the battle of Rakshasbhuwan.\footnote{BL, Mss
Marathi, G33, ff. 44b; NBB, ed. Kale, 86-8; for a similar but less successful mission carried
out Chimaji Rakhmagad Chitnavis, see Chapter 2.} Based on his
performance in this assignment, Mudhoji assigned him work in the royal household, including
the administration of his wife Chimabai’s affairs, along with jāgīr land at Shegaon and other
villages to support his cavalry. Though he soon died in a scuffle with some warrior ascetics
(gosāvī) who were raiding the territory around Chamorshi, his sons enjoyed long diplomatic
careers under the supervision of Mahipatrao Dinkar.\footnote{NBB, ed. Kale, 91.}

The most politically sensitive mission that he assigned to the Kashi brothers involved a
tangled web of events falling between between the death of Janoji Bhonsle on May 16, 1772 and
the murder of Peshwa Narayanrao on August 30, 1773. These events concerned the succession crises of both the Nagpur and Pune governments. Before his death, Janoji had adopted Mudhoji’s young son Raghuji II as his heir, and while all parties agreed that Raghuji should be the holder of the senā sāheb subhā title, they could not agree on whom should be made regent. One faction led by the head munshī Bhavani Nagnath coalesced around Janoji’s brother Sabaji and widow Daryabai Bhonsle, while another led by Mahipatrao Dinkar backed Mudhoji. Both sides attempted to win the support of Ibrahim Beg Dhaunsia, the ruler of Nirmal, and Ismail Khan Panni, the nawāb of Achalpur and the steadfast friend of the Bhonsles.558 Chitnavis and Gupte recount that Daryabai’s emissary Ramchandra Dado, the Bhonsles’ envoy at Hyderabad, alleged that Mudhoji intended to whisk Raghuji away to Chandrapur in order to use him as a pawn, but Vyankatrao Kashin in a separate meeting with the nawāb assured him that Mudhoji had no such plans.559 The nawāb initially refused to give anyone his support, perhaps in light of Daryabai’s claim to be pregnant with Janoji’s child; however, Mahipatrao was able to mobilize a group of supporters among the Nagpur mobility.560 These supporters supposedly swore an oath with bel leaves at a Jogeshwar shrine in Budhwar Peth in Nagpur city. Mahipatrao’s meetings with Daryabai and the munshī were acrimonious, and having been warned that they planned to arrest him, he fled back to Chandrapur under cover of night.561

By late February 1773, Sabaji Bhonsle and ten of his commanders sought out an agreement with Mudhoji Bhonsle that would contain three main provisions: Raghuji would be

558 On this friendship, see Chapter 1.

559 BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 56a; NBB, ed. Kale, 102.

560 It seems that Ismail Khan nearly had the munshī Bhavani Nagnath killed out of frustration with his meddling. See BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 123a-124b; NBB, ed. Kale, 109.

accepted as if he was Janoji’s natal heir; Mudhoji would run the administration in accordance with Sabaji’s wishes; and both sides would demobilize their forces.\(^{562}\) Though Mudhoji ultimately declined to enter into it, the terms of the agreement reflect the severity of the military mobilization and political polarization that had transpired since Janoji’s death. The massive armies of the two opposing sides had clashed at Kumbhargaon near Balapur with no clear victor. In addition, both the Hyderabad and Pune courts had horses in the race. Ibrahim Beg Dhaunsa and Rukn ud-Daulah Mir Musi Khan, the diwān of Nizam Ali Khan, aligned themselves with Sabaji and besieged Ismail Khan and Mudhoji at Achalpur in early 1773.\(^{563}\) Around the same time, the Peshwa had despatched an army against Mudhoji. Mahipatrao and his family were highly engaged in these various skirmishes. Mahipatrao’s brother Rajoba, son Balwantrao, and cousin Nimbaaji Shivdev – Shivaji Vinayak’s son – alternately accompanied Mahipatrao in the field and stayed behind to defend Chandrapur from potential attack.\(^{564}\)

Meanwhile, realizing that Peshwa Narayanrao was firmly in Sabaji’s camp, Mahipatrao pursued a dangerous new alliance. After the initial outbreak of the succession conflict, he and Vyankatrao Kashi made a trip to Pune, where they met with the Peshwa’s kārbhārī Sakharam Bapu (for his earlier career, see Chapter 2). Based on Mudhoji’s June 10, 1773 letter to Bapu, we can infer that the goal of these negotiations was to cultivate Bapu’s, and by proxy, the Peshwa’s support for Mudhoji’s regency and to convey that the military conflict with Sabaji had taken a serious financial toll. Mudhoji stated that he would re-send Vyankatrao Kashi to Pune in a couple

\(^{562}\) BL, Mss Marathi, D35-6, ff. 244b-245b, agreement dated 24 Jilkad suhūr san 1173/February 24, 1773; for version of the same agreement with alternate dates, see AP, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Kulkarni, nos. 128, 130, pgs. 107-8. The signatories included several Maratha clans – the Patankars, the Ghatges, and the Naik Nimbalkars – as well as Majid Khan of Seoni-Chhapara.

\(^{563}\) NBB, ed. Kale, 115.

\(^{564}\) NBB, ed. Kale, 111-113.
days. But, in light of the Peshwa’s stubborn commitment to Sabaji, Mahipatrao attached a clandestine objective to the diplomatic mission that was subsequently undertaken by Vyankatrao and his brother Laxmanrao. This objective was to make contact with Narayanrao’s uncle Raghunathrao, who had been placed under house arrest for suspicion of colluding against his nephew.

Since Narayanrao’s succession in November 1772, Raghunathrao faced increasingly tight security measures because of his refusal to desist from carrying on correspondence with external parties in hopes of securing partners in a coup d’etat. When the Kashi brothers were in Pune, he was not allowed to receive any visitors. Nevertheless, they were ultimately able to gain access, and in early September, they fixed the terms of an alliance between him and Mudhoji. Raghunathrao in a September 4, 1773 letter to Mudhoji relayed, “Vyankatrao Kashi and Laxmanrao Kashi made it clear that we are old friends and that your heart is pure when it comes to me. Taking this into consideration, I ordered Hari Viswanath and Vyankatrao Kashi to make the necessary arrangements for the health of your chiefdom and the benefit of the government. They will write, and Vyankatrao Kashi has been sent to inform you.” These arrangements took the form of two sets of articles of agreement in the names of Mudhoji and Raghuji Bhonsle. These articles addressed a range of financial and jurisdictional issues, but most importantly, they offered the senā sāheb subhā title to Raghuji in exchange for a gift of Rs 700,001 and vowed to ignore any objections (phiryād) that Sabaji might make against the new understanding (samjūta)


566 BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 131a.
reached with Mudhoji’s government.\textsuperscript{567} The Kashi brothers’ diplomatic efforts bore fruit, but they narrowly escaped being implicated in a political storm brewing at the Pune court.

Mere weeks before these terms of agreement were committed to paper, the young Peshwa was murdered by his bodyguards, a composite corps of north Indian mercenary troops known as \textit{gādaḍī}, whom, as it came to light later, had been bribed by Raghunathrao to take some untoward action against his nephew.\textsuperscript{568} But in addition to Raghunathrao, many individuals at court were directly and indirectly implicated in the assassination of a young, weak, and by all accounts, extremely unpopular ruler. According to the Gupte and Chitnavis \textit{bakhars}, these individuals included the Kashi brothers. They indicate that the Pune-based contacts who arranged for their meeting with Raghunathrao demanded their participation in the assassination plot, presumably in the form of cash for bribing Narayanrao’s bodyguards. They further specify that Sakharam Hari was one of these intermediaries and that Laxmanrao Kashi in particular made the transaction.

While there is no direct evidence to substantiate the \textit{bakhars’} claims, three details are suggestive. First is the fact that Sakharam Hari and Mahipatrao Dinkar were distant relations within the same extended Gupte clan.\textsuperscript{569} Family connections, as we have also seen with respect to the Chitnis household, were important means of gaining access to higher circles of power. Second is the testimony (\textit{jubānī}) offered by Vyankatrao Kashi himself to the \textit{bakhar} writer Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar in the late 1810s or early 1820s:

\textsuperscript{567} BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 127b-131a. For a more extensive discussion of this genre of political documentation, see Introduction and Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{568} Some accounts claim that Raghunathrao’s orders merely specified that Narayanrao should be imprisoned. Popular historical memory most frequently lays the blame for altering these orders on Raghunathrao’s ambitious wife Anandibai.

Sabaji Bhonsle established a connection (sutra) with nawāb Nizam Ali Khan. In Pune, Raghoba Dada [Raghunathrao] established a connection with Haider Naik to help him with his plan to take control of the kingdom. As such, Mudhoji Bhonsle despatched me and my brother Laxmanrao to Dadasaheb. There Dada turned Sumer Singh and Isaf Gardi [Muhammad Yusuf Gardi] by means of nine lākh rupees, and I too was taken into that conspiracy (majalāhī maśwaratāt ghetle hote). So in the end, Narayan died.\textsuperscript{570}

Though provided long after the commission of the murder, the details of the testimony accord with those offered in separate accounts and therefore lend some weight to the supposition that the Kashi brothers abetted the conspiracy against Narayanrao.\textsuperscript{571} Third is the fact that Sakharam Hari, his brother Baburao, Baburao’s two sons, and two associates named Bhaskarrao Narayan and Mirza Fazal Beg were jailed in October 1776 for their participation in a revolt (phitūr).

Among the terms of their imprisonment was that they were forbidden from receiving any Kayastha Prabhu clerks.\textsuperscript{572} Though the immediate revolt in question may have been the uprising of a pretender to the peśvā title named Sadashivrao Bhau in February of that same year, the brothers’ earlier support of Raghunathrao and his plots would have added further weight to the government’s justification for doling out a harsh sentence. Indeed, the record of Sakharam Hari’s imprisonment order impugns his character in quite general terms: “Sakharam Hari is a shrewd troublemaker. He never misses out on anything (khelyā rājkāraṇī āhe koṇī goshtiś cuknār nāhī).”\textsuperscript{573} These three pieces of evidence are suggestive of the ways in which Kayastha Prabhu caste and kin networks played a role in advancing the assassination plot against Narayanrao and other clandestine projects associated with Raghunathrao’s faction. What they do not support is the long-held assumption that these Kayastha Prabhu operatives were motivated by caste

\textsuperscript{570} BL, Mss Marathi, D34, ff. 55a.

\textsuperscript{571} For example, the figure quote for the fatal bribe made to Narayanrao’s bodyguards is the same as the one in Sohoni’s Peshwa bakhar. See Herwadkar, ed., Peśvyāncī Bakhar, 89.

\textsuperscript{572} SSRPD, ed. Vad and Marathe, vol. 8, nos. 872-3, pgs. 74-6.

\textsuperscript{573} SSRPD, ed. Vad and Marathe, vol. 8, no. 872, pg. 74.
resentment incited by Narayanrao’s institution of new rules constraining Kayashta Prabhu ritual practice. Instead, the motivations appear to be almost wholly political and partisan.

Mahipatrao Dinkar and the Kashi brothers’ politicking at Pune may have been complicit in a bloody cout d’état, but it resulted in professional dividends. Having served in the capacity of \textit{ṣubahdār} of Chandrapur, Mahipatrao was formally made Mudhoji’s \textit{diwān}.\footnote{His stipend and \textit{mokāsā} rights at this time are not recorded; however, his son Balwantrao was entitled to a salary of about Rs 1000 drawn from the revenues of two villages, Garwala and Chambhari. They may have also held \textit{mokāsā} in the villages Parsodi, Sonegaon, Kondhali, Karanje, and Kamargaon. See BL, Mss Marathi, D29, ff. 7b, \textit{jubānī} of Balwantrao Mahipat Prabhu; “Kai. Śrī Rā. Rā. Mahipatrāva Dinkar Gupte: Nāgpūrkar Bhōslesarkārce Mājī Diwān Yānca Caritra,” in \textit{KPIS}, 1-14.} Mudhoji expressed his appreciation for the Kashi brothers’ actions in a note dated 29 Muharram (probably April 11, 1774), the contents of which were included in the Gupte \textit{bakhar}: “To Laxmanrao Kashi and Vyankatrao Kashi. You have performed our service loyally. It is a promise that your importance will be preserved for generations without deviation.”\footnote{\textit{NBB}, ed. Kale, 126.} The mission at Pune seems to have been a watershed moment in this group’s transition from the status of mere soldiers to trusted soldier-diplomats. Nevertheless, their careers were not free from the vicissitudes of personal and factional politics, and they would have to continually search for new patrons and allies to protect their position within the Nagpur government.

The deal with Raghunathrao only further complicated the quarrel between Mudhoji and Sabaji Bhonsle. The leading members of the Pune ruling circle, which came to be called the \textit{bārābhāi}, or twelve brothers, opposed Raghunathrao and pledged themselves to Narayanrao’s widow Gangabhai, whose son would succeed as Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao. In addition, they threw their weight behind Sabaji. These developments in the succession struggles at Pune and Nagpur culminated in the battles of Kasegaon and Panchgaon in March 1774 and January 1775, respectively. Following the first battle, Raghunathrao, now essentially a fugitive, fled to
Burhanpur, Indore, and eventually to Surat, where he sought the protection of the British East India Company. Vyankatrao and Laxmanrao Kashi continued to act as Mudhoji’s go-betweens with Raghunathrao, convincing him to lend the mercenary services of Muhammad Yusuf Gardi.\(^{576}\) In this same period, Sabaji’s faction locked up Mahipatrao Dinkar in Chandan fort. Thanks to the intercession of Vyankatrao Kashi, he was eventually released and promptly went on pilgrimage to Jejuri with another Kashi brother, Mahipatrao. On the way back towards Berar, they encountered a group of soldiers charged with their re-arrest but managed to divert them in another direction and hurried onwards to Malgani, where they stayed with Mahipatrao’s wife’s sister’s husband (śādū). While Mahipatrao was able to escape imprisonment, at least temporarily, Vyankatrao was arrested and confined until after the battle of Panchgaon.\(^{577}\) At Panchgaon, those members of the Kayastha Prabhu community who led cavalry units included Umaji Vinayak, Nimbaji Shivdev, and Rajeshwar Dinkar, who died in battle.\(^{578}\) Sabaji Bhonsle was also killed on January 20, 1775.\(^{579}\)

Sabaji’s death effectively nullified the Nagpur succession drama. Mudhoji Bhonsle began to rule as regent for his son under the direction of the former diwān Devaji Chorghode. The resurrection of Chorghode, who had the confidence of Nana Phadnavis and the rest of the Pune ministers, sidelined Mudhoji’s Kayastha Prabhu companions at the Nagpur court. Due to a series of mishaps and misunderstandings, Mahipatrao Dinkar in particular lost the benefits of Mudhoji’s patronage. One of Nana Phadnavis’ many correspondents at Nagpur described the exigency of his situation on February 19, 1779:

\(^{576}\) BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 143 b, 144b, 146b.

\(^{577}\) NBB, ed. Kale, 133-7, 146.

\(^{578}\) NBB, ed. Kale, 141, 146.

\(^{579}\) For his death date, see BL, Mss Marathi D33, ff. 136a.
Having said that he would send his mother on pilgrimage, Mahipatrao Dinkar obtained bills of passage (*dastak*) from Mudhoji Bhonsle and put his family on the road. He told me that he was sending his family on ahead and would join them after. I responded that he would not be allowed to leave. So he began to say, “What am I supposed to do if I won’t be given anything [to make a living] and won’t be allowed to leave? So now I will send my family. They will go to Sagar.”

Sudden departures, particularly for pilgrimages or retreats from worldly affairs, were common acts of protest among political servants in eighteenth-century India; however, Mahipatrao’s departure from Nagpur seems to have been even more calculated. Later in this same year, he began working for Mudhoji’s brother Bimbaji Bhonsle, who presided over the far eastern part of the Nagpur state at Ratanpur and Raipur in today’s Chhatisgarh. Having lost his influence with one ruler, Mahipatrao simply turned to another.

In 1779, Nana Phadnavis through Baburao Viswanath Vaidya, his envoy with the Nagpur Bhonsles, promised Bimbaji a hefty *saranjām* if he joined the Peshwa’s allies Mahadji Shinde and Tukoji Holkar on campaign in north India. Part of the motivation behind this offer seems to have been to deter the Nagpur ruling family from making overly friendly overtures to the Company government at Calcutta by creating competition among its members.\(^{580}\) Mahipatrao Dinkar and Vyankatrao Kashi were tapped to bend Bimbaji’s ear. In a June 3, 1779 letter to Vaidya, Bimbaji fretted, “Mahipatrao Dinkar and Venkatrao [Vyankatrao] Kashi have been despatched. Instead of coming directly here, they went to Burhanpur. They waited for a month and then went to Sagar. Then they were to come here via Mandla, but a fight broke out between the rulers of Sagar and Mandla. Because they met the Sagar ruler, the Mandla ruler would not let them pass. Mahipatrao stayed there with his people, and Vyankatrao came alone.” Eight days later, he notified Vaidya that he “sent a letter to bring Mahipatrao Dinkar here. He will come

quickly.” The agreement that they brokered with Bimbaji Bhonsle did not come to fruition. Rather, when Mudhoji’s son Khandoji Bhonsle returned from an unsuccessful campaign in Orissa in 1781, Bimbaji decided to come to Nagpur to mend fences with his brother. Escorted by Mahipatrao and Vyankatrao, he traveled from Ratanpur via Taktapuri and reached Nagpur in early August. This turn of events exasperated the representative of the Pune government:

“[Vaidya] sent letters to Bimbaji Bhonsle and Mahipatrao Dinkar, who have arrived at Nagpur. The letters said, ‘You should not go to Nagpur. We have made an agreement (karār) with you. All things will come to pass in accordance with it. Have no fear, as Nana [Phadnavis] has conveyed his intention (mānas) and his promise (vacana).’” In the process of facilitating fraternal competition and cooperation, Mahipatrao and Vyankatrao acquired a new patron and a new sphere of influence.

While continuing to carry out the occasional diplomatic mission – such as in the Bhonsles’ negotiations with those who succeeded Ismail Khan Panni in the subahdār post at Ellichpur – Mahipatrao Dinkar with the assistance of Vyankatrao Kashi parlayed his experience with Bimbaji into more a permanent role in the government of Chhatisgarh. Because the jungle tracts surrounding the capitals of Ratanpur and Raipur were tenuously held through tributary relationships with local Rajput and Gond chiefs, there was an almost constant need to re-impose dominance through both diplomatic and military means. For example, in early August 1783, Mahipatrao deputed Vyankatrao Kashi and Govindrao Mugutrao, a commander


582 See Chapter 5.

583 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, vol. 1, no. 150, pg. 159; also see nos. 138, 214, 216, pgs. 150-1, 242, 244.

584 See conclusion of Chapter 1, pg. 76-7.

585 For these relationships, see Chapter 1.
who he had recruited during Sabaji and Mudhoji’s succession dispute, to give instructions to the widowed queen of Bastar on how she ought to direct government affairs. The rānī seems to have allied with her Gond subjects to throw off Nagpur’s overlordship: “The kingdom of Bastar has become disorderly. The rājā was an effective man, but he has died. Many days have passed. The chieftains (mawās) have seized the fort and the kingdom. The rānī and her son do not obey.” While the forces of Govindrao Mugutrao were to quell the armed insurrection, Vyankatrao was to assume charge of the administration and to set up the Rajput dynasty along the lines of the more quiescent tributary Gond kingdom of Deogadh. On May 18 of the following year, it was reported that while the rānī had been appeased, Vyankatrao was struck in the head by a rock during a scuffle with the local fort keepers (gaḍiwāle). Diplomats, especially those despatched to independent-minded and potentially hostile vassal states, were not immune from violence.

Mahipatrao helped manage a similar situation that developed within the main Chhatisgarh government in the years after Bimbaji Bhonsle’s death in 1787. By January 1789, the Nagpur authorities had begun receiving reports that Bimbaji’s widow Anandibai was running the province on her own terms. In response, the head general at Nagpur left for Chhatisgarh with a cavalry force of 500-700 and met with Anandibai at Ratanpur. But his overtures only angered Anandibai, and the local fief-holders who he contacted refused to submit. He was forced to wait for backup. Then, as it was reported in February, “Mahipatrao Dinkar brought cannon and assaulted and took Raipur. The zamīndārs and kamāvisdārs made themselves available.

587 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, vol. 1, no. 185, pg. 197.
589 Ibid., vol. 1, no. 192, pgs. 205-6.
Realizing this, Anandibai created confusion, but those who were close to her explained, ‘What you are doing is not good and will have no effect. They will use the cannons to take this place and imprison you. Then you will have to live in prison.’\(^5\) The combination of Mahipatrao’s assault and these strong words compelled Anandibai to finally submit to the will of the Nagpur government. While the head general returned to Nagpur, Mahipatrao stayed on to put the administration on a surer footing.\(^6\)

In the final years of Mahipatrao’s career, he continued to assist in the dangerous work of holding down the frontiers of the expanding Nagpur state. News reached Nagpur on May 25, 1789 that he had conquered the northwestern outpost of Sohagpur. Though 56 were injured and 20-25 killed in the action, the surrounding country would yield as much as 1 ½ läkh rupees in revenue. He nearly lost his life about a year later in an assassination attempt from within his own cavalry unit. On the evening of Saturday, June 12, 1790, Mahipatrao spent a few hours with Raghuji Bhonsle II in his palace until hearing the sound of the nightly clanging of the palace kettledrums. He decided to return to his tent. Outside the palace, he started to mount his horse in the thick darkness of the Amavasya night. Just as he was placing his feet in the stirrups, two men armed with swords attacked him from behind. They managed to stab him twice in the arm before they were noticed and fled on foot in two different directions. When they were captured and questioned, they identified themselves as Rajputs from Mandla working for Mahipatrao’s cavalry officer (śiledār), who had neglected to pay their wages. They begged and pleaded until Mahipatrao threw them in prison, a decision, they believed, that stripped them of their honor (ābrū). One Mahadji Bhonsle in the circle of the late Bimbaji Bhonsle freed them, and they


\(^6\) According to the Gupte *bakhar*, Mahipatrao Kashi also played a significant military role in the administration of Chhatisgarh, though there is no supporting evidence for this. It also states that he died while putting down a rebellion there. See *NBB*, ed. Kale, 166-7, 169.
hatched a plan to re-gain their honor by force. Notwithstanding their pitiable tale, the assassins were given the harshest possible punishment – they were shackled, imprisoned in a tower, and trampled by elephants the following morning. Mahipatrao’s two wounds were dressed with 21 and 18 stitches each. Though it was reported about two weeks later that the wounds had begun to heal, he was suffering from a fever and a cough and sent his cousin Nimbaji Umaji to lead the Chhatisgarh army in his stead.592

Having survived war, imprisonment and assassination, Mahipatrao earned the second subahdār title of his career in early 1791. On January 18, it was recorded that he received a headdress (śirpeñca) and the robes of the post of subahdār of Chhatisgarh.593 Later that year, his old partner Vyankatrao Kashi received a new assignment as vakīl with Mahadji Shinde, the Maratha ruler of Gwalior and vakīl-i muṭlaq of the beleaguered Mughal emperor Shah Alam. Having defended his supremacy in north India, Shinde set out for the Deccan to challenge the leadership of Nana Phadnavis. From Raghuji Bhonsle II’s perspective, his passage was an opportunity to settle some vexing territorial matters. As he himself explained to Nana in a letter dated May 25, 1791:

Mahadji Shinde’s district and this district are right next to each other. The collectors there pick fights with each and every negotiation (jāb-sāl). Hence from the beginning a person from here has stayed there to handle the work of negotiation. Now, in Harda district, chiefs (mawāsā), Gonds (gondī), and others have come into conflict regarding the revenue collection (māmlat). So Vyankatrao Kashi has been sent to him. He will stay there and negotiate.594

593 Ibid., vol. 1, no. 290, pg. 346.
594 Ibid., vol. 1, no. 19, pg. 19.
Vyankatrao had tried to initiate a correspondence between the two rulers prior to this occasion, but Shinde had denied that there was a need for an envoy. Perhaps in light of his new plans for the disposition of the Pune government, he seems to have had a change of heart. His meeting with Vyankatrao restored the kind of familial intimacy that had predominated in their earlier relations, and he proposed a second meeting with Raghuji at Asirgarh. The latter was less enthusiastic:

Patilbuwa [Shinde] is going to the country (des) after twelve years. He and Nana have not met. Everyone will be suspicious if we meet before that, and if they are suspicious, what benefit will come of us meeting. Bearing this in mind, I have replied to Vyankatrao that Shinde is coming after many days. If we meet before him and Nana, everyone will be suspicious, and there is no precedent for such a separate meeting. In any case, his journey to the country is happening. After that, if he thinks it best, let him invite us to Pune to meet.

So Mahadji Shinde continued onwards to Pune, where he eventually died in February 1794.

Vyankatrao continued to participate in tense negotiations between Raghuji II, Nana Phadnavis, and Mahadji’s son Daulatrao concerning the Peshwa’s succession following the death of Sawai Madhavrao in October 1795. Nana and Shinde were adversaries in this dispute, and so Vyankatrao’s second stint in diplomacy may have been cut short at the former’s request. Vyankatrao’s subsequent confinement is the last available reference to an extremely long and wide-ranging career in government service.

The Social Life of Politics

The Satara citṇīs Govindrao Khanderao’s son Laxmanrao, whose own son Raghunathrao’s unsuccessful machinations to acquire a piece of the Chitnis patrimony were

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596 Ibid., no. 95, pgs. 101-2.
598 Ibid., 186-7.
discussed in the previous chapter, arrived at the British East India Company port of Surat at the start of January 1780. Representing the Pune government, his mission was to persuade the Company to release the disgraced former Peshwa Raghunathrao and to cede the island of Salsette (Sashti), now the location of the northern suburbs of Mumbai. Ultimately, the Company acceded to neither demand, prolonging the conflict known as the First Anglo Maratha War (1775-1782). Nana Phadnavis bitterly reflected on the failure of Laxmanrao’s delegation in a letter to the Baburao Viswanath Vaidya on April 1, 1780:

The English had written to send a respected person (mātbar) so Laxmanrao Chitnis had been sent. He and the English spoke at Surat for four months. In the end, they were not inclined to give up Dadasaheb [Raghunathrao] or Sashti. [These are] arrogant things (magrūrcyā goṣṭī). On the outside, they talk sweetly (goḍa bolāve), but on the inside, they prepare for war. So it is necessary to defeat them. The English have clenched from all four sides (cahū diše ākaršaṇa kele āhe). We have no faith (bharaṃsā) in what they will do at what time.\(^{599}\)

Nana articulated some of the major premises of the new and steadfastly anti-Company Maratha politics galvanized by the challenge of Company territorial expansion. The evolution of this politics out of an entrenched tradition of jawāb-suwaḷ will be the subject of the next chapter. In the remainder of this chapter, I will trace the career of one of its most notable practitioners, the Kayastha Prabhu scribe Krishnarao Madhav, explore the sociality of politics at the Nagpur court, and comment generally on the transformed sociological distribution of power at Maratha courts at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Just as the political influence of the Chitnis households at Satara and Pune waned after the Peshwa’s assumption of executive authority – notwithstanding the limited roles of individuals such as Laxmanrao Govind and Mahipatrao Avaji Chitnis – that of the related Nagpur Chitnavis household began to wax. Govindrao Khanderao’s referral of his cousin Rakhmaji Ganesh for the office of citnavīs under Raghují Bhonsle was only one manifestation of

a dense network of social relations linking Kayastha Prabhu service households at these courts. Four years after his trip to Surat, Laxmanrao Govind departed from Satara for Nagpur, where he was to be married at the home of Mahipattrao Dinkar, presumably to Mahipattrao’s daughter. While Mudhoji made some objection to the choice of bride, causing the wedding to be delayed or canceled entirely, the wedding of Laxmanrao’s son Rajeshwarrao later took place at Nagpur. These relations also reached outside the court. For example, it was conveyed on May 22, 1789 that a group of Nagpur officials had traveled to the Chitnis residence in Jaitapur. The quarrelsome cousins Ramrao Jivaji and Laxmanrao Govind played host, distributing betel-leaf and four types of textile: Paithani sādīs, turbans and scarves, fine-cotton dhotīs, silk embroidered with gold and silver.

Such personal and familial connections facilitated the expansion of the patronage and influence of the Chitnavis household. When Chimaji Rakhmagad died childless in July 1780, Krishnaraao Madhav (Vaidya), the son of Chimaji’s sister, became cīṭnāvīś. Although Krishnaraao, or Kushaba as he was more affectionately known, was outside of Chimaji’s patrilineal line of descent, he was considered his adopted son. Prior to this, Krishnaraao had served as an apprentice (śāgird) of Babaji Govind, the son of Govindrao Khanderao, earning a stipend of three thousand rupees per year. When he became cīṭnāvīś, his stipend increased to five thousand rupees. By the early nineteenth century, when his brother Gangadharrao had inherited

600 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, vol. 2, no. 251, pg. 139.
603 BL, Mss Marathi, D34, ff. 66a.
604 Nāgpūrce Cīṭnīvīś Gharāne: Vāṃśāvalī, 5.
the title, the family claimed Rs 2,700 in annual mokāsā revenue. In addition, Krishnarao managed a substantial secretarial staff. A Kayastha Prabhu father-son pair named Appaji Sakharam and Naro Appaji helped him with his scribal duties. Other staff members included the clerks (and perhaps, brothers) Malharrao Gopal and Vyankatrao Gopal and the assistant Narayanrao Yashwant, whose forebear Trimbakrao Kanhoji as mentioned earlier was recruited by Raghuji at Satara. The assistance of these helpmates was critical to Krishnarao’s ability to take advantage of opportunities for professional advancement and to divert more of his energies to diplomacy.

Babaji Govind and Krishnarao Madhav were among the courtiers and officials regularly attending upon Raghuji Bhonsle II. Even personal developments within the Chitnavis household attracted the ruler’s notice. For example, on the day of the Vijayadashmi, or October 8, Krishnarao’s brother Balwantrao Madhav fell ill with a fever. Ten days later, he died. The court-reporter further relayed that he was a very smart man; that his wife became a satī; and that Krishnarao was sorrowful, as God had dealt him a major blow (iśvara[ne] tyācā mothāca ghāt kelā). Raghuji and his brother accompanied by Babaji Govind and others paid a visit to Krishnarao’s house to console him in early November. Similarly, in August 1790, Raghuji consoled Krishnarao on the death of his mother after having paid a visit to the home of

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605 BL, Mss Marathi, D29, ff. 62 a.
606 BL, Mss Marathi, B26, ff. 104b.
607 According to an April 25, 1788 letter, Malharrao Gopal was struck by lightning during a thunderstorm and died! See NA, ed. Shejwalkar, vol. 2, nos. 175, 189, pgs. 88, 96; NBB, ed. Kale, 178.
610 Ibid., vol. 2, no. 308, pg. 175; also see vol. 1, no. 274, pg. 310.
Mahipatrao Dinkar, who had been injured in battle. The presence of the ruler also marked more auspicious occasions such as the marriages of two of Krishnarao’s daughters on May 1, 1791 and the investiture of Babaji’s son with the sacred thread on April 2, 1792. These formal routines and rituals of elite social intercourse were not merely ceremonial. Rather, they recognized the stature of an individual official and his household, created trust between him, other officials, and the ruler, and granted access into circles of political decision-making.

Krishnarao began to obtain real political influence in the late 1780s when a series of major deaths facilitated a shift in the distribution of power at court. Raghuji’s father and regent Mudhoji, uncle Vyankoji, and brother Khandoji died between 1787 and 1789. Their Persian scribe and leading counselor Bhavani Nagnath died in 1789. Along with Nagnath’s grandson Shridhar Laxman, who inherited the title of munshi, Krishnarao began to assume the responsibility of advising Raghuji II. By mid 1790, Krishnarao Madhav and Shridhar Laxman – both members of scribal lineages – were widely considered to be Raghuji Bhonsle’s leading counselors. In this capacity, they collaborated in shaping and executing the political agenda of the government of Raghuji Bhonsle II. They traveled together to Pune to carry out diplomatic missions, composed joint letters, and reviewed and approved all sanads and official


613 BL, Mss Marathi, D34, ff. 73b.

614 Raghuji Bhonsle recruited the Deshastha Brahman Bhavani Nagnath to compose his Persian correspondence sometime in the late 1740s. He had worked for the Gond ruler Rani Ratankumar and her son Raja Burhan Shah prior to shifting to Nagpur. His son Laxman seems to have died at a relatively early age. He was survived by two sons, Shridhar and Janardan. Because Shridhar was still quite young, his Persian scribal duties were performed by his cousins Bagaji and Gopal, while his grandfather took on an increasingly prominent role in government. See BL, Mss Marathi, B26, ff.100b-101a; NBB, ed. Kale, 59-60.

While Shridhar Laxman applied the *lakṣmikānta* mark (*niśāna*), Krishnarao – or perhaps one of his assistants – wrote out the date and the word *bār* denoting that the document had been recorded in a daybook or ledger. In fact, they worked together so closely that in the letters of Pune’s news-writers, they were very often referred to simply as the *kārbhārī* or *ubhayatāṃ kārbhārī* (both administrators). Baburao Viswanath Vaidya verified the integrity of their working relationship in a letter to Nana Phadnavis dated February 7, 1791:

> It has been a month and a half since I arrived here. I have spoken in person [with Raghuji II] five to ten separate times. Our conversation has been uninterrupted, and I have received appropriate answers. He has much prudent judgment, cautious intelligence, and care for worldly affairs. He attends personally to the management of the government. The man close to him, Krishnarao Madhav, is very capable. He manages things with the *munshi*’s grandson Shridhar Laxman. They are of one mind. They are very skillful in their work and are held in great esteem. Nothing happens without [their] approval.

Given that Baburao, like his father Viswanathbhat, had served as the Pune government’s envoy with the Nagpur Bhonsles since the late 1770s, his approbation of the fitness of the two counselors was meaningful.

From February 1791 to August 1792, Krishnarao Madhav, Shridhar Laxman, and Baburao Viswanath Vaidya met regularly for secret consultations (*khalbat*) regarding business to be discussed in a proposed diplomatic visit to Pune. Because the Nagpur *kārbhārī* began sending updates from Pune in August 1794, we may infer that they made the journey sometime sometime

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616 On the division of responsibility for reviewing and approving documents, see Chapter 3.

617 In addition, the ruler wrote the terminating conventional phrase *bahut kāy lihine*, and another official (in the last days of the Nagpur state, it was the *cīṭnavīs* Naro Appaji), applied the seal (*sīkā*). See BL, Mss Marathi, D31, 9b.

618 As in, for example, Deccan College Museum, rumal 96, file 1, no. 48-9.

619 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, vol. 1, no. 93, pg. 100.

620 Ibid., vol. 1, nos. 93, 197-8, 295-299, 302-3, pgs. 100, 210-6, 360-379, 390-9; also see Deccan College Museum, rumal 96, file 4, nos. 4-6.
in the two-year interval.\textsuperscript{621} The purpose of this visit was to conduct \textit{jawāb-suwāl} regarding the assignment of the Peshwa’s territory of Mandla in central India to the Bhonsles.\textsuperscript{622} Nana Phadnavis in exchange hoped to renew the Peshwa’s alliance with the Bhonsles in anticipation of an armed confrontation with Nizam Ali Khan over arrears of \textit{cauth} revenue. In the longer term, Nana also sought to counterbalance the East India Company’s politicking with the Nizam.\textsuperscript{623} In an August 28, 1794 note to Raghuji II, Krishnarao Madhav described a meeting between Nana Phadnavis and Nizam Ali Khan’s representatives, Mir Alam and Rai Raiyan Renukdas Dhondaji, in which “a bag of letters was conveyed to Shrimant Raosaheb [Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao] and read. It was written in them that the two [Krishnarao and Shridhar] who have been sent are full delegates (\textit{mukhtyār}). Bhonsle will act [accordingly]. Everyone is aware of the issue of the English. Whatever has already happened, we do not wish to involve the English.”\textsuperscript{624} What is significant about this letter is that it suggests how the threat of the English had created new grounds for collaboration between the leading powers of the Deccan, principally the Peshwa, the Bhonsles and the Nizam, through the intermediation of the \textit{kārbhārī} and other diplomatic agents. In subsequent letters, the \textit{kārbhārī} continued to keep their master informed of political developments involving these powers.\textsuperscript{625} Although the negotiations between the Peshwa and the Nizam ultimately failed, resulting in the battle of Kharda of March 11, 1795, those between the Peshwa and the Bhonsles were more productive. The Bhonsles fielded a large force of upwards of 30,000 men on the Peshwa’s side at Kharda. Their participation contributed to one of the last

\textsuperscript{621} BL, Mss Marathi, B14, ff. 2a.

\textsuperscript{622} NA, ed. Shejwalkar, vol. 1, no. 303, pg. 398.

\textsuperscript{623} BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 154a-b.

\textsuperscript{624} BL, Mss Marathi, B14, 2a.

\textsuperscript{625} BL, Mss Marathi, B14, 2b, 3a-b.
Maratha victories prior to Company rule. But this military success would not have been possible without a sustained process of diplomacy – one that preceded and outlasted the clash of arms – executed by scribal-diplomatic intermediaries like Krishnarao Madhav and Shridhar Laxman.

Following Kharda, the Nagpur kārbhārī returned to Pune to iron out the remaining terms of the Bhonsles’ new agreement with the Peshwa. The Bhonsles received authorization to appropriate revenues from certain districts south of the Narmada River in lieu of irregular ghāsdānā exactions and to establish full control over Gadha-Mandla. This agreement led to swift military action. The kārbhārī notified Raghuji on April 7, 1796 that Hoshangabad, a key stronghold in Gadha-Mandla held by the nawāb of Bhopal Hayat Muhammad Khan, had been captured after two attacks. At the same time, they aimed to support Nana Phadnavis’ efforts to manage the succession dispute set in motion by the death of Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao in October 1795. On November 24, they expressed confidence that “whatever may be in Nana’s mind” – namely, arranging for Sawai Madhavrao’s widow Yashodabai to adopt an heir rather than conferring the peśvā-ship on one of Raghunathrao’s sons Bajirao and Chimnaji, who were locked up in Junnar fort – “will come to pass. The Nizam has agreed. It will be settled in just a few days.” But the situation as it evolved by late February 1796 required more caution and

626 The Marathas won over 30 lakhs of territory. See “Peśve Daptarāntīl Sanadāpatrāntīl Māhitī,” edited by D.B. Parasnis, Itihāsa Saṅgraha, nos. 7-9 (February-April 1915), no. 89, pg. 83; on the broader significance of Kharda for Maratha politics, see Chapter 5.

627 BL, Mss Marathi, B14, 11a-12a; D33, ff. 258a-259a.

628 BL, Mss Marathi, B14, 13a.

629 BL, Mss Marathi, B14, 9b-10a.
alertness (śāwadhī va huśārī) then they first anticipated.⁶³⁰ They relayed the news that the teenage Gwalior ruler Daulatrao Shinde had concocted a plan to bring Ragunathrao’s sons into his custody and install the elder Bajirao on the throne; however, Nana Phadnavis preempted him by sending his own general to Junnar to escort them to Pune. By June, the younger Chimnaji was made Peshwa, but Nana’s own position had become untenable. Vyankatrao Kashi, then still in the diplomatic service of the Shindes, on April 27, 1796 conveyed the sentiment of many of the Maratha chiefs assembled for Chimnaji’s coronation that Nana ought to be removed from the administration.⁶³¹ Nana was forced to leave Pune for his retreat in Mahad.

At this critical juncture, the kārbhārī became more deeply involved in Nana Phadnavis’ machinations to retain control over the succession process and the Pune government in general. He sought to use them to make a new ally out of the Nizam’s former minister Ghulam Saiyid Khan Moin ud-Daulah, who had been imprisoned in Pune since Kharda. In a letter dated November 17/8, 1796, they reported that they met with the minister and exchanged words of reconciliation (saphārī). When the kārbhārī asked “what course (cāl) ought to be taken and in what manner (itikartavya) and how our master ought to be reconciled,” he replied:

Going forward my master and your master should be in agreement (aik-ITYAFĀK). Information (itiLLā) about any counsel (sALLā-MASALAT) should be exchanged. Your master should not take any advice without our having such information, and my master should not take any advice without your having it. Both sides should act with unity (AIK-VĀKYATENE). Your master should not speak to anyone about my master’s affairs without my knowledge. In response, we responded that this was very good. Your and our master’s counsel should be as one.

Having agreed to these terms, they discussed the merits and demerits of the two sides in the succession dispute. In the minister’s opinion, unlike Shinde, who had behaved with disrespect, Nana was far-sighted and kindly disposed to the Peshwa and, more pragmatically, had control

⁶³⁰ BL, Mss Marathi, B14, 12a-b.

⁶³¹ BL, Mss Marathi, B14, 13a-b.
over the resources of the state. Yet he also felt the English were powerful potential allies, suggesting – perhaps not without apprehension – that if Nana courted them, he would effectively become the lord of Hindustan (*hindustānace khāvind*). Further reflecting on the total situation of the Deccan, they noted that on one side were arrayed the Nizam, the Peshwa, and the Bhonsles, and on the other were the foreigners (*parakī*), the English and Tipu Sultan, with whom they maintained diplomatic relations (*karār-madār*). Whatever bickering might arise between the first three powers, they should not allow the English to interfere in light of their desire to gain a foothold in the Deccan. As will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, diplomacy drew on a highly realistic and totalizing political calculus. The exchange of symbolic words, gestures of fidelity, and sacred objects co-existed with an acknowledgement of the competing probabilities and eventualities of politics.

Krishnarao Madhav and Sridhar Laxman ended up on the right side of this particular succession fight. With the Nizam’s support, Nana returned to Pune and replaced Chimnaji with his brother Bajirao, thus extending his power over the government for a couple more years. Krishnarao Madhav and Shridhar Laxman, on the other hand, received more lasting rewards in the form of permanent *jāgīrs*. The prospect of personal gain from diplomatic work had been integral to their relationship with Baburao Viswanath Vaidya back in the days of Kharda. About a month after the battle on April 5, 1795, Vaidya and the two *kārbhārī* entered into a *karār-nāmā* stipulating that they would work together and divide equally whatever profits accrued from their work. The substantive text of the agreement reads: “It is decided in the presence of god that the three of us have made an agreement of friendship. Any assignment that we receive and anything we accrue [from it] will be divided equally into three parts, and there should be no deception between us. Accordingly, this agreement has been fixed with our personal signatures.”

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632 BL, Mss Marathi, B14, ff. 16b-18a; Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 262a-265b.
three names appear on the backside of the document followed by the promissory phrase “mānya ase.” This outline of a distribution of profits turned out to be a kind of proposal for the actual allotment of inām rights between Krishnarao Madhav, Shridhar Laxman, and the Bhonsles’ Hyderabad envoy Ramchandra Dado. The cīṭnavīś and the munshī claimed about Rs 3000 in revenues in the villages of Manegaon and Palshi, and in Sawargaon and Takli-Mahuli, respectively. These rights to revenue formed a stable part of their financial portfolios until the months and years after the Second Anglo-Maratha War of 1803 when the Company began to re-examine various proprietary claims within the territories that straddled the jurisdictions of the Pune and Nizam governments. The scribal-diplomats and many others were forced to petition the Company resident at Nagpur to retain the rights they had been rewarded for previous acts of service. Thus, Kharda turned out to be a fleeting moment of success not only for the Maratha state, but also for the talented individuals who practiced politics on its behalf.

Conclusion: Bartering Maratha Politics at Baroda

In Chapter 3, I noted that Prayagji Anant Phanse, the kiledār at Satara, was one of many Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhus to occupy civil and military posts in forts in the early Maratha state. Based on two accounts of his lineage first published in Kāyastha Prabhūncyā Itihāsācī Sādhane, which in all likelihood share a single author, as well as the Chitnis bakhar, Prayagji was nearly killed in an explosion during Aurangzeb’s siege of Satara in 1699-1700. Buried under

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633 BISM, Vaidya Daftar, rumal 21, no. 14, karārnāmā dated April 5, 1795.

634 The original intended recipient of the third portion of this reward is unclear. While Baburao Vaidya is specified in the karārnāmā, archival documents demonstrate that inām rights to Waygaon and Mundgaon were assigned to Ramchandra Dado, then to Baburao Vaidya’s son Narayanrao, and finally to Ramchandra Dado’s son Yashwantrao Ramchandra. The Güpte bakhar states that Vyankatrao Kashi was the first intended recipient, but when he fell out of favor with Nana Phadnavis, his portion was re-assigned to Dado. See NBB, ed. Kale, 184, 187.

635 BISM, Vaidya Daftar, rumal 21, unnumbered yādī document.
rubble and debris, he was somehow spotted by a search party and escorted back to the fort, where Chhatrapati Rajaram rewarded him with several villages in inām. Among these was the village of Kalambe in tālukā Parali. Prayaji’s son Jyoti Anant alias Appaji inherited this inām along with rights to a small annual sum for the feeding of Brahmans and various other expenses associated with the upkeep of a temple of the family deity Yavateshwar that was perched on a hill to the west of Satara. Little else is known of Jyoti, but his son Bhaskar Jyoti alias Raoji Appaji would become the most influential broker at the court of the Maratha Gaekwad dynasty of Baroda (now Vadodara in the state of Gujarat), in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A sketch of his career, which will conclude this chapter, re-affirms the social mobility and political aptitude of Kayastha officials while raising new questions about the status of politics in relation to the growing dominance of the British East India Company.

Like many of those operatives examined in this chapter, Raoji Appaji obtained his foothold in the circles of power of the Gaekwad household by brokering the thorny politics of succession. When Damaji Gaekwad died in 1768, the succession was divided between his eldest son Sayajirao and several junior sons, including Fattesingh, Manaji, and Govindrao. While in service with the latter claimant, Raoji Appaji’s brother Chimnaji Jyoti was killed in an action


637 Selections from the Historical Records of the Hereditary Minister of Baroda, Consisting of Letters from Bombay, Baroda, Poona, and Satara Governments, edited by B.A. Gupte (University of Calcutta, 1922), nos. 2-6, 8-13, 15-16, 19, pgs. 19-24, 26-9, 31-2, 34.

638 Like the Bhonsles of Nagpur, the Gaekwads of Baroda were semi-independent Maratha rulers with long-standing and complicated social, economic, and political relationships with the Peshwa. Half of the territories surrounding Baroda fell under the Peshwa’s jurisdiction, and they customarily paid massive gifts to the Peshwa to renew their titles of senā khāskhel and samśer bahādar, yet they periodically challenged the particulars of these arrangements and pursued separate alliances with Maratha and non-Maratha powers.
near Songad involving officials appointed by Fattesingh. Around the time of the death of Peshwa Madhavrao Ballal in 1772, Raoji Appaji seems to have transacted a deal with certain Pune-based merchant-moneylenders, including principally Balaji Naik and Gopal Naik Bhide, to finance an expedition through Gujarat into north India projected by Govindrao Gaekwad in conjunction with Mahadji Shinde and his then-diwān Khando Awaji Tambekar. Raoji’s role in the transaction was to stand surety for re-payment:

Bhide understood that Patilbaba [Mahadji Shinde] planned to go (because such eminent persons do not speak a lie) and said that he would give the funds. But when he said that Raobuva [Raoji Appaji] should acquiesce to it in order for him to give, Raobuva was brought, and he said what Mahadji Shinde had discussed with the Peshwa. Then the Naik [Bhide] said, “I will give the money if you state this on your assurance (tumce khāṭrivar sāṃgāl tar rupaye deto).” At that time, [Raoji Appaji] off to the side said, “I have told you what has happened. But they are leaders, and I am poor. So what means do you think I have? How would you stop them through me? You are a powerful intimate of the government. It will not come to my attention if your money is lost.” Bhide responded, “I will not press you [for the money.] Just say yes in their presence, and let us do the work.” Having said this, they spoke in front of both [Shinde and Govindrao]. Bhide wrote up a deed (khat), and [he said], “I do not put my attention on this. The money will have to be recouped from you. If you acquiesce, I will give; otherwise, I will not give.” Then Raoba looked at Khandopant [Tambekar], and he said, “Why are you afraid? If a master like Patilbuva will give, then what is the significance of this money?” Raoba said, “Ok, it shall be given,” and Naik caused the money to be given. So many merchants and moneylenders were involved and lākhs of rupees were acquired.

It is impossible to corroborate this narrative of the interactions involved in the deal, but it offers some sense of the way in which Raoji gradually become entangled in web of financial and political transactions guaranteeing the Gaekwad succession.

Raoji’s skills in cutting deals and making connections to wealthy and influential contacts at the Pune court were central to securing Govindrao Gaekwad’s succession after Fattesingh’s death towards the end of 1789. According to an autobiographical narrative written by Gangadhar Shastri Patwardhan, Raoji befriended his father Krishnarao Patwardhan, who was the family

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639 MS, ed. Bendrey, vol. 1, nos. 13-14, pgs. 109, 121.

priest (upādhya) of the powerful Pune minister Haripant Tatya Phadke, and it was through the Patwardhan household that Raoji was able to convince Phadke to engineer Gaekwad’s claim to the Baroda throne. Patwardhan’s text recounts a series of meetings between Raoji, the Patwardhans, and their many associates at Pune and Menavli, culminating in the conferral of the title of senā khāskhel in exchange for major financial and territorial concessions. After Raoji began to perform the work of diwān for Gaekwad, he maintained his relationship with Gangadhar Shastri Patwardhan, who eventually became the Company resident’s intermediary between Pune and Baroda. Hence in a July 7, 1799 letter from the so-called Shastri Daftar, compiled by a grandson of Gangadhar’s clerk Yashwantrao Bapuji Marathe, Nana Phadnavis wrote to Gaekwad, “You sent Raoji Appaji to carry the government’s business. The aforementioned carried out the government’s business and furthermore has executed any and all agreements related to the negotiations (puḍhe jāb-sālāce karār-madār kele āhet). So now he has taken leave and come to you. He will explain everything in detail.” Though Gangadhar’s relationship with the family deteriorated as he became closer to the Company, it remained strong during Raoji’s lifetime. He even petitioned the Peshwa to allow Raoji to undergo a

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641 Famously, Gangadharpant was assassinated by a follower of Peshwa Bajirao II in 1815 while performing a diplomatic mission on behalf of the Company resident at Baroda. For his family’s involvement in Govindrao Gaekwad’s succession, see MS, ed. Bendrey, vol. 1, no. 19, pgs. 145-40; also see no. 13, pgs. 112-7.

642 The timeline of these events in the Baroda volume of the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency (1883) differs from that of Gangadharpant’s account. The former states that Govindrao received the title on December 19, 1793, while the latter suggests that he received it about one year earlier on Friday, December 7, 1792. See Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, volume 7 (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1883), 199.

shrāvana ceremony for the renewal of his sacred thread against the long-standing objections of orthodox Pune Brahmans.⁶⁴⁴

More broadly, the ascension of Raoji Appaji marked a transformation in the Baroda administration in which Kayasthas, and particularly Raoji’s own relations, benefited enormously.⁶⁴⁵ His brother Babaji Appaji became commander of the Gaekwad’s forces, and he became the leaseholder of certain revenue farms formerly held by Pune appointees. His cousin Raghunath Mahipatrao alias Kakaji became Govindrao’s son Bhagwantrao’s administrator.⁶⁴⁶ So enormous were the private benefits of public office that the family was willing to barter away Baroda’s political independence to protect them. Earlier, in the 1770s, the Gaekwad brothers had appealed to the Company for military support in their succession dispute, but it was only after Govindrao’s death in 1800 that the Company found its opportunity. Believing Govindrao’s successor Anandrao to be incompetent, various members of the massively indebted Gaekwad royal household attempted to oust Raoji by winning over the fractious Arab mercenaries and paymasters who composed the majority of Baroda’s armed forces. On Raoji’s invitation, the Bombay governor Jonathan Duncan in 1802 deputed a force under Major Alexander Walker to defeat his enemies and take control of the city.⁶⁴⁷ The resulting Company-Baroda treaty, struck on March 15, 1802, arranged for the installation of a Company subsidiary force at Baroda.⁶⁴⁸ On

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⁶⁴⁵ According to the account of this transition published in KPIS and subsequently compiled by Bendrey, ciṃśis and potnīśis were among the posts occupied by Kayasthas under Raoji Appaji. See MS, ed. Bendrey, vol. 1, no. 13, pg. 118.


June 8, Raoji received a document from Duncan guaranteeing his family’s permanent possession of the office of diwān. After his death, his relations continued to enrich themselves off of top posts in the government, including through Babaji Appaji’s mulākgirī tribute-taking expeditions into the Kathiawar peninsula. But the independence of the old Maratha regime was effectively lost.

Raoji Appaji’s career bears several family resemblances with those of the Kayastha Prabhu officials examined in this chapter. He and his forebears traced their lineage back to a distinguished follower of the Chhatrapatis; combined appointments in civil and military offices with durable inām rights to revenue; obtained political influence by brokering agreements in key moments of dynastic transition; and offered considerable patronage to relations and caste-fellows. As I have explored in this and the prior chapter, the emergence of a common pathway from service to politics among Kayastha Prabhu officials reveals the extent to which the political domain of the Maratha Empire had become accessible to a wider range of skilled service groups in the eighteenth century. At the same time, Raoji Appaji’s pathway tells a cautionary tale about the potential costs of the intimate relationship between political practice and social mobility. Raoji and those like him transacted politics not only to secure the stability and prosperity of the polity, but also to benefit themselves and their familial and social networks. The absence of a firm division between the political and the social, and between the public and the private, became one of several important grounds for the British East India Company’s condemnation of Maratha politics and eventual conquest of what it termed the Maratha “confederacy.” The Company’s encounter with Maratha politics is the subject of the next chapter.

649 Selections, ed. Gupte, no. 20, pg. 36.

650 Raoji’s family’s service under the Company was not without problems. For conflict concerning his nephew and heir Sitaram, see Gazetteer, vol. 7, 207-24; for Babaji Appaji’s mulākgirī campaigns, which brought in around half a crore, see Gazetteer, vol. 7, 319-322.
CHAPTER 5: The Company and the “Confederacy,” 1778-1803

“इंग्रजी जात केवल काबूचे यार.
The nature of the English is altogether that of a cunning friend.”
-Letter from Malharji Varpe to Nana Phadnavis, Nagpur, May 1780651

Soon after the British East India Company fired the opening shots in the second of three Anglo-Maratha Wars, Raghují Bhonsle II of Nagpur in a September 7, 1803 letter to his fellow Maratha ruler Yashwantrao Holkar characterized the Company in the following terms: “The influence of the English has grown from all directions (इंग्रजी अंग्रजी काबू चे यार यांनी जात केवल काबूचे यार.

The nature of the English is altogether that of a cunning friend.”
-Letter from Malharji Varpe to Nana Phadnavis, Nagpur, May 1780651

Therefore it is resolved that we will not fail to retain our influence in the same manner and break the English, and in observing them, there is no longer any doubt. Since all of us are united, the plot that they seek to execute will not come to pass.”652 Bhonsle’s premonition of the quadradirectional growth of Company territorial power across the Indian subcontinent echoed anxieties present within Maratha governments since the late 1770s and early 1780s. Making use of the talents of the class of jawāb-suwał practitioners examined in the previous two chapters, including the Nagpur scribal-diplomats Sridhar Laxman and Krishnarao Madhav, Maratha governments organized concerted responses to the threat of Company territorial monopoly. Even as the Company took a more assertive stance towards Maratha governments, its discourse about Maratha statehood increasingly centered on the idea of “confederacy.” Lacking any discernible king, country, or constitution, the Maratha state in this discourse amounted to little more than a conspiracy of “confederates” with a common lust for predation and plunder. This chapter examines the ways in which the interplay between these two processes – the Company’s interpretation of Maratha “confederacy” and the response of Maratha governments to this

652 “Nāgpūrkar Bhōṣīlyāncī Saṃbandhācē Kāgadpatre,” ed. Sane and Oak, no. 75, pg. 146.
interpretation and its corresponding policies – tested and ultimately destroyed the practice of Maratha politics.

The Company-Maratha encounter was a significant episode in the making of the Second British Empire. Vincent Harlow coined the phrase “swing to the east” to describe the renewed interest in exploration and trade in the Pacific Ocean that he strongly associated with the founding of this empire in the period leading up to and following the loss of the North American colonies in 1783. Harlow argued that the ideal empire continued to be a commercial, not a territorial one, though the case of India was “exceptional.” It was India that most strongly represented what the empire had become in Harlow’s estimation, namely “a coloured Empire, ruled not through representative institutions, but by a strong benevolent bureaucracy directed from London.”653 Echoing Harlow, P.J. Marshall has argued that Britons re-imagined an empire in which domestic liberty and overseas despotism were compatible.654 Broadening the scope of this line of argument, C.A. Bayly has emphasized how the establishment of overseas despotisms across the empire was a response to the social, political, and economic transformations of ancien régime states. These transformations included not only the American and French Revolutions, but also, for example, the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire and the emergence of new regional states in South Asia.655 British elites increasingly associated imperial service with their


role as “protector of Crown, Church and Constitution” in a world beset by rebellion and revolution.\footnote{Bayly, Imperial Meridian, 107.}

In a slightly different vein, Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford have recently argued that the British “imperial constitution” of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a “fluid vernacular” for the expression of an ideology of strong executive authority tempered by a benevolent and impartial justice.\footnote{Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, \textit{Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800-1850} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 3.} The imperial constitution became a paramount, protective authority over a “field of smaller sovereignties” through the formation of subsidiary treaties and agreements with non-British states.\footnote{Benton and Ford, \textit{Rage for Order}, 23.} Such diplomatic arrangements, as Michael Fisher and Robert Travers have demonstrated, drew on Mughal and post-Mughal norms, conventions, and systems of political communication, such as the circulation of articles of agreement to formulate alliances, while also cutting off or dramatically limiting the ability of Indian states to manage their existing political relationships.\footnote{Michael Fisher, “Diplomacy in India, 1526-1858,” in \textit{Britain’s Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550-1850} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 249-281; Robert Travers, “A British Empire by Treaty in Eighteenth Century India,” in \textit{Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600-1900} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 132-160.} The courtly gift economy in which earlier Company officials had participated to their own enrichment was increasingly viewed as an indication of the corruption of Indian states.\footnote{For two very different evocations of how East India Company understood and intervened in the pre-colonial gift economy, see Natasha Eaton, “Between Mimesis and Alterity: Art, Gift, and Diplomacy in Colonial India, 1770-1800,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 46.4 (2004): 816-844; Sudipta Sen, \textit{Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 60-88.} In short, the pre-colonial practice of politics became a problem to be managed within the ambit of the British imperial constitution. This chapter shows that the
Maratha “confederacy” was one such problematic state incorporated by diplomacy and force into the British imperial constitution.

This chapter consists of three sections on the Company-Maratha encounter. First, I follow the attempts of Governor-General Warren Hastings to intervene in the Bombay Company government’s conflict with Pune by pursuing an alliance with Mudhoji Bhonsle of Nagpur in the years leading up to the First Anglo-Maratha War. When this intervention led to war on the western coast, the ministers Nana Phadnavis, Devaji Chorghode, and their collaborators deployed practices of jawāb-suwāl to forge an anti-Company alliance between Pune, Nagpur, Hyderabad, and Mysore. The second section examines eighteenth-century English and Persian historical writing on the Maratha state, culminating with the extraordinary research of the resident Charles Warre Malet (1753-1815) at the Pune court. I argue that ethno-historical notions of Maratha plunder and Brahman avarice undergirded the Company’s emergent theory of Maratha statehood. Finally, the third section shows how Governor-General Richard Wellesley developed and operationalized this theory. Emphasizing the dangers of an unconstitutional “confederacy” between predatory Maratha “chieftains,” he made a case in the Second Anglo-Maratha War of 1803 for an armed intervention to restore the just constitutional authority of Peshwa Bajirao II. The Nagpur scribal-diplomats Krishnarao Madhav and Sridhar Laxman were among those who made one last-ditch effort to forge a unified Maratha response to Wellesley’s intervention. As I suggest in the conclusion, the alliances and dependencies that emerged between the Company and Maratha governments created a path to the Company’s 1817-1819 war of extirpation against any and all “predatory” elements threatening the permanent peace of India.

**Miscommunication and the Beginning of the Anglo-Maratha Encounter**
The encounter between the Maratha Empire and the British East India Company unfolded over the course of the First (1775-82), Second (1803-5), and Third Anglo-Maratha Wars (1817-8). Prior to these wars, there had been minor engagements between the Marathas and the Company over control of the western coast and coastal trade across the Indian Ocean.\footnote{The “piratical” exploits of the Maratha seafarer Kanhoji Angre were notorious across the British Empire. See Simon Layton, “The ‘Moghul’s Admiral’: Angrian ‘Piracy’ and the Rise of British Bombay,” \textit{Journal of Early Modern History} 17 (2013): 75-93.} Competition escalated tensions between the Company government at Bombay and the Maratha government at Pune. In December 1774, the Bombay government attacked and seized the Maratha outpost of Thane on the island of Salsette (Sashti). In February 1775, Raghunathrao, whose schemes with Mudhoji Bhonsle’s Kayastha operatives were discussed in the previous chapter, fled to the port of Surat in search of succor, obtained it by the treaty of Surat of March 6, 1775, and returned to Gujarat to confront the joint armies assembled by the ministerial council of the Pune government. Though Bombay pursued its own interests without much regard for the approval or disapproval of its overlords in Bengal, Hastings in his capacity as Governor-General took responsibility for the broader geopolitical eventualities that its actions might precipitate.\footnote{Lord North’s Regulating Act of 1773 constituted a Governor-General and Supreme Council of Bengal with legislative authority over the Bombay and Madras branches, but Bombay often ignored the orders of the Supreme Council. See Robert Travers, \textit{Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India: The British in Bengal} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 143-4.}

He countered Bombay’s alliance with Raghunathrao by sending Lieutenant Colonel John Upton to negotiate an agreement with the Pune government, which after more than a year of difficult negotiations materialized in the treaty of Purandar in March 1776. The British would retain Salsette; in return, Raghunathrao would permanently resign from public life.

At the same time, Hastings considered how best to capitalize on the relationship between the Company and the Bhonsles of Nagpur. This relationship had emerged in the early 1760s
through intermittent negotiations regarding re-instatement of cauth payments that fell into arrears after then-Governor Robert Clive’s acquisition of the revenue administration of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa (conventionally known as the diwānī) in 1757. Janoji Bhonsle was desperate for cash to pay his army’s wages; however, Clive did not hold the cauth claim in very high esteem. He advised the Bengal nawāb Mir Qasim, who had been installed after the removal of his predecessor Mir Ja’far, not to pay. He also insinuated that if he wished to re-conquer Cuttack, the headquarters of Nagpur’s subahdārī government in Orissa, they would support him. Instead, Mir Qasim rebelled against the Company and was defeated in the Battle of Buxar of 1763. He and his ally Shuja ud-Daulah, the nawāb of Awadh, then invited Janoji to join them in return for a hefty sum of 30 lākh rupees. Unmoved, Janoji reported these machinations to Clive and re-committed to a strategy of pursuing a settlement of the cauth issue through diplomatic means.

In the late 1760s, the Nagpur government adopted a conventional strategy of jawāb-suwall diplomacy in its search for a resolution of the cauth question. It deputed a regular envoy to Calcutta, the first of which was the wealthy merchant-ascetic Udaipuri Gosain. While Janoji Bhonsle hoped that Clive would hand over the cauth monies directly, Clive’s own envoy Mir Zain ul-Abidin Khan reached Nagpur in early 1767. He accepted Janoji’s friendly offer of bel-bhandar and a sacred śāligrāma stone. In December, Janoji demanded that these tokens of friendship be reciprocated with “a treaty sanctified by the sign manual [seal?] of the King of India”.

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663 The Bhonsles’ financial troubles played a role in the deterioration of their relationship with Madhavrao Peshwa and the outbreak of the Pune-Nagpur civil wars. See Chapter 2.


England, attested by the Governor’s signature, sworn to on the sacred pages of the Evangelists, and solemnized by invocations.”\textsuperscript{667} Unfortunately, these symbolic professions of friendship did not immediately conjure a substantive agreement. Clive was willing to remit thirteen lākhs to Nagpur, but only in exchange for the province of Orissa, a major territorial concession that Janoji disputed on the basis of its lack of precedent.\textsuperscript{668} After a brief silence during the 1769 war between Pune and Nagpur, negotiations re-opened in 1770. Bad faith prevailed on both sides. Company officials repeatedly evaded Udaipuri Gosain’s efforts to strike a deal. They objected that the gosāvī had no authorization to sign a treaty, stating that there was no “instance in which a person of obscure origin in Europe may have been sent with a verbal message to a prince and procured a treaty from him on the strength of that message alone.”\textsuperscript{669} Growing tired of the back and forth of this “empty communication (khālī jāb-sāl),” Janoji invited the ousted rulers of Bengal and Awadh to march to the Narmada River to form a joint anti-Company force.\textsuperscript{670} By the time of his death in 1772, and the commencement of a three-year succession struggle between his brothers Mudhoji and Sabaji, neither the issue of cauth nor Orissa had been resolved.\textsuperscript{671}

It was in this context that Warren Hastings converted Bombay’s conflict with Pune into a scheme to install the regent Mudhoji Bhonsle of Nagpur as the sovereign Chhatrapati of the entire Maratha Empire. For Hastings, such extraordinary means were justified by extraordinary circumstances. In May 1777, he received intelligence from Bombay that the Pune government,

\textsuperscript{667} CPC, vol. 2, no. 709, pg. 193.

\textsuperscript{668} In addition, Janoji suspected that Mir Zain ul-Abidin Khan interjected this issue into the negotiations because he coveted the governorship of Orissa for himself. See CPC, vol. 2, nos. 709-712, 716, pgs. 191-200.

\textsuperscript{669} CPC, vol. 3, no. 203, pg. 62.

\textsuperscript{670} SPD, ed. Sardesai, vol. 20, no. 292, pg. 285; also see nos. 198, 297, pgs. 188, 290.

\textsuperscript{671} For the succession dispute, see Chapter 4.
mere days after hosting Mudhoji’s son and the senā sāheb subhā Raghuji Bhonsle and his minister Devaji Chorghode, had extended its hospitality to a French ambassador named Chevalier de St. Lubin. The intelligence suggested that St. Lubin hoped to contract an alliance with Nana Phadnavis to support a French assault on the western coast and perhaps a general invasion of the Company’s territories. It was even believed that St. Lubin had invited all French subjects residing in Pune to come to Nana’s house one day at the end of June 1777 to witness the swearing of oaths. Eyewitness reports suggested that “there was some written instrument; on one side of which Nana swore by the cow and to the other side Mons. De St. Lubin swore by the holy Evangelists; that Nana farther kept the book Mons. De St. Lubin was sworn on.” The Bombay government considered such alarmingly vivid intelligence to be further grounds for effecting a regime change on behalf of Raghunathrao, who, they believed, had drummed up support among the rivals of Nana Phadnavis. Hastings expressed his approbation in February 1778 by ordering a battalion of the Company’s army in Awadh to march from Kalpi to Bombay to support whatever preemptive action they might take.

The internal deliberations of the Supreme Council suggest how Company officials were becoming increasingly preoccupied with the threat of French invasion. Though it was the Company’s policy to avoid unnecessary “schemes of conquest,” Hastings’s interventions foreshadowed the way in which Britain’s global war with the French would engulf its


673 Selections, ed. Forrest, vol. 1, 293.

674 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 58a; Forrest, ed., Selections, vol. 1, 303-4.

relationships with both colonial and independent governments. In light of the American and French Revolutions, and from the British perspective, the loss of the American colonies to the conflagration of Francophone revolutionary sentiments, many Company officials believed that war was necessary to prevent dramatic social and political upheaval. In the Maratha case, the Company’s counter-revolutionary war evolved from Hastings’ scheme for regime change to a just war of constitutional restoration under Wellesley to a war of extirpation against “predatory” states in the 1810s. At the same time, this early stage of the Company-Maratha encounter reveals the frequent miscommunications and misinterpretations that beset the Company’s decision-making process, dependent as it was on intelligence derived from its limited penetration of the information and communication networks of Indian governments.

In a January 28, 1778 minute, Philip Francis (1740-1818), a member of the Council and Hastings’ most ardent critic, objected that Bombay’s actions ignored the Council’s supreme authority, violated the treaty of Purandar, presumed that Raghunathrao had dependable allies within the Pune ruling circle, and disregarded the insufficiency of resources for a large-scale military campaign. Moreover, he doubted the wisdom of giving “the utmost attention to the Preservation of Peace in India, but at this Conjuncture more particularly than at any other, while a Considerable Part of the national force is employed in America, and while the apprehension of a War with France and Spain hangs over the Councils of the Nation.” When Hastings pressed Francis to clarify whether he would acquiesce to aiding the Bombay government should it become entangled in an actual war, Francis stated that he would only acquiesce to defensive

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677 On the Company’s efforts to penetrate the information order of late eighteenth-century north India, see C.A. Bayly, Empire and Information, 56-141.

678 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 60a.
measures, not to “measures of an offensive nature against the Maratta State.”679 In late February, as Hastings prepared orders for Colonel John Leslie to lead a force across India, Francis even went so far as to ask “what right have we to make use of Force, to prevent the French from obtaining such a grant by Negotiation with an independent state.” He was unconvinced that an “advantageous Treaty or Alliance” was worth “engaging the Nation in a War with France.”680

Subsequent messages from the Bombay council sharpened the bite of Francis’ criticism. On April 5, 1778, the Bombay council expressed “the uncertainty of our situation” in light of a recent “revolution” in the Pune court that disempowered Nana Phadnavis and therefore rendered intervention on behalf of Raghunathrao unnecessary. Francis argued that the detachment ought to be immediately recalled. Hastings disagreed. He strongly repudiated Francis’ suspicions about the veracity of the reports of French intrigue at Pune: “Does he really regard the Letters and Presents delivered to the Peshwa from the King of France, by the Chevalier St. Lubin, the written Engagements declared by Mr. Mostyn to have been eneterchanged by St. Lubin and Nanna Furnese [Nana Phadnavis]…as Facts of a doubtful Nature?”681 Hastings linked these interactions to the fact that two French ships, the Brilliante and the Sartine, the latter of which had carried St. Lubin to Chaul, rather than proceeding to China as originally planned docked at the French port of Mahi. St. Lubin appeared to be the head of a French conspiracy that could easily prey upon “a system of disjointed and discordant parts, which the Government of Bombay may hold together, but no other Power can, or, by withdrawing their Grasp, let it fall to Pieces.”682

679 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 69b.
680 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 77b.
681 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 140a-b.
682 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 142b.
Hastings was transfixed by the notion that the Maratha state was a “system of disjointed and discordant parts” either on the brink of either total domination or total collapse. In a January 1777 letter to Alexander Elliot, future envoy to Nagpur, Hastings fretted that “so sudden a revival and reunion of the powers of this great empire…indicate a degree of vigour in its constitution which cannot fail to alarm the friends of the Company.” Yet, he also argued that there was no time like the present for “advancing the interests of the Company, and extending their influence and connexions.” His argument was premised on perceived weaknesses in the Maratha state. First, he claimed that the “confederacy” between the Peshwa, the Nizam, and the Bhonsles of Nagpur, “all possessing mutual claims on each other, and swayed by opposite interests, cannot hold long together.” Secondly, he pointed to the Pune government’s “want of constitutional authority,” by which he meant the Peshwa’s rule on behalf of the Chhatrapati. Finally, he sought to take advantage of the “seeds of civil discord” sown by the death of Janoji Bhonsle. All of these weaknesses, he concluded, could become the enabling conditions for a “general system…to extend the influence of the British nation to every part of India.” By taking advantage of the apparently disjointed and confused character of the Maratha state, he might lay the groundwork for such a system of British power over the Indian subcontinent.683

The Bombay council vacillated in its proceedings – first rescinding and then reinstating its orders for Leslie to march west – while Francis and Hastings on the Bengal council became increasingly unable to agree to a common set of facts. It had been reported that the *Brilliante* had sailed from Mahi to Mangalore to transport men and military stores for the Mysore ruler Haidar Ali.684 Based on this news, Francis argued that the supposed Franco-Maratha alliance was a


684 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 146a-147a.
chimera. Hastings challenged Francis, complaining that “by this method of selecting partial passages, and by an artificial application or combination of them…it is in his power not only to pervert the original meaning of the text but to draw any conclusions from them he pleases.” Francis reverted that it was “a Fact, which is not disputed, that the French have lately sent Military Assistance to Hyder Ally,” to which Hastings replied that the Bombay council “do not assert this as a fact.” Rather, they only established the “simple intention” of the French lending their support to Haidar Ali. Finally, he countered Francis’ “conjectural conclusions from an unascertained fact” with “an unauthenticated fact admitting of but one Conclusion,” namely that the Pune government continued to maintain a friendly disposition toward St. Lubin. 685

Francis and Hastings’ disagreement about the construction of facts shaped their different interpretations of how events within India would impact the course of global politics. Francis was appalled at how Bombay’s sudden reversal displayed a reckless disregard for the hazards of a long-distance march, which for him were recently demonstrated by General Burgoyne’s surrender at Saratoga in October 1777 during the American Revolutionary War. He wondered “whether Policy and Prudence, do not plainly dictate to us, that, while the Nation is so deeply engaged and pressed on one side, with everything to apprehend from the designs of France and Spain on the other, we should stand on our defence.” 686 Hastings’s interpretation of the significance of events in India and America was rather different:

I hope that our affairs in America are not in the desperate situation in which they are described to be; but I see no Connection between them and the Concerns of this Government; much less can I agree that, with such superior advantages as we possess over every Power which can oppose us, we should act merely on the defensive, and abruptly stop the operations of a Measure of such importance to the National Interests, and to the national safety, as that in which we have now decidedly engaged with the Eyes of all India upon it. On the contrary, if it be really true that the British Arms and

685 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 149b-153b.

686 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 158b-159a.
Influence have suffered so severe a check in the Western World, it is the more incumbent on those, who are charged with the Interests of Great Britain in the East, to exert themselves for the retrieval of the National Loss.  

The defeat of British arms in America recommended opposite courses of action in India to Francis and Hastings. Whereas Francis advised defense, Hastings advised offense. Whereas Francis voiced a cautious pragmatism, Hastings linked the status of British arms in the eyes of the world, and especially of India, to the status of the British nation.

It was at this uncertain juncture that Hastings pursued Mudhoji Bhonse as an alternative candidate for installing a pro-Company Maratha regime. This intervention would have serious consequences not only for Company policy towards Maratha governments, but also Maratha governments’ policy towards the Company, which in response to such interventions became more unified and deliberate. The groundwork for more friendly relations between Nagpur and Calcutta had been re-laid through the Nagar Brahman merchant-diplomats Beniram Pandit and Bishambar Pandit Dube. In early July 1778, Leslie’s troops reached Chhatarpur, about 250 kilometers from the Narmada River, where Mudhoji, on Hastings’ instructions, had sent a delegation to replenish their supplies. On the basis of letters received and possibly solicited from the Peshwa, Mudhoji sought to reassure Hastings that St. Lubin had been dismissed from Pune; that his purpose was primary commercial; and that the extension of hospitality to him was

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687 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 159b-160a.

688 Like many Brahman service families in the eighteenth century, these brothers combined diplomacy with revenue farming, temple construction and management, and other businesses over the course of their careers. Bishambar Pandit acquired control of the management of the Jagannath temple in Puri sometime after 1781. See Madhuri Desai, Banaras Reconstructed: Architecture and Sacred Space in a Hindu Holy City (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 128; on Beniram’s lease of the Benares sugar monopoly, see Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars, 200.

689 CPC, vol. 5, nos. 968-9, pg. 169.
a mere diplomatic courtesy, not an indication of disloyalty. Hastings rejoined that he had reliable intelligence of a treaty between the French and the “principal Brahmins” of Pune. He promised to fully involve Mudhoji in any steps he might take towards a resolution of this matter, “not only because he [Mudhoji] is the principal chief of the Mahratta Empire but because he is also connected by blood with the ancient Rajas of Satara.” To this end, he sent an ambassador, Alexander Elliot, to negotiate “a treaty of perpetual peace between the Maharaja and the English.” The extent to which Hastings’ attention had shifted from Raghunathrao to Mudhoji is indicated by the fact that he instructed the Bombay council not to conclude any sort of treaty that might jeopardize Elliot’s negotiations at Nagpur.

Hastings’ July 18 instructions to Elliot further elaborated an historical understanding of Mudhoji’s connection to the “ancient Rajas of Satara,” and therefore, claim to the Chhatrapati title:

A Natural Jealousy has ever subsided between his Family and the Government of Poona. This has been heightened into a confirmed Animosity by Acts of mutual Violence. He has strong Pretensions if not an absolute legal right to the succession of the Rajah, or Sovereign Authority of the Maratta State, vacant by the Death of the late Ramraja; and the Nabob Nizam Ally Cawn, who has always been connected with the French, and is now in close Union with the Ministers of Poona, is from his Situation the natural Enemy of the Government of Berar, and personally that of Moodajee.

Hastings’ recap of recent Maratha history contains major inaccuracies. Neither the Nizam nor the Peshwa were “natural” enemies of the Bhonsles of Nagpur; rather, as I argued in Chapters 1 and 2, they co-existed in a delicate balance as equally successful successors to Mughal rule in the Deccan. Secondly, though it was true that “acts of mutual violence” had at times fractured

690 CPC, vol. 5, no. 992, pgs. 175-6.
691 CPC, vol. 5, no. 1003, pg. 179.
692 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 170a-b.
693 BL, India Office Records and Private Papers (hereafter IORPP), Mss Eur D1190, ff. 3b.
relations between the Pune and Nagpur governments, tensions between them had significantly diminished by the late 1770s.

Elliot would not be the one to enlighten Hastings on these points of misunderstanding. En route to Nagpur, he died of fever at Sarangadh between late September and early October 1778. 694 Around the same time, Leslie died and was replaced by his second-in-command General Thomas Goddard. 695 Hastings vested Goddard with full powers of diplomacy, which the latter carried out through his paymaster, Lieutenant Dalhousie Watherston. In addition, Hastings ordered two additional battalions under the command of Major Jacob Camac to proceed to Nagpur’s western border in the expectation that they would eventually join Goddard. In late December 1778, Watherston began to send regular reports of his conversations with Mudhoji Bhonsle, Devaji Chorghode, and the Peshwa’s envoy Baburao Viswanath Vaidya. What he discovered was not exactly what Hastings had imagined when he concocted his plan to elevate Mudhoji to the Chhatrapati seat.

Before Watherston reached Nagpur, Mudhoji had argued that the delay caused by Elliot’s death and Pune’s openness to reconciliation made military action imprudent. 696 But Watherston painted an even more comprehensive picture of the diplomatic commitments of the Nagpur government. On December 20, 1778, he wrote, “They have a thousand arguments to oppose those I urged in favour of the plan for assuming the dignity of Rauge of Sittara [rājā of Satara]. They gave a long detail of the past Transactions of their history, the connections which they have

694 CPC, vol. 5, nos. 1137, 1190, 2027, pgs. 215-6, 231, 497.

695 Because Leslie had been accused of gross mismanagement, this change in personnel was generally viewed in positive terms. For example, Francis shared a letter with the Supreme Council describing a disastrous first day’s march from Kalpi in which “they marched above thirty miles over a burning sandy Plain without a drop of water.” See BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38401, ff. 161a.

696 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, ff. 1a-5a; CPC, vol. 5, no. 1294, pgs. 259-60.
since formed and the treaties solemnly entered into by them.” More particularly, he explained, “They say they have sworn to an alliance of friendship with the present Paishwa Pundit Purdhan Madhurow [Sawai Madhavrao], which they cannot violate.” In a subsequent letter, Watherstone also reported that Mudhoji had an “intimate connection and Friendship” with Nizam Ali Khan’s feudatory Ibrahim Beg Dhaunsa, “whom he esteemed as his own son.”

Ultimately, Watherstone blamed Devaji Chorghode for Mudhoji’s ambivalence:

Perhaps he [Devaji Chorghode] thinks his own honour concerned in the maintaining the treaties, betwixt the Nizam and Paishwa, which he himself brought about, and there is even some room to believe he may have entered into negotiations of a very secret nature with the ministry at Poona who are Brahmans like himself, nor do I imagine it can be his wish to see the power of the Brahmans totally annihilated, which would be the inevitable consequence of placing a Rajpoot of the Authority of Moodhoji in the throne of Sittara.

Watherstone’s belief that Brahman cabalism dominated Maratha politics would become a popular theory under the resident Charles Warre Malet. In addition to obscuring the divisions between Brahman sub-castes and the political contributions of non-Brahman Kayastha Prabhus, which have been explored in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, this belief excluded the possibility that governments were motivated to maintain peaceful relations for pragmatic, not identitarian or ideological reasons.

The conclusion of Watherstone’s delegation was that the Nagpur government would not pursue an alliance with the Company as long as it continued to support Raghunathrao. As it turned out, Bombay had concluded a new treaty with Raghunathrao on November 24, 1778 and

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697 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, ff. 34a.
698 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, ff. 37b. For more on Ibrahim Beg Dhaunsa, see Chapter 1.
699 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, 40b-41a.
700 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, ff. 25a-28b.
readied a force to march on Pune on his behalf. The march ended in a retreat under fire and surrender by mid-January. Francis continued to believe that Hastings all along intended to pursue “Schemes of Conquest and Ambition.” He argued that forming an offensive alliance with Nagpur was Hastings’ “first object” in organizing a detachment to march across India. In answer to this imputation, Hastings claimed that a Company-Nagpur alliance had been considered for years and re-iterated his conviction that an alliance would have been possible if not for Bombay’s rashness. He again advocated a general re-orientation to an offensive posture on the basis of the weakness of the Maratha state. He explained, “The Marhatta Empire was in its full vigor, its parts entire, its possessions extending from the Banks of the Jumna to the Walls of Seringapatam…It is now proposed to assume an ascendant over this no longer dreaded state.” If it was more suitable to take military action against a weak state rather than a strong state, it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that Hastings had aimed to execute an offensive war.

Nana Phadnavis certainly seems to have acted on this conclusion in devising his own scheme of conquest, one that would be the first of several efforts among Maratha government to organize a coordinate response to Company encroachment. From the mid 1779 to early 1780, he finalized a plan with the Bhonsles of Nagpur, Nizam Ali Khan of Hyderabad, and Haidar Ali of Mysore to organize a joint military action against the Company. The Company designated this plan as the “Quadruple Alliance,” a term that somewhat occludes the strategy on which it was

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702 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, ff. 61a.
703 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, ff. 63b.
704 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, ff. 78a-b.
705 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38402, ff. 85a.
founded. As Nana Phadnavis and his representatives articulated, the strategy was to apply strain, or more literally, to stretch (tāṅ basavne), the Company from four directions (cahuṅkaḍān). Specifically, Pune’s army would engage Goddard in Gujarat; the Bhonsles would invade Orissa and Bengal; the Nizam would attack Sriakakulam on the eastern coast; and Haidar Ali would attack Channapatna in the Karnatak. This quadra-directional strategy made full use of Nana Phadnavis’ sophisticated communication apparatus to incentivize participation by extending an opportunity for individual governments to regain territory and revenue lost to Company encroachment (e.g. Orissa for the Bhonsles, Sriakakulam and the remaining Northern Circars for the Nizam). In the case of Nagpur, the yāḍī agreement struck with Pune on September 22, 1779 included a kalam promising a new saranjām in Gadha-Mandla and the title senā bahādar to Mudhoji’s son Khandoji Bhonsle.

While Nana Phadnavis engaged the self-interest of individual actors, he also argued for a shared interest in repelling the Company’s divisive geopolitics of subcontinental conquest. In December 1778, he warned the Bhonsles: “English sincerity is false. Professing sincerity to many, they slowly gained a foothold, talked sweetly, and acquired many kingdoms.” Similarly, he wrote to Haidar Ali on August 4, 1780 that “the intention of the British is to take the three kingdoms of Haidar Khan, Shrimant [the Peshwa], and the Nabob [Nizam Ali Khan].

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707 Nana Phadnavis also hoped to win the support of the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II and his commander-in-chief Mirza Najaf Khan. See APYV, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Vakaskar, no. 274-5, pgs. 249-51.

708 For the agreement, see BL, Mss Marathi, D36, ff. 15a-16b; APYV, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Vakaskar, no. 138, pgs. 137-42. Sanads issued in 1186 (1785 CE) divided the grant of Gadha-Mandla between Khandoji and his brother and the senā sāheb suhbā Raghuji Bhonsle. See PD, Ghadni Daftar, rumal no. 515, sanads dated 10 Jilkad and 7 Saban 1186 and yāḍī dated 1186.

709 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, no. 199, pg. 217.
By any means necessary, they will break one off, defeat another, and when one remains, conquer it.” The Company’s divide-and-conquer strategy stemmed from a fundamentally deceitful nature. “The nature of the hat-wearers [the English] is unfaithful (be-imān) and dishonest (pharebī). They will impose their counsel on one party and create confusion,” he wrote to Haidar in another message. Similarly, he asked Sadashiv Ram Gune, his representative at Nagpur, “For the past three or four years, how have the English behaved? They say one thing and do another. They act with an eye to chicanery. Neither their speech nor their writing is correct (pramāna).” Nana’s critique was grounded in a prevailing culture of communicative politics, one in which the Company was a novice participant. As I have argued through this dissertation, the integrity of one’s word was the central question in jawāb-suwał negotiations, and it was equally salient in relations between the Maratha governments and the Company. The Anglo-Maratha encounter was not only a war of arms, but also a war of words.

The entirety of the communicative process of jawāb-suwał is evident in the negotiations leading up to the issuance of the 1799 agreement between Pune and Nagpur. In a September 13, 1778 letter, Nana Phadnavis reminded Devaji Chorghode: “It was when you came to Purandhar [Purandar] that you won my full confidence (khātarjamā pakī jahalī).” Devaji’s visit to Purandar, which he made with Raghuji Bhonsle in the previous year, is a refrain in the letter. A few lines later, he stated, “You came and made it so that only [our] bodies were separate (śarire mātra bhinna itake karūn gele).” Even more dramatically, he declared, “When it was announced across the earth that you came to Purandhar (purandharāvar cālūn āle he prthvīs jāhirāṇā jāhale), a powerful sign of perfection became evident to all. Perhaps you will recall that in your

710 APYV, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Vakaskar, no. 277, pgs. 252-3.

711 APYV, eds. Sardesai, Kale, and Vakaskar, no. 278, pgs. 253.

712 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, no. 121, pg. 129.
worship of god, you should wish for my wellbeing. God revealed the fruits of this. Amidst such heartfelt affection (mamatā) and purity (svachhatā) and love (prem), I have received news that you regard me with doubt (sandeḥa).” Whereas face-to-face speech was a powerful means to build trust, hearsay and rumor in the interim could easily sow doubt.

In lieu of face-to-face contact, the correspondents at Pune and Nagpur resorted to the more mediate device of the promissory note. On December 31, Nana Phadnavis wrote to Mudhoji Bhonsle, “Divakarpant [Devaji Chorghode] left here to go to you. You heard what he had to say. I have received the holy basil and pigment [turmeric] (śrīvarīl tulśī va gandha) and a hand-written letter (khāsdastūr patra) with a promise to god (śrīcī śapath) that you, your sons, and your grandsons would remain by my side and that nothing would come between us.” He specified that the basil was planted in a gold pot (sonyācī ḍabī) in a separate message to Devaji. Expressing his satisfaction (santoṣa) and confidence (khātarjamā) in the intentions behind these gestures, and to reciprocate them, Nana too despatched a basil plant with turmeric. Several months later, Nana received a similar promise-bearing letter (śapathpurvak patra) accompanied by a gift of bel-bhanḍār from the Ujjain ruler Mahadji Shinde, who at several junctures in his career challenged his leadership within the Maratha state. Just as the attachment of a spoken oath to a mahzar had the function of mediating juridical conflict, its attachment to a letter in the context of jāb-sāl had the function of mediating political conflict. In both instances,

713 BL, Mss Marathi, D36, ff. 3a-6a. Nana also composed a similar message to Mudhoji Bhonsle on September 24. See BL, Mss Marathi, D36, ff. 6a-7b.

714 BL, Mss Marathi, D36, ff. 8a-10a.


716 See Introduction.
textualization converted a direct, but ultimately fleeting gesture into a more stable, but less immediate device capable of sustaining relationships across time and space.

Devaji’s promissory note did not have the desired effect of assuaging Nana’s doubts. Devaji told Nana that he became aware of a note that the latter personally wrote to Baburao Viswanath Vaidya about his fears of the Bhonsles and the Company joining forces upon hearing of the approach of Leslie’s battalion towards Nagpur. As Devaji wryly put it, “When such words are issued in a handwritten letter, I know full well how much faith you have. His lordship [Nana] wrote that there has been not the least discrepancy from us in the past few years, yet he also wrote this letter. Let it be. God is the master. To continually elaborate is dishonorable, and I am tired of making promises to Raoji [Baburao Viswanath Vaidya] and both Naiks [the court newswriters].” Devaji went on to plead that he was unable to visit Pune personally to remove whatever misgivings had arisen regarding his conduct precisely because the Company force was stationed at a distance of only 100 kos, or about 115 miles. In his customarily frank style, he averred, “I am an honest servant (mī imānī sevak āhe), and my master is honest. This has been proven in the last several years. Later too, God will prove it.”717

About two weeks later, Devaji repeated these sentiments and rather dramatically added, “The learned Sadashiv Buwa [Devaji’s physician] has seen the state that I am in. Though my chest might burst and kill me, still through the merit of his highness Maharaj Raosaheb [the Peshwa], I would be saved. Such is the cruelty that has befallen me. So it is. God is the giver of the fruits of action.”718 Devaji’s performance of abjection in these letters was a device designed to solicit pathos, and ultimately, to reset the terms of his relationship with Nana. In the coming weeks and months, Devaji repeatedly reminded Nana that he was a loyal and devoted servant. In

718 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, vol. 1, no. 54, pg. 56.
one letter, he refigures their master-servant relationship in terms of familial affection, again invoking the pivotal meeting at Purandar:

> When I had come to your feet, you no longer deceived me or said anything about me. Then it became incumbent on me to serve for the rest of my days. Every instant I remember the affection that you showed to me and the fatherly love that you bestowed on his highness the senā sāheb. What need is there to write a discourse on it? Where there is so much fellow feeling, how can such doubt or forgetfulness arise? Your affection is such that I ought not to abandon you for the rest of my days. Whoever would do so is not considered to be a man. He ought to be considered a mere animal.”

In another, he declared, “As God is my witness, it is lodged in my mind that I ought to visit you. Why should I write this out in a letter? At all times, I ponder this – when will I meet my master? The day that this meeting happens will be a good day.”

So eager was Devaji to express his desire for a reunion with Nana (and, perhaps more obliquely, his readiness for death) that he deputed his son Balwantrao to Pune. The promissory note and the handwritten letter, even when laden with profusions of feeling, could not equal the power of a face-to-face encounter.

In his later correspondence, Devaji became significantly more ambivalent in light of the many troubles that befell the Nagpur government’s invasion of Orissa. He penned a letter in November 1780 during his convalescence in Chimur, a small town in eastern Berar where he had sponsored the construction of a Balaji temple that is still a popular site of worship today.

> “God is an ocean of compassion and will show compassion,” he observed. No less buoyantly, he avowed, “God will give its fruits to us. Harm will never come to this state. When faith is strong here, how can god do us harm? It is well known that the one who deviates from faith is harmed.”

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719 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, no. 57, pg. 60.

720 Ibid., no. 58, pg. 61.

721 When I visited the temple at Chimur in January 2016, its staff was preparing for the annual Ghodayatra festival. Hanging on a column in the mandapa was a print of a modern-day portrait of Devaji Chorghode with a placard noting his distinguished position at Nagpur and patronage of the temple.
He also relayed that the Company had sent letters and copies of agreements in both English and Persian to Nagpur. He intended to transmit these to Pune, though he feared that they would not meet Nana’s expectations. He urged Nana not to share these papers with Haidar Ali, another member of the anti-Company alliance, warning that “one should keep watch on wherever antagonism has occurred again and again and treaties and promises were made a hundred times.” More darkly, he elaborated, “On this occasion, it is required that you make happen what should not happen. After this, even after a test of five or ten years has been made, he who is foreign should not be completely trusted.”

In a similar vein, he remarked on the inappropriate (amaṅgala) manner of the Company’s communication and the persistence of their deviousness (kuṭilapaṇa). With complications and misgivings swirling on all sides, it could be very difficult to preserve a relationship between two individuals with different affiliations, much less a multilateral alliance between rival governments.

Devaji’s premonition of disorder in the Maratha state appears most vividly in a letter most likely composed sometime at the end of 1780, mere months before his death:

> It ought to be assured that there will be no deviation from the plan. So it is. If things go according to the terms to which a man has agreed, it is a good thing. With the memory of his sincerity, it has come under universal discussion that while he made an agreement, it did not come to pass. Thus the man is disgraced, and people also fear for what might happen without their knowledge. Realizing this, they abandon the usual customs and ways on any given occasion and are forced to do improper things to save themselves. Such occasions have arisen. It has become necessary for you to prevent any kind of disorder and to incline yourself to whomever and to pass the days. Otherwise, everyone’s accusations will come on your head. Hence in these days, it is appropriate to consider many things and act…Before, I accused you of forming a friendship with Haidar Naik and not with us. What could not have come from this? I should not have written this to you. My master is all-knowing. What has happened up to today has first been understood and then has happened. Now also what happens is understood and happens. Such being the case, please forgive what I wrote. I write out of concern. In short, there are troublesome issues in these crooked days. To pluck up and consume hoary places; to resort to many kinds of wild schemes; to allow many things to happen which should not happen; to not keep the memory of bonds and promises – when such things take the place

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of friendship, they are called crooked days. On account of this, one ought to be aware of one’s behavior. The kingdom is the enemy’s plunder. Til today, what has happened has happened through the labors of plunder. Though this practice will stay strong in the future, god will provide good days.

Devaji here describes an ethico-political world turned upside down, or what he pithily terms crooked days (vākaḍe divas). Such days are characterized by a series of reversals of the norms of friendship, including the keeping of oaths and treaties, to satisfy the short-term needs of the moment. These reversals amount to a total inversion of the polity – the kingdom becomes the plunder of the enemy – yet Devaji also cleverly alludes to Shivaji’s celebrated mode of light, mobile warfare, or ganimī kāvyā, to acknowledge that the kingdom is in fact the result of plunder. If the sordid reality is that politics and violence are inseparable in the world of human affairs, the only hope for deliverance in his view is divine intervention. Only god can usher in good days: “The kingdom’s master is god. It is the seat of gods and Brahmans.” Finding himself at the end of a difficult set of negotiations and a tumultuous life and career, Devaji turn away from the delicate this-worldly game of promises, treaties, and friendships for a more comforting, but idealized and Brahmanical political theology.

As Nagpur’s battalion was approaching Cuttack, the war of words between Francis and Hastings was heating up. Francis opposed Hastings’ proposed measures to augment the Company’s military spending in the war with the Marathas, which had expanded to several fronts, including Gujarat, Malwa, and Orissa. In a July 3, 1780 minute, Hastings inveighed against the duplicity of Francis’ persistent opposition to almost every proposal he had floated since the beginning of his tenure, adding, “I judge of his public conduct by my experience of his private, which I have found to be void of truth and honour.” Francis replied to these

724 BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 38404, ff. 80b.
indictments by challenging Hastings to a pistol duel, which took place on the morning of August 17. Hastings’ bullet hit Francis below his right shoulder. Though Francis’ physical wounds healed, his psychic ones may not have. Shortly after the duel, he left Bengal for Britain. In subsequent years, he exacted his revenge by anonymously editing documentary compilations attesting to Hastings’ misconduct, including one titled *A State of the British Authority in Bengal Under the Government of Mr. Hastings Exemplified in the Principles and Conduct of the Marhatta War and His Negociations With Moodajee Boosla, Rajah of Berar* (1781).

The Company’s war with the Marathas dragged on until a peace agreement was concluded at Salbai in May 1782. Bombay held onto its coveted coastal outposts of Salsette and Broach, but the war had its costs. These included a bribe of sixteen lākh rupees that Hastings paid to dissuade the Nagpur army from proceeding past the port of Balasore in upper Orissa. The generals Khandoji Bhonsle and Bhavani Kalo accepted this sum – even though it was much lower than what was owed in *caouth* arrears – because by all accounts the march had been an utter disaster. Like the Bombay army’s expedition to Pune, Nagpur’s march to Bengal resulted in much expense and loss of life for relatively little gain. Both were direct consequences of an increasingly aggressive confrontation between a Company politics of conquest and a Maratha politics of coalition building.


728 Reports from Naro Krishna Kale, the *vakil* traveling with army, told of desolate and swampy terrain, sickness, and constant shortages of water and grain. So many horses died along the way that many soldiers had to walk on foot. At certain points, they subsisted on seeds and pulses. See Ibid., xi-liii, 105-118.
In March 1781, Devaji in his last message to Nana stated that he was suffering from winds (vāyu) that had caused his left side to freeze up. He promised to visit once his health improved. But he also resignedly acknowledged, “I am very tired. It is for you to wish for my recovery.” He died in the early morning of July 15 after battling a bad fever for several days. Many recognized the significance of the passing of one of the most prominent political operators at the Nagpur court of the last thirty years. The news-writers Malharji Naik Varpe and Dattaji Kusaji Toradmal lamented, “God did a harmful thing. No one has a remedy for the power of God. But he was an illustrious and thoughtful man of state.” Hastings was among those who had come to respect his talents. In his final days, Devaji swore that he would come to Calcutta to meet Hastings and finalize the peace settlement with Nagpur, just as he promised Nana to make a visit to Pune. The Supreme Council at Fort William suggested to the Court of Directors in London that because he was “a man of Acknowledged Ability,” they had entrusted him to advance the Company’s agenda during his talks with Nana.

Hastings’ recall and Devaji’s death marked the end of the intense opening stage in the encounter between the Company and the Maratha state. Several characteristic features of the Company discourse on the Marathas had emerged: its relative disorganization and discordancy; its lack of a clear sovereign authority; and its potential connections with French revolutionary plots. Yet, Francis’ skepticism about Hastings’ claims indicates the extent to which there was still no clear case for intervention into Maratha affairs. Similarly, on the Maratha side, the Company appeared to be intrinsically cunning, deceptive, and desirous of territorial and political monopoly, yet individual governments had particular reasons for preserving cautious friendships.

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729 NA, ed. Shejwalkar, vol. 1, no. 66, pg. 75.
730 Ibid., no. 214, pg. 242.
731 BL, IORPP, H/161, ff. 599.
with the Company. It would not be until the early nineteenth century that Company policy coalesced behind the necessity of intervention in Maratha politics, and in turn, Maratha politics assumed a decidedly anti-Company character. In the interim, Company officials began to research the origins, history, and character of the Maratha state.

**Maratha History and the Disposition to Plunder**

Notwithstanding its wide differences of opinion on policy matters, Company officialdom was relatively united in the basic assumption that the rise of Maratha power was inextricable from the decline of Mughal sovereignty. Early Company official-historians, including Alexander Dow (1735/6-79) and Robert Orme (1728-1801), primarily drew their understanding of Mughal history from Persian accounts, especially the *Gulshān-i Ibrāhīm* (also known as *Tārīkh-i Firishtah*) of Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Astarabadi *alias* Firishtah (c. 1560-c. 1630), and the local munshiś who tutored them in Persian and assisted them with the work of research and translation. Their encounter with the Indo-Persian traditions of historical writing led them to adopt a critical, albeit nostalgic notion of Mughal sovereignty-in-decline.\(^{732}\) Both Dow and Orme categorized the Mughal Empire, and Islamic rule in India more generally, as an example of “Oriental” or “Asiatic” despotism. In this categorization, they were guided by Montesquieu’s definition of despotism in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748-50) as a form of government by fear that especially flourished in hot climates. Native inhabitants, typically imagined as Hindu, were too enervated by tropical heat to limit the authority of the Mughal despot and create the conditions for political freedom through the establishment of individual rights to property. At the same time, this narrative conceded that individual “enlightened” despots were capable of a degree of mercy,\(^{732}\)

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\(^{732}\) For an important analysis of the nostalgia of this tradition, particularly among the official classes of nawābī Bengal, see Kumkum Chatterjee, “History as Self-Representation.”
tolerance, and compassion.⁷³³ One could be rich or poor under despotism, but one could never be free.

Later commentators like Philip Francis and the statesman Edmund Burke (1730-97) articulated a more complex theory of the “Mughal constitution.” According to this theory, the government of the Mughal Empire was not co-terminous with the authority of the sovereign, but rather was built on a fabric of norms, rules, and laws binding both rulers and subjects.⁷³⁴ The impeachment trial of Warren Hastings was the most spectacular site of encounter between this theory and the cruder idea of Oriental despotism. Whereas Hastings protested that he treated his Indian subjects like “slaves” in a manner befitting a “despotic prince,” Burke in his opening speech before Parliament remonstrated that “nothing is more false than that despotism is the constitution of any country in Asia that we are acquainted with…The greatest part of Asia is under Mahomedan governments. To name a Mahomedan government is to name a government by law.”⁷³⁵ In contrast, he denounced the Company for being a “nation of place-men” united by little more than a common interest in personal gain. “In a body so constituted,” he declared, “confederacy is easy, and has been general.”⁷³⁶ He further mused, “As one of the honestest and ablest servants of the Company said to me in conversation, the civil service of the Company resembled the military service of the Mahrattas, – little pay, but unbounded license to

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⁷³⁴ For a more nuanced discussion, see Robert Travers, Ideology and Empire.

⁷³⁵ The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, vol. 9 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1901), 454-3, 463.

⁷³⁶ Ibid., 353-4.
plunder.” Burke stressed that in the Mughal Empire, as in any political community, the governors and the governed were both subject to the law of a constitution, whether or not embodied by a single document, a collection of texts, or a even a set of norms and principles. For him, neither the Company, at least in its current form, or the Maratha state fit this description.

The Company discourse on the Maratha “confederacy” eventually incorporated a certain idea of constitution, or the absence of constitutionalism, but in its earliest stages, it was anchored by the idea of plunder. As early as 1698, the Company surgeon John Fryer (1650-1733) in an account of his travels across the Mughal and Safavid domains stated, “Seva Gi [Shivaji] is a kind of Free-booter, whose Maxim is, No Plunder, no Pay.” Dow in the History of Hindostan (1768), which combined a freewheeling translation of the Gulshan-i Ibrāhim with his own observations, made a similar distinction: “Though the genuine Mahrattors all over India do not exceed 60000 men, yet, from their superior bravery and success in depredation, thousands of all tribes enlist themselves under their banners. These, instead of pay, receive a certain proportion of plunder. By this means any army of Mahrattors increases like a river, the farther it advances.” Whereas the Mughal Empire was understood to be a state comparable with European states insofar as it contained a system of land tenure, manufacturing, and commerce meeting the criteria of the science of political economy, the Maratha state was reduced to its mode of warfare. Captain James Kerr in A Short Historical Narrative of the Rise and Rapid Advancement of the Mahratta State, a translation of a history composed by his Persian tutor, explained, “Whenever the critical situation of a neighbouring power affords a probability of gaining an

737 The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, vol. 9, 356.


advantage, the Mahrattahs seldom overlook the opportunity…[they] fall into that error so common in states where war is the chief profession, and commercial views form no part of their political principles.”

Company historians and commentators found no social, political, or economic organization among the Marathas, but merely an unregulated arena for profit-seeking warfare.

An important source for observations about Maratha plunder in early Company writing was eighteenth-century Persian historical narrative. In the tradition of Indo-Persian tārīkh and tazkirah, Marathas were synonymous with petty cavalry (bārgīr), cossacks (qazzāq), and plunderers (ghanīm). Ghanīm could also mean simply “enemy,” but like the other terms, it invoked the particular mode of light warfare practiced by Maratha armies and their allies. The reputed poet and chronicler Ghulam Ali Azad Bilgrami (fl. 1706-86) frequently used these terms in the Maʿāṣir al-Umarā’, which he finished for his late employer, the Nizamate noble Shah Nawaz Khan Samsam ud-Daulah (d. 1758), as well as in his own masterpiece, the Khizānah-i ʿĀmirah (1762-3). In a section of the Khizānah narrating preparations for a battle between the Pune and Hyderabad armies at Udgir – or the plunderers from Pune (ghanīm az puna) and the armies of Islam (ʿasākir-i islām) – Bilgrami comments on the mode of warfare of the soldiers of Ibrahim Khan Gardi, an Afghan general in Maratha service: “It is no longer a secret that often people of qazzāqī warfare were with the enemy (makhfī namānad ki bīshtar bā ghanīm tanhā-yi jang-i qazzāqī būd). Their skill was precisely that they would seize the provisions of the army of Islam and seeing an opportunity, fight with small arms.”

Given their willingness to employ

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740 James Kerr, A Short Historical Narrative of the Rise and Rapid Advancement of the Mahrattah State, to the Present Strength and Consequence It Has Acquired in the East. Written Originally in Persian; and Translated into English by an Officer in the East India Company’s Service (London: J. Nichols, 1782), 117.

unruly brigands, Bilgrami believed that the rise of the Marathas could lead to the end of Muslim rule in the Deccan. Likening the forfeiture of cauth to “when corrupted blood in the veins of the kingdom acquires a disease,” he warned that any kind of partnership (sharkat) with them would have grievous consequences.  

In a long digression in a section of the Khizānah on the career of Nizam ul-Mulk, Bilgrami provided an unusually rich and detailed account of the Marathas not only as one of many local groups to rebel against the Mughal yoke, but as a distinct ethnic and political formation with a particular historical destiny. While the residents of the Deccan (ahl-i dakan) had posed a problem for the rulers of Hind, or north India, (farmān-rawāyān-i hind) for ages, he emphasizes, “In this period, the Maratha community has committed astonishing deeds in the kingdoms of the wide roads of Hindustan and conquered the countries of the Deccan, Malwa, Gujarat, and the provinces of Hindustan.” He links the word “Marhat” with the country of the Yadavas of Devgiri as well as with the Marathi language; identifies the Bhonsles as the sovereign lineage of the Marathas; and points out that the Bhonsles were descended from the Rajput kings of Udaipur. In addition, he claims that the Udaipur rānās, being superior among the Rajputs, used to send the marking for any newly installed king to apply to his forehead. Following Abu al-Fazl in the Ā’īn-i Akbarī, he claims that the Udaipur rānās were descended from the celebrated Sasanian ruler Anushirwan, known today as Khosrow I (r. 531-579). Their forefathers, he speculates, must have migrated from Iran to India during Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas’ invasion of the Sasanian Empire and hence would have been related to the revered Shia imām Ali ibn Husayn through his mother, the Sasanian princess Shahrbanu. To explain how the Marathas

742 Bilgrami, Khizānah, 92-3.
743 Bilgrami, Khizānah, 59.
came to the Deccan, Bilgrami states that one of the sons of the Udaipur rānās escaped a disagreement with his brothers by re-locating to the Karnatak and founded two lines: the Antuliyas (probably Athavles) and the Bhonsles. One of the descendants of the latter line was Shahji Bhonsle, father of Shivaji Bhonsle.  

Though Bilgrami accorded the Marathas a somewhat more respectable lineage than earlier authors writing in Persian, he was more critical in his discussion of the virtues and abilities (manāqīb) of the Brahman classes of the Maratha state. He argued that Chitpavan Brahmins in particular, represented foremost by the Peshwa, sought to extend their reach, recruit followers, and uproot ancestral ruling lines in order to fulfill their ultimate intention of establishing a new and expansive Brahman kingdom. Such a proposal was absurd to Bilgrami in light of what he took to be the basic characteristics of Brahmans as a community. For example, he criticized their austere diet, mocking them for preferring coarser millet-based to wheat-based bread and tūr dal with little or no seasoning or oil. He associated these preferences with the humors of a dry (khushkī), bilious (safrāwī), and melancholy (saudāwī) nature. Morever, he stated, “Because the original profession of Brahmans is beggary (ašl-i pishah-i barāhimat gadā’ī ast), and because in the religion of the Hindus, it is accepted that alms should be given to Brahmans, this community from generation to generation has become accustomed to poverty, and they have necessarily adopted the disposition of a greedy and selfish person. Though they have acquired the trappings of imperial authority, still the stench of beggary does not leave their

745 Bilgrami, Khizānah, 59-60.

746 In one of the earliest discussions in Persian of the Marathas’ descent, Khāfī Khan in the Muntakhab al-Lubab claims that Shivaji’s ancestor was a man living in the Rajput country who fled to the south after illicitly marrying a woman of a lower caste and fathering a child. See Muhammad Hashim Khāfī Khan, Muntakhab al-Lubab, edited by Maulvi Kabir al-Din Ahmad, part 2 (Calcuta, 1874), 112.

natural disposition (bā wasf ḥusūl-i martabah-i sālṭanat wa amārat būū gadāʾī az ẓainat namī rawad).

Though the Khizānah was not a widely known text in Company circles in the 1770s and 1780s, Hastings and later Company observers like Charles Warre Malet arrived at similar conclusions about the essentially perverse and corrupt nature of the Brahman rāj that the Maratha state appeared to have become.

The Benares-based jurist Ali Ibrahim Khan’s (d. 1792) Aḥwāl-i Marhata [also known as Tārīkh-i Ibrāhim Khān and Waqā’i ʿ-yi Jang-i Marhata] (1786) and Bilgrami’s student Lacchmi Narayan Shafiq Aurangabadi’s (d.1808) Bisāt al-Ghanāʾim (1799-1800) – commissioned by Charles Cornwallis and John Malcolm respectively – were among a handful of Persian histories of the Marathas composed in the wake of Bilgrami’s Khizānah. At the same time, Company authors increasingly compiled more eclectic bodies of material. Robert Orme’s Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire (1782) followed the early Maratha state’s engagements with the Mughals through Aurangzeb’s execution of Sambhaji. He relied not only on Dow’s History, but also on Company records and European travelogues by the aforementioned Fryer, Sir Thomas Roe (1581-1644), Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-1689), François Bernier (1620-1688), Jean de Thévenot (1633-1667), and others. Orme’s research over the course of his career was wide-ranging. In a volume of brief notes on various subjects, he included some observations on

748 Bilgrami, Khizānah, 69.


“Morattoe Chiefs,” principally related to the Bhonsles of Nagpur and their relations with the Peshwa, that he borrowed from a 1762 account of events at Delhi supposed to have been written by Hastings.\textsuperscript{751}

Orme’s manuscript collection featured similar narratives by obscure or unknown Company servants who interacted in a military or diplomatic capacity with Maratha rulers. One such narrative was “Some Historical Anecdotes of the Bonsila Family of Marhattas, since their settling at Nagpoor under Ruggojee, collected by Major Camac.”\textsuperscript{752} This Camac was none other than the Major Jacob Camac appointed by Hastings in 1778 to reinforce General Goddard. Camac broke his journey with a visit to Bimbaji Bhonsle at his appanage in Ratanpur. At this time, he explained, “Anecdotes were collected from many different persons…most of them sent at the writer’s expense expressly for the purpose.” He hastened to add that he could not “vouch for the truth of them, but can only answer, that he has taken as much pains, as his situation afforded him, of comparing the various relations, and separating the many fables, which travellers take the privilege of mixing with their accounts of distant countries.”\textsuperscript{753} Like Hastings, Camac speculated that the Bhonsles of Nagpur might turn against the Pune government and “thus restore the dominion of the Marrattoe Empire to its original Governors.”\textsuperscript{754} Another very short summary of recent history, titled “A Short Account of the Accession of Moodajee Boosla to the Raje of Burrah Nagpore, & the State of His Brother Bhimbajee Boosla at Ruttonpore,” was


\textsuperscript{752} Hill, Catalogue, 141; an abridged version of this account was later published in The Asiatic Annual Register, or a View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce, and Literature of Asia, for the Year 1801 (London, 1802), 15-27.

\textsuperscript{753} BL, IORPP, H/456a, ff. 589-90.

\textsuperscript{754} BL, IORPP, H/456a, ff. 629.
composed at Ramgarh on December 25, 1780 by an unnamed Company writer \textsuperscript{755} who had conversed at length with Bimbaji Bhonsle. \textsuperscript{756} As the Company established more sustained relationships with Maratha rulers, it relied on its envoys, officers, and especially residents to observe, recruit informants, and compose their own historical accounts of various branches of the Maratha state.

As Camac noted, one of the obstacles to writing these accounts was “the little knowledge which I have observed that Europeans, in general, have of the Political State, or the History of these Inland Countries.” The Company’s ignorance about the Indian interior relative to the ports and coastal districts where it exercised influence made diaries and travelogues key sources of information about history, politics, and geography. Several of the Company’s representatives kept diaries of their journeys to and from parts of the interior directly or indirectly ruled by the Bhonsles of Nagpur. In 1766, Clive sent a representative named Thomas Motte \textsuperscript{757} to explore prospects for entering into the diamond trade of the Chauhan Rajput ruler of Sambalpur, to ascertain whether the Maratha state “might be easily divided, and by such division, that the power of a people so formidable in India might be weakened,” and to persuade the Nagpur government to cede Orissa in exchange for an annual tribute. \textsuperscript{758} Motte in his semi-daily diary of the journey, undertaken from mid-March to early November 1766, attributed the desolation of the country of Orissa and the dilapidated state of its wells, residences, and fortifications to the

\textsuperscript{755} The author of this tract may have been F.B. Thomas, a Company surgeon who was in the Nagpur area between 1780 and early 1782, before leaving for Cuttack. For more on him, see below.

\textsuperscript{756} BL, Western Manuscripts, Add 29202, 101a-104b.

\textsuperscript{757} On Motte’s later life and relationship with the Hastings family, see C.U. Wills, \textit{British Relations With the Nagpur State in the 18th Century: An Account, Mainly Based on Contemporary English Records} (Nagpur: Central Provinces Government Press, 1926), 34, unnumbered fn.

depredations of the Maratha tributary government. Compared to the inhabitants’ relative contentment under the Mughals, Motte speculates, “When they fell under the yoke of the Mahrattas, the oppression of that vile government broke their spirits, and their custom of inactivity became a total aversion to labour.” Motte situated his observations in a Montesquieuian framework of climate-induced Oriental indolence to make a historical argument about the effects of Maratha plunder on the state of the country.

Just as history, geography, and political economy were intertwined in the diaries of the Company’s peripatetic representatives, the Company’s early efforts to represent measurement-based geographical knowledge through cartography depended on these diaries. Motte’s route from Calcutta to Sambalpur was one of several travel diaries consulted by James Rennell (1742-1830), the surveyor-general who created the Company’s first detailed maps of Bengal and its eastern environs. In the sections of the revised third edition of a Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan (1793) on his sources of information for the country around Nagpur, he made reference to the routes of Camac, Watherstone, and Francis B. Thomas, a surgeon and friend of Hastings who kept a diary of his journey from Nagpur to Cuttack in 1782. Noting that


761 On Thomas, see Wills, British Relations With the Nagpur State, 82-3.

762 Other important informants for this area included Lieutenant Ewart, a person employed by Hasting’s surveyor-general in 1782-83 to survey the roads from western Bihar and Allahabad to Nagpur, and a “Sepoy officer” named Ghulam Muhammad. See James Rennell, Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan; or the Mogul Empire (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1793), 216-9, 236-42; Raj, “Circulation and the Emergence of Modern Mapping,” 37.
Camac’s observations had served as the basis for a relatively accurate estimation of the location of Ratanpur prior to its surveying, Rennell was struck by “how much may be effected, by a careful examination and register, of the estimated distances on the roads: and this mode of improving the geography of India, may be adopted when all others fail. An intelligent person should be employed in collecting such sort of information…from the principal cities in the least known parts of Hindoostan.”

Long after Rennell completed his survey of Bengal, Company officials continued to collect historical and geographical information in a desultory manner on the “least known parts” of the Maratha country.

Another peripatetic Company servant who Rennell cited in the Memoir was George Forster (c. 1752-91). Forster was the author of Sketches of the Mythology and Customs of the Hindoos (1785) and the well-known travelogue A Journey from Bengal to England (1790-8).

He seems to have been conversant in Marathi and cultivated Marathi-speaking informants during his two stints in India, the second of which included two official delegations to Nagpur from January 1788 to February 1789 and June 1790 to January 1791. While back in Britain in 1784, he met Henry Dundas (1742-1811), the Cabinet minister and President of the Board of Control for India. Dundas asked Forster to inform him of the current political state of India. Forster complied by writing two long letters to Dundas on May 21 and June 5, 1785 that contained his musings on the major powers of the Deccan, namely the Marathas, Nizam Ali Khan, Marathas, and the Mysore ruler Haidar Ali’s successor Tipu Sultan (1750-99). He echoed prior

763 Rennell, Memoir, 218.


765 For example, in the Sketches, he credits a “Mharatta Brahmin” of Thanjavur for information concerning a local marriage ritual. See George Forster, Sketches of the Mythology and Customs of the Hindoos (London, 1785), 84.
commentators with regard to the expansion of Maratha rule: “Their predatory disposition and schemes of conquest have drawn their forces to the remotest quarters of India.”

He commented on the relative strengths of and relationships between different Maratha governments, taking care to qualify that “not being upheld by fixed or constitutional principles, nor guided by any general preponderating system must ever fluctuate, and be subject to sudden changes.” The Company discourse about the Maratha political continued to be tied to certain fundamental assumptions: a nature disposed to plunder and predation; a lack of principled system or organization; and a tendency towards chaos.

Forster provided a thorough report on the history, government, revenue, territory, and army of Nagpur to Governor-General Charles Cornwallis (1738-1805) in April 1788. Based on Forster’s judgment that Nagpur was financially and militarily ill prepared to join the Company’s imminent war with Tipu Sultan, Cornwallis recalled him to Calcutta in February 1789. After the outbreak of war in December and the Company’s formation of an alliance with Pune and Hyderabad against Tipu in January 1790, Cornwallis ordered Forster to return to Nagpur to gather intelligence in support of the war effort. Surveyors accompanied him on this journey, as they had on the one back in 1788, and a member of his party named Colonel Leckie kept a diary of their route from Cuttack to Nagpur. Forster during his first deputation also coordinated with the Pune resident Charles Warre Malet to outfit a certain Captain Reynolds to survey the route

766 BL, IORPP, H/685, ff. 43.
767 BL, IORPP, H/685, ff. 74.
768 Wills, British Relations With the Nagpur State, 84-116, 225-30.
from Nagpur to Masulipatnam (today’s Machilipatnam) on the Coromandel Coast.\footnote{BL, IORPP, F149/4, ff. 90; F149/5, ff. 181.} Forster died in the middle of his diplomatic mission on January 1, 1791 and was buried with a gravestone in the immediate vicinity just as his predecessor Elliot had been.\footnote{Forster was buried near the Nag River, but due to erosion, his grave was moved to the Protestant cemetery in Nagpur. Elliot was buried near Sarangurh. See Wills, \textit{British Relations With the Nagpur State}, 58-9, 115-6.} Malet continued at Pune until 1797, nurturing a hearty research interest in local art, history, geography, and political economy that substantially contributed towards the Company’s understanding of the Maratha state.

Malet’s research at Pune took place amidst a period of reform and retrenchment. Over the course of Hasting’s tenure, the Company had accumulated significant debts. Hasting’s financial mismanagement and authorization of unjustified wars, including against the Marathas, would come under rhetorical fire during his long and scandalous impeachment trial. In the interim, the British defeat in America in 1783 incentivized measures to impose increased ministerial and Parliamentary control over the Company’s activities in India. After the fall of the North government and the failure of the Fox-North coalition’s attempts at reform, the new prime minister William Pitt the Younger steered an India Act through Parliament in 1784. It established a Board of Control – led by Dundas – that would supervise the decision-making of the Governor-General and Council, while the Company’s trade would continue to be under the purview of the Court of Directors. In addition, the Company no longer relied on Indian expertise to carry out its revenue and judicial functions; instead, it rebuilt its civil service on firm racial hierarchies. Finally, Dundas’ choice of Cornwallis, the defeated but beloved general of Yorktown, for Governor-General burnished a new, more respectable image of Company leadership. With respect to these developments, Robert Travers has argued that in the 1780s and 1790s, “the idea
of colonial state-building as constitutional restoration” slowly dissolved in favor of a “purified agency of imperial virtue.” But taking its stance toward Maratha politics into consideration, the Company’s virtuous self-image cannot be separated from its aggressive policy of war, conquest, and even extirpation, against powers it deemed be predatory and unconstitutional.

Malet was a vocal proponent of using Company arms to open up commercial prospects in western India. He believed that “reducing to order a country plundered by a thousand predatory chieftains is as easy to execute, as worthy of attention of a great and generous people, and the more readily to be adopted when consistent with their interest, their honour and perhaps necessary to the reestablishment of their affairs.” He also went to great lengths to acquire materials on Maratha history, including directly from scribes employed by the Pune government who were engaged in separate history-writing endeavours (see below). In this sense, he is a forerunner to the next generation of Company official-historians, including James Tod (1782-1835), Colin Mackenzie (1754-1821), Richard Jenkins (1785-1853), and James Grant Duff (1789-1858), who combined an antiquarian interest in Indian history with a zeal for collecting “original” source materials and recruiting Indian informants to interpret them. At the same time, he consolidated the assumptions of his predecessors into a unified theory of the Maratha state centered on Maratha predation and Brahman cunning.

Malet began his research with the assumption that the Maratha state was a peculiar formation. In a November 8, 1786 letter to Cornwallis, Malet conceded, “It is difficult to say, My

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772 Travers, Ideology and Empire, 207.

773 Pamela Nightingale, Trade and Empire in Western India, 1784-1806 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 137.

774 Quoted in Nightingale, Trade and Empire, 139.

775 See Chapter 6.
Lord, whether an entire ascendancy of the Mahrattas or Tipoo Sultan would be most dangerous to the Company’s interests.” He then compared the two powers. Whereas “Tipoo is promoted to conquest by the ambition of a despot and the wild enthusiasm of a bigot…the Mahrattas are urged to depredation by the restless rapacious spirit of every chieftain of which their armies are composed, and by the interest of every Brahmin administration to keep that spirit constantly employed.” Whereas Tipu represented “absolute despotism resting solely on the person of the despot,” the Marathas represented “an immense aristocracy, the permanence of which, though liable to many accidents is more certain…because the component parts by a participation of goods are more interested in its existence and aggrandisement.” This comparison suggests the ways in which the Company began to re-calibrate the language of Oriental despotism to characterize a power that appeared to be totally novel. Whereas Tipu was a classic despot – ambitious, zealous, and singular – the Maratha-Brahmin combine was rapacious, self-interested, and plural. Rather than searching for “nicely arranged systems of perspective policy” among Indian powers, Malet instead felt that “certain causes tend invariably to produce certain effects: so in judging the genius of the Brahmin Government and the power of the Mahratta chieftains and the state of society among them, as probable a conclusion may be formed of the operation of this complicated body.” To form a “clearer judgment” about these “certain causes” within the Maratha state, Malet proposed write a “plain statement of facts,” which would contain “an epitome of the History of the Mahratta Empire from its foundation to the present time, comprising a period of about 130 years.” For Malet, history writing was a means to identify the components of the Maratha state, to characterize its natural tendencies, and to classify it in relation to the various powers of India.776

Malet presented parts of this “epitome” of Maratha history in several subsequent letters to Cornwallis from roughly March 1787 to February 1788.\textsuperscript{777} Cornwallis forwarded these “short sketches” to the Court of Directors, who upon reading through them was satisfied enough to request a copy of Malet’s notes, or “Historical and Political Glossary.”\textsuperscript{778} Malet’s initial enthusiasm about the “prospect of being able, from rare and authentick materials to elucidate the history” of Shivaji and Sambhaji was later dampened by difficulties in obtaining access to local materials and informants.\textsuperscript{779} On August 4, he condemned “the Ignorance, Illiberality, and low suspicion of these People.” His main complaint was that Nana Phadnavis had forbidden the “principal secretary of this government” from confirming certain dates in “an abbreviated history composed by one of the Writers in his Department.”\textsuperscript{780} It is very probable that this “abbreviated history” was a short historical narrative composed by Balaji Ganesh in 1783 for the edification of the nine year-old Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao. Malet seems to have acquired a copy of this history and passed it on to his son Alexander Malet, who deposited it and several other accounts with the Royal Asiatic Society in London.\textsuperscript{781} As I discussed Chapter 3, Balaji Ganesh’s designation \textit{kārkun nisbat cīṁīs} indicates that he was a clerk responsible for writing Marathi letters and documents under the supervision of the chief scribe. In Chapter 6, I further examine Company criticism of scribal-authored historical narratives of the Maratha polity. Malet’s counterparts at

\textsuperscript{777} BL, IORPP, F149/2, ff. 105-9, 117-121, 301-4; F149/4, ff. 103; Sardesai, ed., \textit{English Records}, vol. 2, no. 50, pgs. 94-5.


\textsuperscript{779} BL, IORPP, F149/2, ff. 117.

\textsuperscript{780} BL, IORPP, F149/2, ff. 303.

\textsuperscript{781} Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Archives and Personal Papers, Documents Relating to Maratha History, unnumbered Modi narrative with English title “Epitome of the Rise of Marratta Empire”; for a published version, see MIS, eds. Rajwade and Deshpande, vol. 4, 131-52.
the Maratha courts of Satara and Nagpur faced similar difficulties in using texts primarily authored for didactic and commemorative purposes as sources for empirically “factual” histories. Malet’s “sketches” echoed Orme’s Historical Fragments in briefly praising Shivaji’s valor and fortitude. But he was far more interested in, and far more critical of, the Brahman “ministerial power” of the Peshwa, who in his view “brought into action the talents of their own tribe, singularly fitted for prompt and implicit obedience by their poverty and humility, and to supply what was wanting in the desultory character of the Mahratta by the sedentary studies and habits of their sect.” Though Marathas and Brahmins had overcome their natural differences for strategic purposes, Malet found a disturbing hypocrisy at the heart of their alliance. He stated, “The sole principles that actuated the government of a tribe of men that affects singular purity, innocence, humility, abstraction, from worldly pursuits, and unbounded horror at shedding the blood of the most insignificant reptile, were, plunder, devastation, and the consequent destruction of the human species.” With plunder as its actuating principle, this unnatural Maratha-Brahman combination became the second “distinct form” of the “Mahratta system.” The third, he went on to explain, was dominated by “the Persons of the Jaghiredars, or great Military chieftains intrusted with the Command of distant Provinces,” including the Bhonsles of Nagpur. Malet predicted that a general lust for plunder would exacerbate existing tensions between the Brahman “ministry” and Maratha “aristocracy,” leading to insubordination, rebellion, and war. “At all events, the season of blind implicit obedience is at and end,” he foreboded.782

In his “Historical and Political Glossary,” Malet provided notes on various terms that he encountered over the course of his research. Occasionally, these notes are quite detailed. Under the term “Marratta,” he rejected the claim that the Marathas are descended from Rajputs, but, referring to the Ā’īn-i Akbarī via Orme, he accepted that the Rajputs may have some connection

782 BL, IORPP, F149/2, ff. 117-20.
to pre-Islamic Persia. In the margins of this entry, he shared a rather curious anecdote to support his position on the Maratha-Rajput question: “One day conversing with the Regent Minister at Poona [Nana Phadnavis?] my Vackeel Nooral Deen Hussein Khan [Nur al-Din Hussein Khan], a man of much knowledge, but a great advocate for the opinion of the Mahrattas being Rajputes, in the course of conversation asked the Minister if a certain Person was not a Rajpute. He replied no and mentioned his Tribe. My Vackeel repeated is not that a Rajpute Tribe. He answered No, a Mahratta.”

Variety of content and source material is characteristic of the glossary. Certain entries on basic occupational designations, such as “Subadar” and “Sepoy,” are concise, while others on important personages and families, such as Nizam ul-Mulk are very long. Malet even managed to procure a translation of the portion of Lala Mansaram’s Maʿāṣir-i Nizāmī (1785) in which Nizam ul-Mulk advises his son Nasir Jang to make peace with the Marathas.

The glossary further illuminates how Malet struggled to fit the Maratha state into existing models of state structure. For example, under the entry “General Arrangement,” he compared Shivaji’s famous council of eight ministers (ashta pradhāna) to the electors of the Holy Roman Empire: “In this the Marratta Empire has great Resemblance to that of Germany. The original 9 German Electors were great officers of state or Emperor viz. Grand Marshal, Arch Treasurer, etc. This has in its original institution of those Officers…a Resemblance to the Pritanidee [pratinidhi] and Purdhans [pradhāna].” Re-iterating this analogy in a June 1787 letter to Cornwallis, he stated, “The Constitution of the Mahratta State is not dissimilar to that of Germany, where the Princes of the Empire live in a constant jealousy and apprehension of the

783 BL, IORPP, F149/39, ff. 10.
784 BL, IORPP, F149/39, ff. 20, 65-6, 75-6.
785 BL, IORPP, F149/39, ff. 67.
786 BL, IORPP, F149/39, ff. 100.
Malet’s entry for “Constitution” revealed just how little he thought of the ties binding these elements together. He surmised, “In the constitution of this Empire we have a recent and very extraordinary instance of the necessary steps by which a kingdom formed from numerous military connexions drawn by various causes under the influence of one man falls into a state of association without any of those compacts or the knowledge of any of those rules by which we in Europe impute information and by which we judge of societies.” Rather than a constitution, the Maratha state was held together by an interest in preserving the titles and possessions gained through service. In the absence of a constitution, the Marathas were guided by “the sanction of custom which in all societies must have preceded and been the foundation of compacts.”

Even more than custom, Malet in the entry for “Military Spirit” suggested that the animating force of the Maratha community was a “lust of rapine which ruling passion influenced by his [Shivaji’s] great Genius operated extraordinary Effects.” While this spirit was almost ennobled by Shivaji and “nearly extinguished” by Aurangzeb, “it has ever since been the policy of the Peshwas to employ the Passions of the Marrattas. Whence has sprung a spirit not of military but of predatory enterprise.” He concluded that the “leading trait” of the Maratha of the present day was “a fondness for depredation,” followed by “a paucity of ideas.” As for the Brahman, he noted that his “most prominent nature is avarice…with this difference that his exertions depend more on the mind than those of the Marratta which are almost confined to the body. Every species of trick, art, and chicane joined to the most patient perseverance is practiced

787 BL, IORPP, F149/3, ff. 478.
789 BL, IORPP, F149/39, ff. 103.
790 BL, IORPP, F149/39, ff. 106.
by this thrifty tribe with pursuit of gain.” This representation of “the modern Brahmins in their governmental character,” he acknowledges, is very different from that given by “philosophical European inquiries” into the so-called Gymnosophists of ancient India.\textsuperscript{791} Seduced by these earlier opinions, “the European Speculatist annexes to the Brahmin character an idea of sanctity,” and “views him meek and tender as the lamb shuddering at blood,” but “the Realist sees him shrinking back indeed with an affectation of horror at the destruction of an ant, but pursuing his rapacity, his avarice, and his resentments to the extirpation of nations.”\textsuperscript{792}

Malet’s glossary places his “sketches” on Maratha history in a new light. In his sketches, he conceived of the Maratha-Brahman combine as a moment within an organically evolving three-stage process of state-formation; however, the glossary reveals that his conception of the state was inextricably tied to fixed notions of inborn Maratha and Brahman character. The conjunction of Maratha body with Brahman mind could only ever engender a perverse chimera of a state. But unlike the Oriental despot, exemplified by the figure of Tipu Sultan, the Maratha-Brahman chimera was primarily characterized by its parasitic relationship with the social body. He explained this most explicitly in an August 8, 1788 letter to Cornwallis: “Averse to and probably ignorant of the systematic and equitable principles on which alone commerce can be rendered flourishing by encouraging the industry in the security and happiness of the subject, its chief attention seems directed to conquest and depredation, giving employment at once to the desultory military spirit of the Marrattas, and supplying the state and the chief individual Bramins with wealth and power.” Driven by a combination of Maratha rapacity and Brahman avarice, the Maratha state was only interested in territorial expansion for short-term gain, not for fueling a commercial economy or contributing to the welfare of its subjects.

\textsuperscript{791} BL, IORPP, F149/39, ff. 107.

\textsuperscript{792} BL, IORPP, F149/39, ff. 108.
Though Malet’s research systematized several existing assumptions about the Maratha state – foremost among them, its penchant for predation – he did not come nearly as close as Hastings to supporting a policy of interference, much less conquest, with respect to the Marathas. He cautioned against entering into any engagement with the Maratha state that might necessitate action on its behalf, even if such an engagement might work to advance “the general policy of disuniting the interests of the great feudatories of the Mahratta State.” Nevertheless, his ideas were significant because they firmly placed the Marathas outside of the “federation of nations” that were capable of and deserved a permanent peace. In subsequent administrations, Company officials would come to view the Marathas as being foremost among the predatory states that posed an obstacle to peace unless pacified or exterminated. The next section will explain how this view emerged, and how it appropriated and radicalized the language of plunder and predation developed during the Company’s search for Maratha history.

**The Birth of the “Confederacy”**

The defeat of Tipu Sultan in the Third Anglo-Mysore War of 1792 was widely celebrated as a triumph for the British nation unprecedented in Company wars in India. A renewed sense of patriotism intersected with a growing strategic concern among Company officials with the security of its possessions. While Douglas Peers locates the rise of the Company “garrison state” in the years following the Third Anglo-Maratha War, the concern with security that gave rise to this state is evident as early as the administration of Governor-General Richard Wellesley. At

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the same time, the Company’s official policy with respect to Indian politics continued to be one of cautious non-interference, and metropolitan leadership was still primarily concerned with protecting the Company’s financial and commercial interests. The work of Pamela Nightingale and Rudrangshu Mukherjee on Company expansion into Gujarat and Awadh has demonstrated that Company officials continued to view conquest in terms of the potential for a financial payoff through the creation of new opportunities for trade and the acquisition of land revenue. The Company’s economic and political frontiers were difficult to separate.796

Nevertheless, the Maratha question enacted a shift in Company discourse about Indian politics towards a language of international security and diplomacy. Company officials increasingly understood post-Mughal and post-Tipu Indian politics in terms of a horizontal field of nations competing within an overall “balance of power.” 797 Cornwallis’ successor John Shore in a March 25, 1793 minute outlined what he took to be “an important alteration in the political state of Hindostan” in the wake of the 1792 victory. 798 Recalling Malet’s terminology, Shore asserted that a “spirit of jealousy and ambition” animated the Company’s Indian allies, namely the Marathas and the Nizam. Shore viewed this spirit as a “collateral security to us; its operation without our participation and direction must necessarily tend to invest the balance of power in our hands, where it should be steadily preserved without throwing a preponderance into either of


797 The notion that Britain and its proxies would be the arbiter of the balance of power was not particular to this moment. The “balance of power” principle had been critical to the English understanding of European politics, both as they played out in Europe and in European colonial possessions, for much of the eighteenth century. See Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the British Empire, 1714-1783* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

the scales.” Unremarked in this minute is the assumption that the Company was not subject to the same balance of power as the other nations of India; rather, the Company was to be the arbiter of this balance. The tacit justification for making such an exception was the categorical, natural difference between the British state and “predatory” Indian states like the Marathas that Malet and others had already established on the basis of their historical research.

The balance of power was the “leading principle” of Dundas’ instructions to Wellesley at the beginning of his governor-generalship in early 1798. Dundas hoped that a balance would lead to reductions in military expenditure and a reorientation to commerce; however, Wellesley favored a much more aggressive “forward strategy” that would achieve a permanent security solution for British India. Edward Ingram has argued, “Wellesley set out to transform British India from one state among many, which depended for security upon a balance of power equivalent to the balance of power in Europe, into the paramount power.” Soon after his arrival in India in the spring of 1798, Wellesley learned that the Afghan ruler Zaman Shah Durrani – following in the footsteps of his grandfather and the victor at Panipat, Ahmad Shah Durrani – had prepared for a campaign in northwestern India by sending an envoy to the ruler of Awadh. The envoy also confirmed rumors that Durrani was in touch with the Company’s mortal enemy Tipu Sultan. Most alarming was the news that Tipu had capitalized on an existing


\[801\] Though their differences of opinion were not initially apparent, Dundas and Wellesley disagreed on many issues. Dundas was primarily concerned with addressing the French threat, while Wellesley saw many threats, both internal and external, to British possessions in India. Dundas sought to reduce the Company’s debt, while Wellesley believed security was the most important concern. Dundas wanted to reduce the size of the Company’s European army; Wellesley wanted to increase it. See Two Views, ed. Ingram, 1-14.

diplomatic relationship with the French monarchy to persuade the French governor of Mauritius to furnish troops for his army. Wellesley used this mission to stoke fears of a French invasion of India through Egypt. The French invasion of Egypt in October 1798 seemed to confirm a French push to the east in the long-term, even though it removed any possibility of aiding Mysore in the short-term.

To guard against the resurrected specter of French collusion and external invasion, Wellesley called for “a general defensive treaty of all the existing powers of Hindustan.” He instructed the Company’s residents at Pune and Hyderabad to negotiate the establishment of subsidiary alliances. His initial strategic objective was to obstruct the growth of French influence in the militaries of Indian governments. In response to the dramatic intensification of the military economy in this period, Indian rulers, notably Nizam Ali Khan and Daulatrao Shinde (1779-1827), employed European officers to introduce advanced drilling and disciplinary regimes into their armies. But they often struggled to amass the funds to finance these advanced military programs and to mollify the Arab and Afghan mercenaries who were quite happy to resort to arms to acquire their pay. Wellesley sought to capitalize on these problems by offering forces in exchange for an annual payment, or subsidy. While in theory this exchange would benefit

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803 Tipu had sent ambassadors to Paris as early as 1787-8. Later, he maintained a correspondence with Napoleon Bonaparte presided a “Jacobin club” at Srirangapatam as “Citoyen Tipou.” For a rich account of the reception of the embassy, see Meredith Martin, “Tipu Sultan’s Ambassadors at Saint-Cloud: Indomania and Anglophobia in Pre-Revolutionary Paris,” West 86th 21, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2014): 37-68.

804 Ingram, Commitment to Empire, 115-152.

805 Two Views, ed. Ingram, 25.

Indian governments by relieving them of the costs of administering a large, technologically sophisticated army, in practice it restricted their flexibility in meeting short-term debts, creating a convenient pretext for Company intervention and annexation of territory.

But at this juncture, Wellesley met with uneven success in imposing alliances on Indian governments. In 1798, the resident William Kirkpatrick negotiated an alliance with Hyderabad, suppressing the French military influence that had existed at that court under Michel Joachim Marie Raymond (commonly known as Monsieur Raymond). Article 8 of this agreement stated that the Company would serve as mediator in any dispute between the Hyderabad and Pune governments. But at Pune, the resident William Palmer was unable to negotiate a corresponding agreement. His difficulties stemmed from the chaos surrounding the succession.

In the last chapter, I detailed Nana Phadnavis’ attempts to control the succession process with the help of the Nagpur scribal-diplomats Krishnarao Madhav and Sridhar Laxman. Bajirao II finally won the peśvā title at the end of 1796, but he had few friends at court apart from Daulatrao Shinde. In addition to detaining and extorting Nana Phadnavis for cash, both Bajirao and Shinde imposed new taxes on the residents of Pune and coerced loans out of its bankers. After his release, Nana solicited an agreement with Shinde, which prompted Bajirao to send his munshī to Palmer to request the Company aid. Palmer initially demurred, but after Wellesley’s assumption of the governor-generalship, he changed his course, offering a subsidiary force to Bajirao in exchange for an agreement like the one executed at Hyderabad. Bajirao stalled as the Company once again went to war with Tipu Sultan.


808 *English Records*, ed. Sardesai, vol. 6, nos. 68, 95, pgs. 100-6, 150-2.

This war came to a close in May 1799 when Tipu perished in battle at Srirangapatnam. Considering its virtual non-participation in the war and fraternization with Tipu’s ambassadors, he nearly cut the Peshwa’s government out of the post-war territorial settlement. Bajirao challenged this decision when discussions for a subsidiary agreement re-started. In the ninth of a set of articles sent to Palmer on July 1, 1799, Bajirao demanded a share of the conquered territories equal to those of other powers; in reply, Palmer flatly dismissed “this unreasonable and unfounded requisition.” Bajirao was also unwilling to relinquish the Maratha claims to the cauth of Surat, and he made a rather maladroit request for the revenue of Pune’s share of the Mysore territory to be designated as cauth. Finally, he balked at the Company’s provision against employing Europeans in his government and asked for “a stipulation against the interference of British officers in the concerns of his Sirdars.” By the end of 1799, the talks had completely broken down. Palmer considered Bajirao to be a weak and faithless ruler under the malign influence of Daulatrao Shinde. He predicted that this alliance “will last no longer than it can promote Sindia’s views of rapine, of which Baajy Rao will find himself first the dupe and in the end the victim.”

Palmer’s representation of the relationship between Bajirao II and Daulatrao Shinde replayed old stereotypes of the Brahman-Maratha combine, but it also reflected Wellesley’s evolving policy towards the Maratha state. Two general assumptions about its structural

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810 See draft of treaty of Mysore in Despatches, Minutes, and Correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley, K.G. During His Administration in India, edited by Robert Montgomery Martin, volume 2 (New Dehli: Inter-India Publications, 1984), 26-33.

811 English Records, ed. Sardesai, vol. 6, no. 274, pg. 458.


813 Ibid., no. 304, pg. 506.

814 Ibid., no. 340, pg. 556.
dynamics conditioned this policy. First, Wellesley believed that the Company’s interests were best served by recognizing the Peshwa to be the only legitimate sovereign authority with the power to make war and peace and to negotiate with external powers. Secondly, he was convinced that this authority would be fatally compromised should other Maratha rulers choose to form an independent alliance, or, as he would come to designate it, a “confederacy.” More so than before the war, he now felt that “no injury can result to us from the interminable feuds of the Mahratta Empire, or from the mutual jealousy of the Peishwa and the Nizam.” Rather, he was more apprehensive of an “internal union of all the divided feudatory chiefs of the Mahratta Empire, or even a confederacy between the Peishwa and the Nizam.” In a March 14, 1799 letter to Palmer, he predicted, “The distractions of the Maratha empire must continue to increase until they shall be checked by foreign interference. No power in India, excepting the British, now possesses sufficient strength to interpose with effect in these dissensions.” He felt that a British subsidiary force was “the only means of restoring order, and of saving the whole of that country from plunder and desolation.” Bajirao’s scuttling of the subsidiary agreement negotiations exacerbated these concerns to the point that Wellesley in late August 1800 forwarded a set of instructions to Palmer regarding immediate steps should Shinde depose Bajirao or cause him to flee Pune. He was prepared to mobilize a force under his brother and commander-in-chief

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815 Two Views, ed. Ingram, 32-3.
817 Two Views, ed. Ingram, 228.
Arthur Wellesley to restore the Peshwa’s “just authority.” Restoration would be attached to a key condition: submission to a subsidiary alliance with the Company.

Wellesley’s strategy also included the solicitation of an alliance with the Nagpur government. In late 1798, he appointed H.T. Colebrooke (1765-1837), a scholarly associate of the Sanskrit scholar William Jones and future founder of the Royal Asiatic Society, to the mission. Colebrooke reached Nagpur on March 18, 1799 and met Raghuji Bhonsle the next day. The purport of his negotiations centered on the desirability of an alliance between the Company and Nagpur against Shinde’s “hostile designs.” Wellesley suspected “that Scindia has long viewed with jealousy and dissatisfaction both the acquisitions made of late years by the Bhossillah in the Malwa quarter and the favorable disposition which he has generally manifested towards the late Nana Furnavese.” In exchange for security and protection, Nagpur would cede all or a substantial portion of Orissa to finance the subsidy and, even more beneficially, to “establish the continuity of their [the Company’s] dominions from Bengal to the Northern Sircars.” Bringing Nagpur into the subsidiary system would allow Wellesley to counter Shinde, build the long-coveted corridor between the Company’s southeastern and northeastern bridgeheads, and prevent a “confederacy” between Maratha governments. Such a “confederacy” rapidly moved from eventuality to event in the coming months.


821 English Records, ed. Sardesai, vol. 6, no. 172, pg. 291.


823 BL, IORPP, H/575, ff. 704.

824 BL, IORPP, H/575, ff. 708.

825 BL, IORPP, H/575, ff. 713.
Recalling the days of Hastings, Colebrooke gradually realized that the Nagpur government was much less favorably inclined towards the Company than Wellesley had anticipated. In early 1801, he predicted that Raghuji Bhonsle would maintain his independence while continuing to welcome a Company resident as a marker of prestige. Finding this conduct to be “insincere and illusory,” Wellesley decided to recall Colebrooke in mid-April 1801. But even as Colebrooke prepared to leave, he gathered intelligence of potential anti-Company collusion between Nagpur and Pune. On May 8, Colebrooke obtained a letter sent by Bajirao to Raghuji from an unnamed individual working under Sridhar Laxman. Colebrooke’s translation of the letter suggested that Bajirao had instructed Raghuji to avoid a subsidiary alliance and to wait for the fruition of certain plans to “force them and even take from them our share of the territory lately embezzled by them.” Colebrooke’s footnote stated that the “them” in question probably meant “the English.” After his departure, he wrote on May 22 that he had learned through a “confidential agent” of Raghuji’s brother Vyankoji of plans to participate in an upcoming “general convention of Maratha chiefs” on the Godavari River. The conveners were thought to “harbour designs which are injurious to the Company but which are so in various degrees,” he warned. Though Colebrooke was not able to achieve his diplomatic goals, he kept detailed travelogues of his journeys to and from Nagpur in the manner of his predecessors.

826 Wills, *British Relations with the Nagpur State*, 154-7.


828 BL, IORPP, H/576, ff. 689.


830 *Early European Travellers*, 175-229. He also penned a very short “Memoir of the Origins and Descent of the present Bhosolah Family now on the Musnud of Berar” in which he maintained the regnant notion of the Bhonsles’ direct descent from Shivaji. See BL, Western Manuscripts, Add MS13589, ff. 1a-b.
The details of Colebrooke’s return trip shed some light on why the Nagpur government was disinclined to form a closer alliance with the Company. He passed through Gadha-Mandla along the banks of the Narmada River. In Chapter 1, I mentioned that Gadha-Mandla was one of several Gond kingdoms conquered by the Marathas in the 1740s. Whereas Devgadh came under the authority of the Nagpur Bhonsles, the Peshwa acquired Gadha-Mandla; however, Nana Phadnavis finally forfeited it to Nagpur in two stages in 1779-8 and 1795 to secure its loyalty. Colebrooke’s journey through Devgadh towards Gadha-Madla included a visit to Seoni and Chhapara, two towns that together formed the seat of a petty Afghan nawabī dynasty discussed in Chapter 1. Soon after Colebrooke’s visit, this household would fall on hard times. In 1808, the Bhonsles forced them to pay off their debts to their principal creditor, the merchant Gosāvī Kharak Bharati. They were reduced “to such distress as to be obliged actually to sell off their wearing apparel and other property to obtain even the common necessities of life.” But Colebrooke observed them in very different circumstances. He noted the impressive residences of the senior and junior branches of this household, remarking that the head of the latter “maintains the princely state of a grand feudatory, and, like an ancient baron in the feudal days of Europe, renders military service to the paramount.” In fact, Colebrooke was unable to meet the “grand feudatory” because he was rushing to suppress a mutiny in Raghuji Bhonsle’s army.

With the support of the Afghan nawabs of Seoni-Chhapara, the Bhonsles gradually displaced or subordinated the various local authorities that posed a challenge to their dominance in Gadha-Mandla. I referenced at the end of the last chapter that the Bhonsles’ army took the fort

831 See first section of this chapter and Chapter 4.
832 MPSA, “Musulmaun Jagheerdars of Seonee,” ff. 138; Grant, Gazeteer, 473.
833 Early European Travellers, 212.
of Hoshangabad from the *nawāb* of Bhopal in April 1796. Led by their top general Vitthal Ballal Paranjape and a diverse coterie of subsidiary commanders, including the Seoni-Chhapara ruler Muhammad Amin Khan and the Rajput general Beni Singh, they took a series of strongholds, including Chauragarh, Sohagpur, and Dhamoni, through the usual combination of violent coercion and pacific compromise. In 1799, matters became more complicated when the Pathan general and future *nawāb* of Tonk Amir Khan (1769-1834) threatened to attack Sagar, the headquarters of the Peshwa’s officer Balaji Govind Kher in the northerly adjacent region of Bundelkhand. Amir Khan had left his employment with the *nawābs* of Bhopal to take up with Yashwantrao Holkar (1776-1811), a son of the late Indore Maratha ruler Tukoji Holkar (d. 1797) whose succession disputes with his brother Kashirao propelled him into the life of a soldier of fortune. The Bhonsles briefly detained Yashwantrao at the behest of Daulatrao Shinde, but he escaped and built up his following, with Amir Khan’s assistance. The Bhonsles defended Sagar from the latter, but he and his Pendhari soldiers continued to haunt the northern frontier of their domain in pursuit of a permanent *jāgīr*.834

Nagpur’s push into central India in the late 1790s is important for several reasons. First, it catalyzed Amir Khan’s persistent efforts to acquire a *jāgīr*, which eventually served as a pretext for Company intervention. In the years leading up to the Third Anglo-Maratha War, the Company’s claims to “protection” of Nagpur were early formulations of an argument for a war of extirpation against “predatory” entities that threatened the permanent peace of India. Secondly, the competition for revenue and territory in central India that attracted such “predatory” entities reflected the displacement of existing centers of power and patronage, including Delhi, Lucknow, Mysore, and Hyderabad. As the Company seized control of the political and military operations of Indian governments, military men ranging from light cavalry

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834 *NBB*, ed. Kale, 191-4. For Pendharis more generally, see Conclusion below.
to skilled officers looked elsewhere for steady income. For example, Nagpur’s top general in their conflicts with Amir Khan in the late 1800s and early 1810s was Siddiq Ali Khan, an Afghan officer decommissioned after the fall of Tipu in 1799. The destabilization of the South Asian military economy contributed to the so-called “predatory system” that the Company fought to suppress in the Third-Anglo Maratha War and fully extinguished in the Thuggee campaigns of the 1820s and 1830s. But most importantly, Nagpur’s expansion with the formal approbation of Pune demonstrated that the two governments continued to be invested in cultivating a strong diplomatic rapport in order to enact a collective political future. While Wellesley observed that the weakness of Pune had exacerbated the divisions between Maratha governments, he failed to recognize that these divisions were embedded within a battered, but still intact framework of diplomatic negotiation and conciliation.

The “general convention of Maratha chiefs” that Colebrooke mentioned in his May 22, 1801 message had been in the works for several months. Daulatrao Shinde’s confidante and father-in-law Sarjerao Ghatge on March 8, 1801 wrote to Raghuji Bhonsle that his son-in-law “keeps faith regarding the plan (masalat). You should speak soothingly to Colebrooke. Here too we are talking to Colonel Palmer. Information about our intention to meet should be conveyed to the Nawab [Nizam Ali Khan] and to the English.” He later clarified that some communication to Company officials would be necessary because any unexpected movements would alarm

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837 BL, Mss Marathi, D37, ff. 42b.
them. Though he did not describe the specifics of their plan, he did include a telling set of statements: “You had also written that whatever should be said to the English and the Nawab will be said and that this year the plan will be executed. The dharma ought to be protected.”

Ghatge frequently refers to dharma and hindu-dharma in his correspondence. Such terms evoke a specifically Hindu conception of the Maratha state, but they also generally emphasize the ethical and existential stakes of the contest with the Company. Ghatge also referred to an earlier request that Bajirao had made for Bhonsle to send Sridhar Laxman and Krishnarao Madhav to speak with him. In conjunction with the Narayan Baburao Vaidya, son of their old partner Baburao Viswanath Vaidya, these scribal-diplomats continued to be responsible for all communication between the rulers. Bhonsle promised to give his permission for them to travel to Pune in January or February 1801, but due to some delay, they still had not left by September.

Meanwhile, the overall political situation worsened due to the complications of the Holkar dynastic succession. Refusing to couteanae his brother Kashirao’s succession, Yashwantrao supported his nephew Khanderao. But Shinde backed Kashirao, arrested Khanderao, and killed another brother Malharrao. In response, Yashwantrao committed significant damage to Shinde’s domains in the north over the course of 1800, and a third brother Vithoji raided the Peshwa’s territories further to the south. Bajirao eventually captured and, shockingly, executed Vithoji. Sarjerao Ghatge in a July 8 message to Raghuji Bhonsle indicated that the Company issue would have to wait until after the Dasara holiday in October because it was first necessary to quash these internal disputes. Still, he worried about whether the Company would use the upcoming monsoon period to make their own preparations: “We must observe the

838 BL, Mss Marathi, D37, ff. 43a.

839 BL, Mss Marathi, D37, ff. 44a-b, 46b-47a, 63b.
enemy’s behavior during the rains. We must be smart and keep an eye on their behavior.”

On October 30, having left Pune to join his son-in-law on the Narmada, he warned that four Company platoons had left Benares for Lucknow and that additional supplies were being amassed. Echoing Nana Phadnavis’ critique, he added, “On the outside, they say what needs to be said to be friends with everyone. They do not show their deviance.”

But an exact date for a “general convention” of all concerned parties was still not in sight.

With the assistance of the Nagpur scribal-diplomats, Bajirao II and Yashwantrao Holkar began to discuss terms of reconciliation in the early months of 1802, but these negotiations broke down. Yashwantrao moved south and came to blows with Bajirao and Shinde’s forces on the outskirts of Pune in October 1802. Bajirao was defeated and fled to Mahad in the Konkan and thence to Bassein to take refuge with the Company. Wellesley recognized this “crisis of affairs” to be “the most favourable opportunity for the complete establishment of the interests of the British power in the Mahratta empire.”

As the Secretary to the Governor-General Neil Edmonstone had conveyed to the new Pune resident Lieutenant-Colonel Barry Close on June 23, 1802, an agreement with the Peshwa “would preclude the practicability of a general confederacy among the Mahratta states.” At the same time, he hoped to avoid war by persuading Maratha rulers to recognize Bajirao’s authority, observing, “Justice and wisdom would forbid any attempt to impose upon the Mahrattas a ruler, whose restoration to authority was adverse to the wishes of

840 BL, Mss Marathi, D37, ff. 53a-b.
841 BL, Mss Marathi, D37, ff. 67a.
843 Ibid., 20.
every class of his subjects.”

But treating Bajirao as the sole Maratha sovereign in the subsidiary treaty of Bassein on December 31, 1802, the Company fabricated a constitutional framework in which Maratha governments’ distinct claims to sovereignty and affiliation would have no place. All would be subordinate to the paramount authority of the Peshwa, who would in turn be subordinate to the paramount authority of the Company.

Though deemed unconstitutional by the Company, the political obligations between Maratha governments endured. Wellesley on April 19, 1803 shared information from Colonel Collins posted to the camp of Daulatrao Shinde at Burhanpur about Shinde’s plans for “an accommodation with Jeswunt Rao Holkar, and a confederacy with that Chieftain, and with the Rajah of Berar.” Collins was unable to procure details, but this basic intelligence was accurate. Representatives of the three rulers were again attempting to meet to reconcile and formulate a united approach to the problem of the Company. Raghuji Bhonsle in an April 28, 1803 note to Bajirao’s brother Amritrao stated, “Bajirao has made an agreement with the English. The conduct of the English is deceptive. I understand as you wrote that at this time all of us should act with one heart to protect our dominion (svarājya). The security of the state of our dominion ought to be secured. No penetration ought to occur. Everyone should be reconciled.” He explained that the scribal-diplomats had returned to Nagpur after meeting with Holkar at Pune, and Shinde had sent a representative to Nagpur to confer with them. All parties having agreed to proceed, Bhonsle on April 18 entered his tents in preparation to march.

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844 Despatches, ed. Martin, vol. 3, 42.
846 Despatches, ed. Martin, vol. 3, 73.
847 BL, Mss Marathi, D37, ff. 71b.
By late May, Bhonsle was within a few days’ march of Shinde’s new campsite of Chikhli near Buldana. He wrote to Yashwantrao Holkar on June 2 of their impending meeting and urged him not to prolong negotiations (jāb-sāl) so that they could bring their plan (masalat) to its conclusion. He indicated that Khanderao Holkar would be released soon and that they were in touch with the Peshwa’s generals in the south, including the Rastes and the Patwardhans. After the war, Wellesley discovered that they were also in touch with leaders in north India such as the gosāvī Himmat Bahadur Anupgiri and Ghulam Muhammad Khan, the deposed nawāb of Rampur; however, at this juncture, he still maintained in his correspondence with the Court of Directors that that the proposed meeting was likely a defensive measure. Nevertheless, Wellesley’s approach to Collins’ delegation with Shinde was to force an admission of whether or not the Maratha rulers intended peace or war. Until Shinde retreated to north of the Narmada, and Bhonsle retreated to Nagpur, their mere proximity to the territories of the Nizam would be considered a threat to the Company’s ally. Frustrated by his failure to procure a reason for the meeting during an interview on May 28 with Shinde and his ministers, Collins declared that “the proposed interview between those chiefs was of itself, a sufficient cause to excite the suspicions of our government, inasmuch as the present tranquil state of affairs in the Deccan did not require the adoption of a measure, seldom resorted to but for hostile purposes.” He persisted in demanding more specific answers until Shinde finally disclosed that once he met with Bhonsle, Collins “should be informed whether it would be peace or war.” Wellesley wrote to Lieutenant-General Gerard Lake that Shinde’s language was “insulting and hostile, and amounts to a

848 BL, Mss Marathi, D37, ff. 75a-78a.
849 Notes Relative to the Late Transactions in the Marhatta Empire (London: J. Debrett, 1804), 28-9.
positive act of aggression upon every received principle of the law of nations."\textsuperscript{852} Desperate for an excuse to go to war, the Governor-General issued instructions to both Lake and his brother for how to proceed once he found one.

Bhonsle and Shinde privately conferred for several hours on June 8. Collins tried to learn the substance of their conversation and to convince the rulers to retreat, to which their negotiators responded by criticizing the Company’s dealings with the Peshwa. In a July 4 conversation with Collins, Sridhar Laxman “entered into a most tedious discourse” on the impropriety of the Peshwa contracting an alliance without the knowledge of his fellow rulers.\textsuperscript{853} Collins dismissed this “reference to old usages” and that there was no evidence that the Peshwa had no right to enter into such an agreement,\textsuperscript{854} a position that the Governor-General had carefully staked out after Bassein.\textsuperscript{855} Collins suspected that the rulers and their representatives’ professions of good will were disingenuous and designed to delay while they finalized negotiations with Holkar.\textsuperscript{856} To expedite matters, the Governor-General delegated final decision-making power to his brother, who had assembled a force near Ahmadagar. Arthur Wellesley directly wrote to Shinde and Bhonsle that only the separation and retreat of their armies would be considered a sincere indication of their peaceful intentions. They replied that they would agree to retreat together to Burhanpur if the Company’s army would retreat on the same day. Collins rejected this proposition. He would accept nothing less than the original demand for an immediate separation and retreat, to which the rulers would not accede. When he warned that

\textsuperscript{852} Despatches, ed. Martin, vol. 3, 165.
\textsuperscript{853} Despatches, ed. Martin, vol. 3, 237.
\textsuperscript{854} Ibid., 238.
\textsuperscript{855} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{856} Ibid., 170-2, 236-40, 250-1; Selections, ed. Forrest, vol. 1, 599-601.
Wellesley would brook no further delay, Sridhar Laxman “without hesitation replied, that should the honourable General Wellesley commence hostilities…Raghojee Bhooslah, and Dowlut Rao Scindia would consider themselves at liberty to march their troops in whatever direction they might think proper.”  

Collins left Shinde’s camp on August 3. Wellesley heard of his departure, waited out an early monsoon shower, and commenced the war by besieging the fort of Ahmadnagar on August 8.

Communication between Bhonsle, Holkar, and the scribal-diplomats in the days following the siege of Ahmadnagar further confirms the development of plans for an anti-Company assault that resembled Nana Phadnavis’ 1779-80 scheme. In the opening paragraph of this chapter, I quoted from a September 7 letter from Bhonsle to Holkar that strongly echoed Nana’s call for a quadra-directional response to Company encroachment. On August 24, 1803, Holkar wrote to Sridhar Laxman and Krishnarao Madhav after the conclusion of their visit to Pune. He re-iterated their words in an earlier message: “Our conversations about the matter of the English have taken place, and in connection with this, we have come to our master [Raghuji II] and sent him to meet with Shinde and resolve the negotiations (jàb-sāl ugawūn pāthavle). Now, there is no more uncertainty. The English have taken Ahmadnagar fort, and there is nothing wanting in [their] appearance. Both are ready to come to a confrontation. On this occasion, your arrival is essential.”

In this same letter, Holkar vacillated about joining Bhonsle and Shinde, complaining of six months’ worth of expenses incurred while locked in negotiations, and in fact, he abstained from the first few months of the Second-Anglo Maratha War. His ultimate failure to unite with his fellow Maratha rulers imparts a sad irony to his invocation of an


858 Notes, 63-4.

859 BL, Mss Marathi, D36, ff. 198a.
even more expansive anti-Company coalition in an August 28 note: “Now that us three [Bhonsle, Shinde, Holkar] are united, the rulers of the province of Hindustan and Samsher bahadur Bundele [Maratha ruler of Bundelkhand], and the ruler of Jhansi and others large and small will fall into line.”860 Had such a coalition been formed, it would no doubt have depended upon the practice of jawāb-suwwāl that had enabled Maratha governments to pursue peace, and now to pursue war.

The Second Anglo-Maratha War comprised two main theaters – one in the Deccan under Wellesley and one in north India under Lake – and additional strategic strikes on the western port of Broach and the eastern port of Cuttack. After several hard-fought battles at Assaye, Laswadi, and Adgaon, Bhonsle and Shinde surrendered and signed peace agreements at Devgaon and Surji-Anjangaon, respectively, in December 1803. In the following year, the Company went to war with Holkar and defeated him. Though Wellesley was recalled in 1805 and eventually impeached for his actions, he had transformed his brother Arthur into a war hero and the Company into the most dominant power on the Indian subcontinent. The war marked the end of Maratha sovereignty and the beginning of “confederacy” as the dominant framework for conceptualizing Maratha politics. I noted above that Wellesley used this term to characterize the pre-war coalition between Bhonsle, Shinde, and Holkar. The Notes Relative to the Late Transactions in the Marhatta Empire (1803-4), conventionally attributed to him, expanded its usage such that “confederacy” became roughly synonymous with the Maratha “empire.” The opening of this text draws on existing notions of predation while articulating this new theory of Maratha confederacy:

The predatory states composing the Marhatta power have never been united under any regular form of confederation, or by any system of constitutional laws, or of established treaties, which can be compared to any imperial constitution or general confederation existing in Europe. A vague and indefinite sentiment of common interest however, founded principally on their common origin and civil and religious usages, and upon their

860 “Nāgpūrkar Bhōślyāṇcī Saṃbandhācē Kāgādpatre,” eds. Sane and Oak, no. 78, pg. 148.
common habits of conquest and depredation, has established a certain degree of union amongst them, from the period of their first success, throughout every stage of the decline of the Moghul empire; and the same indefinite but acknowledged confederacy has subsisted between the Marhattas since the entire destruction of the Moghul empire, and together with others causes, has enabled several of these adventurers to erect states of considerable military resource and political power. 861

“Confederacy” in this key passage is primarily distinguished from “constitution” on the basis of the presence or absence of the rule of law. Whereas a constitution is established, regular, and systematic, a confederacy is vague and indefinite. Whereas a constitution is founded on laws and treaties, a confederacy is founded on mere habits, usages, and sentiments.

The Notes’ second key claim was that the only form of constitutional authority in the Maratha state was the Peshwa. Because the Peshwa was “acknowledged by all the Marhatta states, and universally by all the other states of India,” 862 he was “the constitutional representative of the sovereign executive authority of the Marhatta empire.” 863 Rhetorically, this claim buttressed the broader argument about the lack of a collectively determined Maratha constitution. More immediately, it provided a defense for Wellesley’s decision to negotiate with the Peshwa as the sole representative authority of all Maratha governments and to deny the latter any right to object to the agreement concluded at Bassein. This defense was critical to the now-dominant conception of the Company as a disinterested and benevolent arbiter of the balance of power between Indian states. As I hope to have proven in the foregoing chapters, this re-conception of the Company’s role in India, and the notion of Maratha “confederacy,” was

861 Notes, 1.

862 The author here inserts a telling footnote qualifying that while the rajah of Berar viz. Raghuji Bhonsle acknowledged the delegated sovereignty of the Peshwa, he also claims the office for himself. This admission may draw on Hastings and others’ belief that the Nagpur Bhonsles considered themselves to be sovereign within the Maratha state and resented the Peshwa’s authority. It also clearly undermines the claim that the Peshwa was the sole fount of constitutional authority in the Maratha state.

863 Notes, 1-2.
premised on a denial of Maratha politics as it actually existed for its practitioners. The Peshwa did not have a monopoly on constitutional authority; rather, I illustrate in Chapter 1 through the case of the sāt-cālīs agreement in Berar, Maratha and non-Maratha governments worked out their own treaty arrangements for limiting one another’s authority. Subsequent chapters have shown how Maratha rulers and their representatives transacted politics with a repertoire of sentiments, objects, and written agreements – which, as I have argued, was in toto known as jawāb-suwal – in line with a common set of norms of good and bad political conduct. Insofar as such norms, practices, and procedures collectively shaped the exercise of power, Burke’s argument that “to name a Mahomedan government was to name a government by law” should equally apply to the Maratha case.

**Conclusion: The Road to Extirpation**

The Company and the Nagpur governments entered into a treaty of “permanent peace and friendship” on December 17, 1803 at Devgaon. By its terms, the Nagpur Bhonsles ceded all claim to Orissa as well as to those territories in Berar where they had co-ruled with their friends, the Afghan nawabs of Ellichpur.\(^ {864}\) The Nagpur state’s western boundary was now fixed at the Wardha River, and its income dropped from approximately one crore to sixty lakhs of rupees per year.\(^ {865}\) Wellesley appointed Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859), the future governor of Bombay, to serve as the new resident at Nagpur. He instructed him “to be accurately informed of all that passes in his durbar, particularly with the Emissaries of Sindia and Holkar and the Southern Chiefs.”\(^ {866}\) In this capacity, Elphinstone and his successor Richard Jenkins would work closely with Yashwantrao Ramchandra, son of the Hyderabad envoy Ramchandra Dado and

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\(^ {865}\) Jenkins, *Report*, 122.

\(^ {866}\) *Nagpur Residency Records*, ed. Sinha, vol. 1, no. 5, pg. 4.
Nagpur’s representative in the treaty negotiations.\textsuperscript{867} The establishment of a permanent residency made it much easier for the Company to monitor the counsels, deliberations, and communications of the Nagpur government. Intermediaries like Narayan Baburao Vaidya would continue to move furtively between Pune and Nagpur, but it would be more difficult to bring *jāb-šāl* negotiations to fruition without Company obstruction.

Among the most pressing problems facing Elphinstone and Jenkins were the recurring attacks on Nagpur’s northern frontier from small bodies of cavalry known as the Pendharis (or Pindaris, in British parlance). The Marathi term *pendhārī* designated a category of light cavalry serving in a Maratha army on a casual basis. Daulatrao Shinde’s and Yashwantrao Holkar’s armies consisted of especially large numbers of such cavalry, who were predominantly Afghans and Rajputs from north India. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, certain groups of Pendharis organized under the leadership of Amir Khan as well as an array of lesser commanders for the purpose of acquiring *jāgīrs* from the Nagpur government.\textsuperscript{868} I would speculate that the emergence of the Pendharis as a major military and political threat was a product of Nagpur’s expansion into the Gadha-Mandla region and destabilization of local power centers such as Bhopal; however, a thorough examination of this question falls outside of my scope. More germane to this chapter is the way in the Pendhari problem interfaced with the Company discourse on Maratha predation. Company officials employed the frames of predation and plunder to conceptualize the historical link between the decline of Maratha power and the spread of Pendhari bands across the Indian interior.\textsuperscript{869}

\textsuperscript{867} See Chapter 6 and Conclusion.

\textsuperscript{868} Vartavarian, “Pacification”; Ghosh, *British Policy*.

\textsuperscript{869} For a more nuanced discussion of the role of Pendharis in Maratha military recruitment, see Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns*, 32-4.
Elphinstone’s and Jenkin’s despatches are filled with reports of Pendhari attacks and the paltry and hesitant nature of Nagpur’s military response. In 1809, allied Maratha and British forces led by Colonel Close and Siddiq Ali Khan defeated Amir Khan, but occasional attacks under different leaders persisted.\(^{870}\) Jenkins on December 30, 1811 sent a long letter to Governor-General Lord Minto containing “a review of the present political state of India” in which he observed that the “predatory powers” of Amir Khan and the Pendharris threatened the balance of power established by the recent treaties with Bhonsle, Shinde, and Holkar.\(^{871}\) While he had not obtained “any regular history of the origin and earliest state of the Pindaries,” he found that they were mentioned in “the earliest accounts of the Marhattles as attached to their armies.”\(^{872}\) The “natural result” of the dissolution of the bonds between the Pendharris and their Maratha overlords is “that the increasing consequence of these freebooters threatens to prove not more dangerous to the Marhatta States than to the British Government and to all the peaceful Governments of India.”\(^{873}\) Falling in line with his predecessors, he also considered the “possibility of invasion from without aided by such hordes of plunderers,” potentially in league with the French or the Sikhs.\(^{874}\)

Jenkins’ characterization of the Pendhari threat is remarkably similar to earlier characterizations of the Maratha state in its fixation on plunder and predation and its anxiety about the collusion of internal and external enemies. What is new is his consideration of a “war

\(^{871}\) National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), Hyderabad Residency Records (hereafter HRR), Prog. No. 201, ff. 11.
\(^{872}\) NAI, HRR, Prog. No. 201, ff. 12.
\(^{873}\) NAI, HRR, Prog. No. 201, ff. 13.
\(^{874}\) NAI, HRR, Prog. No. 201, ff. 17.
of extirpation” against the Pendharis. He outlines three main policies that might be adopted: defensive neutrality, collaboration with Indian governments to reduce Amir Khan and the Pendharis, and a more “decided system” to suppress them. Dismissing the first two policies to be inadequate, he breaks down the third into three options: a war of extirpation, sedenterization, or a combination of the two. He expresses much trepidation about the first option:

However we might be authorized by the laws of nations to proceed to this extremity, and however loud the calls of the suffering countries laid waste by the Pindarries, to excite us to vengeance against their merciless ravagers; however desirable, too, it may seem to pluck up so serious an evil by the roots, it is impossible to contemplate even as a measure of necessary policy the extirpation of such numerous bands. A war of extermination as a fixed system of action even against robbers and pirates has seldom been found politic or practicable and in our own Bengal provinces, we have experienced a policy more human to be at the same time consistent with our interests and our security. If then there is any other less severe mode of curing the evil, a wise and humane Government will not hesitate to adopt it.  

Jenkins ultimately shows more interest in pursuing territorial settlements for the Pendharis or combining two options. Nevertheless, his invocation of a “war of extirpation” is remarkable in light of the fact that Lord Minto only a few years later pursued such a war against the Pendharis. The Third Anglo-Maratha War, or the “Mahratta and Pindarry War” as it was known, was fought not only to consolidate British paramountcy over Maratha governments, but also to finally extirpate the figure of the plunderer.

At the same time that Jenkins was preparing his recommendations on the Pendhari problem, he was beginning to make inquiries about the history and current state of the Nagpur government. These inquiries would accelerate once the Company acquired full control over the government in 1817. With the help of his assistant Vinayakrao Anandrao Aurangabadkar, he searched for existing histories, documents, and letters related to Nagpur, commissioned new histories, collected testimonies from court officials and village officers, and surveyed the Chanda.

875 NAI, HRR, Prog. No. 201, ff. 25.
and Chhatisgarh districts. Such initiatives towards producing new, more “scientific” knowledge about the Maratha state were growing in the 1810s and 1820s at both Nagpur and Satara, but they drew on existing forms of scribal-produced historical knowledge with different didactic and commemorative ends. The Company’s encounter with scribal authors in the arena of the production of historical knowledge will be the subject of the following chapter.
CHAPTER 6: Scribal Histories, Company Knowledge, and the Ethics of Politics

Captain James Grant Duff, the British East India Company resident at Satara, met with Balwantrao Chitnis (d. 1843), the chief scribe of the young ruler Pratapsinha Bhonsle Maharaj on Wednesday, July 7, 1819. Grant Duff posed a series of questions on the history and composition of the Maratha state. First, he asked when and in whose administration the prestigious title of pant pratinidhi had been created and what became of it in later years. Balwantrao explained that the title had been created during the administration of Chhatrapati Rajaram at Ginjee and conferred on several individuals before passing into relative obscurity. Grant Duff then moved on to revenue. He inquired about its classification into various categories; the distribution and management of tax-free revenue assignments; and the remuneration of members of Shivaji’s council of eight ministers. Out of his depth, Chitnis suggested that they write to his father Malhar Ramrao (d.1823) to obtain papers pertinent to this subject.\(^\text{876}\) About ten years earlier, the elder Chitnis had included such information in a massive and detailed biographical narrative, or caritra, of the lives of the Bhonsle rulers. Grant Duff referred to this work in his magnum opus *A History of the Mahrattas* (1826). This chapter explores the relationship between scribal histories and Company knowledge about the Maratha state and exposes the limits of the latter in capturing the purpose and meaning of the historical tradition of scribal families.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Kayastha Prabhu scribal-diplomatic elites of the Chitnis lineage at Satara and the Chitnavis and Gupte lineages at Nagpur composed Marathi-language histories of the Bhonsle dynasties. Colonial and post-Independence historians looked to these histories for information about the rise and consolidation of Maratha rule in the western Deccan. But scribal writers also stressed the role of scribal knowledge and skill in the

Maratha polity. Most distinctly, Malhar Ramrao Chitnis drew on śāstric texts to make a case for the importance of scribal knowledge of rājnīti (political ethics) in shaping the conduct of kings. In so doing, he rendered the historical past into a vehicle for conveying ethical lessons for the future. At the same time, Chinis and his counterparts at Nagpur valorized the acts of service performed by their forebears, highlighting in particular the accomplishments of Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal, the first two Kayastha Prabhu scribes of the Chhatrapatis. While Grant Duff and Richard Jenkins, the Company resident at Nagpur, consulted these works in researching the Maratha political past, they ignored their connection to the accumulated knowledge and achievement of the scribal-diplomatic class that had worked at Maratha courts for over a century.

The histories examined in this chapter are part of a class of Marathi prose narrative called bakhar. Some scholars believe this designation is derived from the Arabic word khabar, meaning information, while others link it to the Persian salutation ba-khair, meaning “all is well.” These etymologies have in turn been linked to different pre-cursors for the bakhar, ranging from the Perso-Arabic akhbār (newsletter) to the Sanskrit akhāyikā (story). Primarily composed from the late seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries, bakhar tell the stories of famous rulers, prominent families, and major political events. They run to different lengths, employ a mixture of Persian- and Sanskrit-derived idioms and genres, and switch between prosaic, ironic, and hyperbolic modes of narration.877 As Sumit Guha has argued, while earlier bakhars drew on local fact and custom to determine the jurisdiction of newly conquered territories and to settle legal disputes, later “macro-bakhars” were often written at the behest of a ruler or ruling family to

877 For an overview of the genre, see Deshpande, Creative Pasts, 19-21.
commemorate the deeds of their ancestors. In short, the *bakhar* was a site for the representation of power that changed over time.\(^{878}\)

*Bakhars* have been part of a long debate about the emergence of modern history and historical consciousness in South Asia. Once the publication of *bakhars* began in the late nineteenth century, they were predominantly classified as works of literature of limited utility for writing history. V.K. Rajwade pointed out that they contained numerous inaccuracies of time and place. He believed that such errors demonstrated that *bakhar* authors lacked the requisite education to differentiate between suitable and unsuitable materials for writing history.\(^{879}\) T.S. Shejwalkar acknowledged Rajwade’s criticisms, but he argued that authors like Malhar Ramrao Chitnis exhibited an admirably selfless love of country in their writing that his own better-educated contemporaries had forgotten, in part because of Grant Duff’s unflattering portrayal of the Marathas.\(^{880}\) Nevertheless, most twentieth-century historians followed Rajwade’s conviction that historical knowledge should be grounded in the empirical verifiability of facts against “original” documents.\(^{881}\) Later published editions of *bakhars* emphasized their literary value, but they maintained a firm distinction between this value and the factual domain of history.\(^{882}\)

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878 Guha, “Speaking Historically.”

879 Rajwade attempted to correct this error by comparing several different *bakhars*, including that of Malhar Ramrao Chitnis, to establish an accurate timeline of Shivaji’s life. See Rajwade, *Rājwade Lekhasaṅgraha: Bhāg Ek*, 212-293. For a fuller explication of Rajwade’s philosophy of history, see Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 104-109.


Following the interventions of postmodern and postcolonial theory, scholars moved towards describing the modes of historical understanding of pre- and early modern narrative forms on their own terms.\textsuperscript{883} Important to this effort was the recognition of the embeddedness of historical narration in existing conventional genres of narrative discourse such as \textit{tārīkh} and \textit{tažkirah} in Persian and \textit{itiḥāsa-purāṇa}, \textit{vaṃśāvalī}, and \textit{caritra} in Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{884} Perhaps the culmination of this line of argument was Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s contention that the writers, readers, and listeners of early modern narrative were attuned to its “texture” of historicity.\textsuperscript{885} In a related vein, studies of particular regions, including Bengal, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra, have analyzed how representations of the Indian past promoted the ethical values of particular social and political formations and buttressed forms of collective memory and identity.\textsuperscript{886}

While many of these studies have focused on the royal and aristocratic ethos of Mughal, Rajput, and Maratha patrons, others have begun to examine the relationship between works of historical narrative and their authors, who were often


\textsuperscript{886} Deshpande, \textit{Creative Pasts}; Ramya Sreenivasan, \textit{The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in India, c. 1500-1900} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Talbot, \textit{The Last Hindu Emperor}. 

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drawn from Brahman, Kayastha, Khatri, and Jain scribal-bureaucratic classes. In the case of western India, Prachi Deshpande in a perspicacious study of Marathi mestakas, or writing manuals, has called for greater attention to how the ethics of scribal practice were expressed in bakhars and other long-form Marathi political narratives.

This chapter furthers this debate by showing that the caritra of Malhar Ramrao Chitnis narrated the Maratha political past to inaugurate a more ethical polity in the present and future. By framing the facts of Bhonsle rule and scribal service in terms of an authoritative received tradition of nīti ethics, Chitnis offered an historical truth that exceeded the evidentiary protocols of colonial and post-Independence historical practice. That is, the truth of history for Chitnis lay in its fitness for bringing an ethical future into existence through right conduct in the political sphere. While existing scholarship has primarily explained the inaccuracies and partialities of pre-colonial historical narrative in terms of its commemorative function, this chapter also attends to its didactic one. Chitnis told stories about the Bhonsles and their scribes in apparently prejudicial ways to model how those who rule and those who serve should and should not behave. Secondly, as I will show through the circulation of stories about Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal Chitnis, the didactic function of narrative entailed an ethical reflection on the historical experience of scribal service. Scribes in these histories were not mere writers, but instead they advised, instructed and even reprimanded the ruler in the interest of guarding the polity’s ethical integrity. During a period in which Maratha rule was increasingly fragile in the


888 Prachi Deshpande, “The Writerly Self.”
realm of realpolitik, scribal authors made themselves into the custodians of a living tradition of political ethics.

**History and Political Ethics in the Chitnis Caritra**

In the opening lines of the Shivaji portion of his *caritra*, Malhar Ramrao Chitnis claimed that Shahu Maharaj II commissioned a *caritra* of his ancestors in 1811, but since the latter died in 1809, we can assume that Chitnis actually began to write sometime between 1808 and 1811. Modern readers first encountered the *caritra* in installments published in the Marathi journals *Vividhajīnāvistāra* (Spread of Various Knowledge) and *Kāvyetihāsaṅgraha* (Collection of Poetry and History) from 1882 and 1887. K.N. Sane later edited and published separate editions of the Shivaji, Sambhaji, and Rajaram portions. In 1967 and 1976, R.V. Herwadkar edited the Shivaji and Shahu sections of the *caritra*, including extensive introductions and notes. While no manuscripts of the *caritra* are extant today, the editors of *Kāvyetihāsaṅgraha* had access to three: the Chitnis *prat* (copy), the Kolhapur *prat*, and the Indore *prat*. Malhar Khanderao Chitnis (d. 1908), the grandson of Balwantrao Chitnis, had sent the Chitnis *prat* to the *Kāvyetihāsaṅgraha* editors. Consisting of 676 *bandas* (folds), or 1,352 pages bound in leather, it is probably Chitnis’ original manuscript of which the Kolhapur and Indore *prats* were later recensions. Most significant is the ordering of *prakaraṇas* (chapters) in the Chitnis *prat*: first is the *prakaraṇa* on rājnīti, followed by the Shivaji *caritra*, including Shivaji’s exchange of letters with the Hindu poet-saints Tukaram and Ramdas, and finally the Sambhaji, Rajaram, and Shahu *caritras*.

Separate publication was convenient for drawing a wide readership; however, it obscured the essentially cohesive nature of Chitnis’ text and the prominent position of the chapter on rājnīti within it.

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890 In this dissertation, I cite from the Sane edition (1915) of the Sambhaji and Rajaram *caritras*. 
As signaled by the *rājnīti prakaraṇa*, the purpose of Chitnis’ *caritra* was ethical and didactic. The Marathi genre *caritra*, like the Sanskrit *caritam*, refers to the life-story of an individual, usually a male ruler or a god, construed as the sum-total of his accomplishments; however, the word can also be used in the sense of character. Hence the *caritra* carries a notion of ethical personhood built on a foundation of demonstrated and demonstrable ethical action. While kings are the subjects and addressees of Chitnis’ *caritra*, his primary audience consisted of court officials responsible for the education and guidance of young men of the royal family. Chitnis explicitly states his pedagogical intent in the opening lines of the *prakaraṇa*:

> O Ganesh! It will greatly benefit the kingdom and the king to hear and recite these political ethics (*rājnīti*) with the utmost regard and act accordingly. Those who would attain the kingdom by [its] growth ought to observe [these ethics]. These ethics were seen and practiced by great kings of the past like Manu and others. I have contrived to expound [these ethics] on the basis of the sciences (*śāstrādhāre*) in the language of Maharashtra. Those who would attain fitness in this world and the next should certainly examine [these ethics].

He elaborates that while the appellation *rājā* is applied to all sorts in the *kaliyuga* age, only those who seek to maximize the wellbeing of their subjects deserve the name. Kings are not those who merely wield power or call themselves kings; rather, true kings are those who practice right conduct in accordance with the knowledge of the *śāstras*.

Chitnis discusses the merits of an ethical education for a prince’s overall development in the Shivaji section of the *caritra*. The prince, he notes, is the right hand of the king, while the *amātya*, or head minister, is the left. The prince is integral to perpetuation of the kingdom, but if not properly educated in *rājdarma* (duty of kings), *daṇḍanīti* (ethics of punishment), and other subjects by the *amātya* and his fellow servants, he can also destroy it. The narrative episodes that fall before and after this passage – Sambhaji’s disobedience towards his father Shivaji and the latter’s chastisement of his dissolute brother Vyankoji Bhonsle of Tanjavur – dramatize the

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consequences of a young man of royal lineage coming to power without a proper education. They illustrate that the power of the king ought to be shaped and even restrained by an objective, external ethics held in custody by the political-bureaucratic class of which Chitnis and his scribal lineage were long-standing members. By placing ethical knowledge at the center of the education of the king, and by emphasizing the necessity of continuously evaluating kingly conduct against this knowledge, he reserves a prominent place for scribes, diplomats, and counselors in preserving and transmitting political ethics between generations.

The core of what Chitnis aims to teach rulers is nīti (ethics) and nītiśāstra (science of ethics). Nīti in its most basic sense denotes right conduct or practice, particularly in the sphere of politics. In contradistinction to dharma, or duty, nīti connotes a highly flexible and pragmatic ethics of the secular world, which scholars trace to Kautilya’s Arthaśāstra, written in the early first millennium CE. The scholarly consensus about the historical development of these concepts has been that nīti was absorbed into the worldview of dharma, embodied by the Manusmṛti and related legal commentaries, only to re-appear in the medieval and early modern periods in certain regional textual traditions. With respect to Sanskrit textual production, Sheldon Pollock finds a “contraction of the discourse on power” after 1700. Accounts of the trajectory of nīti in regional Indian languages vary. While Rao and Subrahmanyam have found a rich tradition in the Telugu regions of south India, Rosalind O’Hanlon claims that Maharashtra did not enjoy a

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892 Sheldon Pollock, *The Ends of Man at the End of Premodernity* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2004), 74.
similar resurgence in nīti because of the dominance of the rigid and ritualistic field of dharmastra.  

These authors make several assumptions: that the domains of nīti and dharma were separable; that the predominance of nīti ethics presupposes the existence of a more fluid social and political order; and that Maratha politics and government in particular was too dominated by an orthodox Brahman elite to allow for the flourishing of nīti principles. Chitnis constructs an ascending hierarchy of the fields of arthaśāstra, dharmaśāstra, and nītiśāstra. He advises that when coming to a decision on any given dispute, the ruler should first consult arthaśāstra. If a contradiction arises between arthaśāstra and dharmaśāstra, he should follow dharmaśāstra, but if dharmaśāstra conflicts with nītiśāstra, he should follow nītiśāstra. He gives weight to custom (ācār) in creating this hierarchy in favor of nītiśāstra:

I will say why nītiśāstra appears to be a stronger alternative than the two others. Nītiśāstra grasps that one ought to take note of the customs of country, the customs of caste, and the customs of family. If one violates the precepts of custom to follow the dharmaśāstra only, it will lead to the disturbance of one’s subjects, which accordingly will lead to the king’s infelicity. If we look at the customs of the country, we find that the unorthodox customs of marrying the daughter of a maternal uncle and eating onions are ancient in the south…If one maintains dharmaśāstra and destroys long-held customs, it will lead to the disturbance of one’s subjects. Therefore, according to prevalence, nītiśāstra is the strongest.

While offering some support to the theory that arthaśāstra was gradually incorporated into and perhaps eclipsed by dharmaśāstra, Chitnis’ construction of this hierarchy reveals that the flexible, pragmatic thinking of nīti ethics was still valued at Maratha courts because it could accommodate deviations from the Brahmanical orthopraxis of dharmaśāstra.


894 Chitnis, “Rājnīti,” 41.
Chitnis’ *caritra* was not the first example of a didactic text on political ethics in Marathi. The Satara royal library may have contained several such texts, including a manuscript called *Sevak-bodhinī* prepared for Pratapsinha’s Persian scribe Madhavrao. In all likelihood, the short *bakhar* authored by the Pune-based scribal clerk Balaji Ganesh – bearing the familiar title of *kārkun nisbat ciṭnīs* – in 1783 for Peshwa Sawai Madhavrao, and that fell into the hands of the British resident Charles Warre Malet, was pedagogical in purpose.895 Another text produced around the same time, the *Narāyaṇa-vyavahāra-śikṣā* (1785), was a table of instruction consisting of four sets of qualities or virtues (*guna*), which are in turn comprised of subsidiary qualities, all of which are phrased as commands.896 Malhar Ramrao Chitnis’ son Balwantrao compiled a similar list of 108 properties of political ethics (*nītilakṣaṇe*) at the request of Chhatrapati Pratapsinha.897 Two earlier treatises on the subject of *nīti* are published and well known to scholars of Maratha history: the *Dandanīti-prakaraṇam* (1680-83) of Keshav Pandit and the *Ājñāpatra* (1715-16) of Ramchandra Nilkanth Amatya.898 Because of the influence that it has exercised in the historiography of the Maratha state, I will briefly comment on the latter text with respect to its similarities to and differences from Chitnis’ *caritra*.

Unlike in the Chitnis’ *caritra*, Amatya imagines an ethic of political conduct determined in large part by the resolution of conflict between the ruler and the old landowning elite. Nevertheless, Chitnis’ treatment of *rājnīti* does resonate with Amatya’s insofar as its chief political goods are the physical growth (*vrddhi*) of the polity and the care (*poṣaṇa*) of its subjects. We have no way of knowing whether or not he had read the *Ājñāpatra*, but he does give

895 See Chapter 5.
898 For a more detailed discussion of this text, see Introduction.
a prominent place to Amatya in his discussion of the prince’s education and links him to Khando Ballal later in the Shahu caritra. He also seconded Amatya’s belief that the prosperity of the polity was the fruit of human and divine agency working in tandem. Yet he lays special emphasis on the importance of human effort in the world. Employing a karmic framework of action, Chitnis states that divine agency in the world assumes the form of fate (daita) to offer the initial thesis (purvapakṣa) of any action, while human effort (purushaprayatna) constitutes the action’s demonstrated conclusion (siddhānta-pakṣa). But since fate is the manifestation in this life of the accumulated merit (punya) and demerit (pāpa) of previous lives, it may be said that human effort is the cause and first basis (mūla) of fate and, by extension, of any completed action. It is significant that Chitnis takes these additional steps to justify the efficacy of human action. While both he and Amatya both understood the polity’s success to be ineffably linked to divine favor, he envisioned a greater role for the worldly means of political action that formed the centerpiece of nīti ethics.

These means are delineated in seven chapters: rājyāhīsheka (coronation), śrīsinhāsana-sabhā (throne and assembly), rājuguṇa (qualities of the king), amātya-sevakjani (minister and service people), ānhiṇa (daily duties) – two chapters divided into the first and second halves of the day – kośa (treasury), and bala (army). With the exception of the description of the coronation, this division roughly follows that of the Arthaśāstra. Chitnis includes core

899 Chitnis, “Rājñīti,” 63-5.

900 While we know very little about its author Kautilya, the received Arthaśāstra is a rescension of one or more original compositions on kingship and statecraft composed sometime between 50 and 125 CE. The Arthaśāstra in turn was a source for Manusmṛti and subsequent commentaries on dharmaśāstra, the popular collection of animal fables on rājñīti known as the Pancatantra, and other major works of Sanskrit science and literature. For a comprehensive introduction, King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India (hereafter KCL), ed. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford, 2013), 1-60.
concepts from the *Arthaśāstra*, including the seven limbs (*saptānga*) of the kingdom⁹⁰¹ and the six qualities of good policy (*shadguṇa*) for engaging one’s enemies,⁹₀² as well as secondary classifications of concrete information and illustrative references to mythological kings. At times, the correspondence between content and organization can be quite strong. For example, both Kautilya’s and Chitnis’ expositions of the ruler’s proper control of the five senses (*indriyanigraha*) refer to some of the same kings to illustrate the negative effects of passions deriving from attachment to the senses. Janamejaya of the *Mahābhārata*, who performed a snake-sacrifice in retribution for a snake’s killing of his father, is cited in reference to anger, while Ravana of the *Ramāyaṇa* exhibited pride in refusing to return Sita to her husband Rama.⁹₀₃

Chitnis pursued a thoughtful process of selection in his engagement with the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Manusmṛti*. Certain small differences may only derive from the particular rescensions that he read. In this category, we might place his reference to Rama in illustration of the passion of desire rather than Dandakya, who appears in the *Arthaśāstra*. Other variations, however, seem more deliberate. Whereas the *Arthaśāstra*’s explication of the three powers, namely power, energy, and counsel, appears first in the section on the *saptānga* and later with reference to the army, Chitnis chooses to locate it much earlier in the section of the *rājguṇa* chapter on the training of the king, thereby amplifying their significance.⁹₀₄ Whereas the *Arthaśāstra* lists three

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⁹₀¹ In Chitnis’ words, they are the following: king (*rājā*), minister (*pradhāna*), countryside (*rāśtra*), fort (*durga*), treasury (*kosha*), army (*bala*), and ally (*suhṛd*). See Chitnis, “Rājñīti,” 12; *KCL*, ed. Olivelle, 271.


⁹₀₄ Chitnis, “Rājñīti,” 14; *KCL*, ed. Olivelle, 275, 349.
vices stemming from wrath and four vices stemming from pleasure, and the *Manusmṛti* lists eight from wrath and ten from pleasure, Chitnis lists eight for each.  

Both texts discuss the king’s daily routine, but Chitnis borrows the *Manusmṛti*’s division of the routine into two discrete halves encompassing different topics in statecraft. He also draws on the *Manusmṛti* to articulate his own understanding of the ideal ruler. Evoking a Puranic sense of the god Vishnu as lord of the earth (*prthvīpati*), he identifies the ruler as Vishnu’s avatar (*aṃśa*) who ensures the preservation of all those belonging to to the sea-girt earth. He then builds on this association between the king’s physical dominion and care of subjects, describing him in Manu’s terms as an avatar (*devatāṃśa*) of the eight guardian deities of the cardinal directions.  

Along with his frequent references to classical treatises on political ethics, Chitnis produces a pedagogical effect through his use of figurative language. He relies heavily on *drṣṭānta*, a figurative device derived from Sanskrit poetics (*alamkāraśāstra*). Edwin Gerow defines *drṣṭānta* to be an “example” entailing “the adjunction of a second situation which bears upon the same point as the first and where the purpose is entirely one of illustration.”  

As Monika Horstmann has argued, the function of the *drṣṭānta* was similar to that of the *exemplum* of medieval and Renaissance literature in Europe: to illustrate a general truth by means of a specific proposition or narrative. Insofar as the prescriptive component of the *drṣṭānta*

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906 The guardian deities are Indra, Varuna, Vayu, Kubera, Agni, Yama, Rudra. See Chitnis, “Rājnīti,” 12; *MCL*, ed. Olivelle, 154.


determines the corresponding form of the narrative component, the structure of the device mirrors that of Chitnis’ text as a whole.

_Dṛṣṭānta_ can be found throughout the Chitnis _caritra_ but especially in the chapter on _rājnīti_. Take one simple example: “Powerful foes when divided become powerless. I will give an example (_dṛṣṭānt_ of this. Just as a branch is beset with maggots, so the branch falls to pieces.”

In the section on the king’s treasury, Chitnis opines, “Just as the calf of a cow that is milked too much will be weak and unfit for work, so overexploited subjects will be unfit for the king’s work.” As is evident from these examples, _dṛṣṭānta_ commonly made use of imagery from the natural world in order to make general principles vivid and easy to understand.  

Nowhere is this more evocative than in Chitnis’ aforementioned description of the ideal ruler. Having identified the ruler with the avatar of the deities of the eight cardinal directions, he elaborates, “This type of ruler is the one who expands the entire world. As the moon rises, it effects the exaltation and advancement of the ocean. In such a manner, the king by observing his proper duties nurtures his subjects, and by those means, the subjects and the kingdom are advanced.”

Certain _dṛṣṭānta_ appearing in the same contexts of both the _rājnīti_ chapter and the subsequent _caritra_ of the Bhonsle rulers help to establish unity of meaning within the text. In the section of _rājnīti_ on the prince, Chitnis says that just as an elephant without a rider and a goad becomes a menace to all, so an unwatched prince becomes a threat to the kingdom. If he seeks to rule the kingdom himself, it will be difficult to protect, just as a piece of meat is difficult to protect once

909 Chitnis, “Rājnīti,” 73.
911 Here one might draw a comparison to the way in which the famous _Pancatantra_ and _Hitopadeśa_, which have circulated in Sanskrit, Persian, and various regional languages in South Asia since the medieval period, use animal stories to demonstrate principles of political ethics.
it has been spotted by a tiger. He must be watched by careful and well-educated attendants, lest, like a lion’s cub, he devour his protectors. The same series of dhṛṣṭānta later appears nearly word-for-word in the caritra’s discussion of the method of educating Shivaji’s sons Sambhaji and Rajaram.

Chitnis relied on allusions to śāstric texts and figurative devices to communicate ethical principles, but these principles were grounded in his own understanding of the aims and composition of government. As noted above, he considered these aims to be the constant expansion of the polity and the inclusion of subjects within its protective embrace. In turn, these aims reflected an imagination of the ruler’s relationships to the broader polity and society.

Unlike the Ājñāpatra, which finds a basic conflict between the king and elite landed society, and the Arthaśāstra, which situates the king primarily in relation to other kings, Chitnis underscores the exchange of service and protection between the king and his followers and subjects. Whereas the rājmaṇḍala in the Arthaśāstra’s designates the circle of kings, it designates the king’s circle in Chitnis’ rājnīti. While Chitnis restricts the king’s circle to twice-born castes, he also states that inclusion into the broader political fold does not depend on one’s birth or station. Rather, those of all castes who are intelligent (catura), trustworthy (itbārī), and careful (sāvadh) ought to be recruited for political work and rewarded with protection. Thus, without going so far as to break entirely with orthodox views on caste, Chitnis makes an effort to prioritize skill and merit over ascriptive markers of status in determining access to politics and government.

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913 Chitnis, Saptaparakaraṇaṭmaka Caritra, 176.
914 Chitnis, “Rājnīti,” 33.
Chitnis made an especially forceful case for scribal participation in government in his
discussion of the king’s circle. He states that this circle consists of the ruler; his queen and heir;
the council of eight ministers (ashta-pradhana); and, most importantly, the two writers
(lekhakadvaya). While different iterations of the idea of the rajaṇḍala can be found in
descriptions of Shivaji’s administration in other bakhars as well as in various eighteenth-century
documentation and correspondence, Chitnis is alone in including this pair of scribal offices in the
inner circle of the king. He also gives them a prominent place in the coronation and assembly of
the king. In his description of the assembly, he states that the citnīs, or the writer of letters
(patra-lekhaka) and the phadnīs, or the writer of calculations (gaṇaka-lekhaka), should be
intelligent (catura), trustworthy (viśvāsū), and attentive to political affairs. In addition, the
citinīs should be clean, adroit, knowledgeable about the science of words (śabdaśāstra),
proficient in all languages and scripts, and perceptive of the intents and designs of others, while
the phadnīs should be careful, retentive, skilled in calculation, and capable of keeping a written
record of the wealth and treasury of the kingdom. The citnīs should sit on the king’s right-hand
side near the throne, while the phadnīs should sit in the corresponding position on the left.
Later, Chitnis re-iterates that the citnīs in particular should stay close to the king and follow the
same conduct of the head minister. He should be privy to the secret political counsels of the king
and his ministers, and because he is responsible for communicating with the king’s enemies, he

915 While it is possible that Balaji Avaji was involved with securing the Benares-born Maharashtrian
Brahman priest Gagabhatt’s participation in Shivaji’s coronation, his exact role in the actual coronation
ceremonies is unclear. See D.V. Kale, “Bakhars and Coronation,” in Chhatrapati Shivaji Coronation
Tercentenary Comemoration Volume, ed. B.K. Apte (University of Bombay, 1974-5), 7-19; V.S.

916 On similar pairs in Sanskrit legal digests, see Kane, “A Note on the Kāyasthas,” 741.

should think, behave, and act in a straightforward, guileless manner, even when he must deceive the enemy.

In short, the scribe in Chitnis’ view was more than a mere writer. Rather, he was a person of intelligence and discretion with whom the ruler enjoyed an intimacy in political affairs and entrusted with sensitive political communications.

Chitnis exhibited the quality of the scribe’s political intelligence in even more nuanced terms in the life-stories of his ancestors Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal. He intimates that they enjoyed an insight into the import of politics that exceeded the explicit meaning of the written word. In a well-known episode of the Shivaji caritra, Balaji Avaji, having been ordered to write and deliver a letter on some delicate political matter, reads out its contents from a sheet of paper in Shivaji’s presence. Seeing that the paper was blank, a nearby torchbearer bursts out laughing. When Shivaji asks about the outburst, Chitnis explains that he had been reading from a blank sheet; that he would now prepare the letter; and that he should be punished for his offense. Shivaji instead mercifully commands him to compose and read out the letter on the spot. Balaji sits, composes the letter, and reads it aloud, at which point Shivaji is delighted to find not the slightest discrepancy between this letter and the previously recitation. As Chitnis concludes, it was at this moment that Balaji was considered a political official (rājkāraṇī kārbhār) and an intimate official (samīpācā kārbhār).

The claim here is that Balaji not only had cleverness, but also insight and understanding. He did not simply hear the ruler’s instructions and write them down in a mechanical fashion, but rather he apprehended their inner meaning and adapted his communication to this meaning.

Chitnis further emphasizes the political insight of the scribe and his intimacy with the ruler by according Balaji Avaji the privilege of recording the messages received by Shivaji


919 Chitnis, Saptaprakaranātmaka Caritra, 163-4.
through divine visitation. As has been noted by many commentators, several Marathi *bakhars* represent Shivaji as an ideal ruler destined for political greatness in part by suggesting that he was visited and protected by the Hindu goddess Bhavani at critical junctures in his life. In Krishnarao Anant Sabhasad’s *bakhar* (1697), the earliest known account of Shivaji’s life, Bhavani reveals herself to announce Shivaji’s birth and to offer protection before his encounters with Afzal Khan, Shaista Khan, and Mirza Raja Jai Singh. Chitnis builds on these episodes. Occasionally, he repeats Sabhasad’s language, demonstrating that he made use of this *bakhar* in composing his own. But he takes the additional step of attaching his family’s name to Shivaji’s bond with the goddess. While Sabhasad merely states that a nearby clerk wrote down Bhavani’s messages and read them back to Shivaji, Chitnis avers that it was Balaji Avaji, along with Shivaji’s news-writer, who was tasked with putting the goddess’ words on paper.

One of Bhavani’s promises to Shivaji was to usher his polity through the travails of his son’s brief reign to a long life of twenty-seven generations. In Malhar Ramrao Chitnis’ rendering, Balaji Avaji and his descendants became guardians of the polity’s future by recording that promise for posterity. His own act of authorship made the case that they were also the interpreters of its past. In authoring a history of kings that was also a representation of the ethics of kingship, Chitnis contributed to his ancestors’ tradition of loyal and virtuous service. As I will explore in the next section, Chitnis believed this tradition was sufficiently resilient to endure and

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920 Take, for example, the goddess’ initial statement to Shivaji in preparation for his meeting with Jai Singh. In both *bakhars*, she exclaims, “O son, this moment’s occasion is difficult.” Except for the word used to signify a particular segment of time (*vel* in Sabhasad, *samay* in Chitnis), which I have translated as “moment,” their language is the same. *Śiva Chatrapatiśe Caritra*, ed. Herwadkar, 48; Chitnis, *Saptaprakaraṇātmaka Caritra*, 146.

921 Chitnis does not name this person, though it was most likely Dattaji Trimbak. On this appointment and its close relationship with that of the *cīṭnīś*, see Chapter 4.

922 *Śiva Chatrapatiśe Caritra*, ed. Herewadkar, 40, 48; Chitnis, *Saptaprakaraṇātmaka Caritra*, 70.
correct the transgressions of a bad king, should he stray too far outside the boundaries of ethical conduct. Chitnis and his counterparts at Nagpur underscored this resilience in their re-tellings of the lives of their ancestors.

**Scribal Histories of Service at Satara and Nagpur**

In the biographical sections of his *caritra*, Malhar Ramrao Chitnis dwells on the life-stories of Shivaji’s celebrated scribes Balaji Avaji and his son Khandoballal. Corresponding stories about these figures are found in two *bakhars* written by members of Kayastha Prabhu scribal-diplomatic families, whose careers were discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, for the British resident at Nagpur, Richard Jenkins. Gangadharrao Madhav Chitnavis wrote a *bakhar* in 1819/20.\(^{923}\) Sakharam Mahipat and other members of the Gupte family, drawing heavily on Chitnavis, wrote a second *bakhar* about a year later in 1820/1.\(^{924}\) In addition, both *bakhars* bear certain resemblances to two roughly contemporaneous Persian histories of the Marathas: Lachhmi Narayan Shafiq Aurangabadi’s *Bisâṭ al-Ghanâ’îm* (1799-1800) and the *Târîkh-i Râjahâ-yi Dakan* (sometimes called *Târîkh-i Shivâjî*). Jadunath Sarkar, noting the similarities between the *Târîkh-i Râjahâ-yi Dakan* and the *Śrī Śiva Digvijaya*, a bakhar published at Baroda in 1895 and spuriously attributed to Khandoballal, speculated that some lost late eighteenth-century *bakhar* must have been the original source for these histories.\(^{925}\) While we do not know if the Satara and Nagpur authors drew from the same written source, or if a copy of the Chitnis’ *caritra* made its way to Nagpur, the preponderance of similar details points to the circulation in

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\(^{923}\) BL, Mss Marathi, G33. A second incomplete copy of this *bakhar* may be found in BL, Mss Marathi, D42, ff. 43-186.

\(^{924}\) BL, Mss Marathi, D32. BL, Mss Marathi, G46 is a second incomplete copy with significant variations. The former Gupte *bakhar* was published as *NBB*, ed. Kale.

\(^{925}\) Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times*, 451.
oral and written form of common stories about the deeds of Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal in the twilight of the Maratha state.

As I have argued, the putative focus of the Satara and Nagpur bakhars is the history of the Bhonsle rājās and their polities, but the primary concern of their narratives is to recognize the contributions of Kayastha Prabhu scribal-diplomatic elites to these polities. The authors do this in part by means of common hagiographic stories that exhibit the skill, daring, and loyalty of Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal. Given the affinal and caste connections between the Satara and Nagpur scribal households, these figures were likely recognized as common ancestors whose accomplishments redounded to the general credit of Kayastha Prabhu scribal lineages. In particular, all of the bakhars recount the history of the first four Chhatrapatis – Shivaji, Sambhaji, Rajaram, and Shahu – by dramatizing Balaji Avaji’s punishment and death and his son Khando Ballal’s return to favor in the years between Shivaji’s death and Shahu’s rise to power. This narrative of crisis, decline, and restoration testifies to the absolute loyalty of the scribes, even in times of personal adversity, and links the integrity of their lineage and patrimony to that of their royal patrons. While they did not go so far as to include separate genealogies for their lineages or provide full details of marriages and births, they did acknowledge familial relationships between scribal elites. More importantly, they portrayed their lineages as embodying and transmitting the core virtue of loyal service (sevā ekānīshṭhā). Dynastic history became a site for cementing the legacy of scribal service to Maratha rulers.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I discussed the careers of scribal households in politics and administration at the Satara and Nagpur courts, including the varied nature of their appointments in the eighteenth century. Some of this detail for Balaji Avaji, Khando Ballal, and other Kayastha Prabhu officials who sought patronage in the early Maratha state is found in the Chitnis bakhars.
In general, the Nagpur texts offer a much sketchier account of the early years of the Maratha state, but they do join the Chitnis *bakhar* in recounting the circumstances in which Balaji Avaji fell out of the favor during the chaotic years following Shivaji’s death. All of the *bakhars* note that Balaji was tasked with sending letters of instruction to the superintendents of the fort where Shivaji had imprisoned his elder son Sambhaji in order to maintain his confinement and ensure the peaceful succession of Shivaji’s younger son, Rajaram. The Chitnis and Gupte *bakhars* correspond on several particulars regarding Sambhaji’s interception of these orders and subsequent escape to the Maratha capital at Raigad: the names of the couriers who carried the letters; the harsh measures he took against his guards; and his gruesome command to carry out the live burial of Soyrabai, Rajaram’s mother.

The accounts feature significant differences in terms of their descriptions of the circumstances surrounding Balaji’s involvement in the plot against Sambhaji and subsequent punishment and death as well as the explanatory strategies that they bring to bear on these claims. Though the Nagpur authors concur in assigning responsibility to Balaji, the Gupte *bakhar* provides some additional nuance:

> Afterwards, [Sambhaji] summoned Balaji Avaji Chitnavis and asked him why he wrote such letters. He stated that he had received orders from Rani Saheb [Tarabai Bhonsle] and Maharaja [Rajaram]. Then Sambhaji demanded, ‘Am I not your master? Being trusted since the old days, how can your pen have acted in this way?’ Having spoken these words, he was tied to the feet of an elephant and trampled to death.

In contrast, Chitnis takes greater pains to distance Balaji from these charges of sedition. In his account, Balaji refuses to write letters against Sambhaji. He states, “I am an officer of the king.

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926 This fort was almost certainly Panhala near Kolhapur, although the Chitnavis *bakhar* states that it was Pratapgar about 200 kilometers north.

927 *NBB*, ed. Kale, 16-7. Here, the shorter Gupte *bakhar* differs, stating that Balaji died in prison after a brother Nanaji was killed by elephant for failing to protect a fort from capture by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. See BL, Mss Marathi, G46, ff. 8a-b.
As my master is the elder Sambhaji Maharaj, I will not write. So there is no reason for you to apply such pressure.” When his employers insist that letters by his hand were necessary to secure cooperation, and that writing such letters was the responsibility of his office – whether their contents were good or bad – he makes his son available for the job. Sambhaji later commands Balaji to kill his son for this betrayal, causing him to give himself up in his place. Nevertheless, he and his son as well as his brother Shamji meet with their deaths beneath an elephant’s feet.

While Gupte states that Balaji’s surviving son Khando Ballal escaped with his mother to her natal home in the Konkan, Chitnis tells a different story. Learning of Balaji’s death, Sambhaji’s queen Yesubai defends the family’s loyal service against her husband’s unjust behavior:

You have done an improper thing in killing Balaji Prabhu, a ready and faithful man of many days. He was very close to the senior king [Shivaji]. It is said that the ciṅīs is the life of the kingdom. He has been given the ciṅīs post on a hereditary basis. Knowing this, and since he has not committed a crime, how could you have done such a thing?

Sambhaji shows contrition by committing Khando Ballal to Yesubai’s care and allowing him to compose letters on her behalf, thus carrying on the work of his father. But his full restoration comes at a later date, as narrated in a similar fashion in the Chitnis and Gupte bakhars. Both relate that while marching to a fort in the Konkan, Sambhaji was in need of someone who could write to the fort’s inhabitants to assure them that he would reach them in time to halt an impending attack. Khando runs to Sambhaji’s palanquin and deposits the requisite letter, which is then dispatched to the fort. After successfully defending the fort, Sambhaji credits Khando for

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928 Chitnis, Sambhājī Mahārāja Āṇī Thorale Rājarām Māharājā Yaṅcī Caritre, 3. Balaji Avaji had two sons who are mentioned elsewhere in the historical record: Khando Ballal and Nilo Ballal. This supposed third son named Avaji Ballal is likely the invention of Chitnis.

929 Chitnis, Sambhājī Mahārāja Āṇī Thorale Rājarām Māharājā Yaṅcī Caritre, 11.

930 Chitnis, Sambhājī Mahārāja Āṇī Thorale Rājarām Māharājā Yaṅcī Caritre, 12.
his timely assistance, restores his family’s duties and privileges, and even arranges for his care when he starts to vomit blood! Again, Chitnis provides more detailed than Gupte, naming the fort in question as Mandangad and adding another speech in which Sambhaji apologizes for his conduct and reaffirms the good name of Khando’s lineage.931

The bakhar authors underscore Khando Ballal’s ongoing credit and influence with the Bhonsle royal family from Sambhaji’s death through Rajaram’s brief and embattled reign to the arrival of Shahu to the Deccan in 1707. Chitnis includes several episodes, which I will not narrate here for the sake of brevity, in which Khando carries out dangerous political missions that result in his imprisonment and near-death. Along with the deaths of his father and uncle, such incidents are meant to demonstrate that while personal or even familial ruin may be the short-term risk of political service, the long-term benefit is to bind lineage and polity in perpetuity. Khando himself articulates as much to win over the Shirkes, a Maratha clan that had been nearly extinguished for their opposition to Sambhaji: “Just as your destruction (śirkāṇ) was effected, so three of my people died under the feet of an elephant. They too are gone. But we are fighting for the prosperity and dominion of the Hindus. Whatever circumstance may arise, we will fight accordingly.”932 Because political circumstances in fact divided loyalties, the bakhar authors employed narrative strategies to explain potentially disloyal conduct on the part of scribes.

Such an instance arises in a major episode in Khando Ballal’s story as told in all of the bakhars under consideration. Having got wind that Sambhaji’s son Shahu was encamped near Burhanpur after his release from Mughal captivity, the late Rajaram’s wife Tarabai in an attempt to retain the succession for her own son orders Khando to examine Shahu and declare him to be

932 Chitnis, Sambhājjī Mahārāja Āṇi Thorale Rājarām Māharāja Yāncī Caritre, 69.
an impostor. After meeting Shahu, he reports that he is the true son and heir of Sambhaji and
works to effect his succession. According to the Chitnavis and Gupte bakhars, Khando detects
his uncouth speech (rāṅgaḍī bolī) and north Indian ways (hindusthānī cāl), but Shahu’s head
page Jotyaji Kesarkar persuades him of Shahu’s authenticity by emphasizing that he had been
married to a daughter of the elite Maratha Shirke clan.933 The Nagpur authors further assert that
Khando Ballal recruited several of Shahu’s key supporters: Dhanaji Jadhav; Balaji Viswanath;934
and Parsoji Bhonsle, the first recipient of the senā sāheb sūbhā title and progenitor of the Nagpur
Bhonsle rulers. Tarabai had invited Parsoji to declare Shahu an impostor after she realized that
her trusted scribe had shifted his allegiance.935 When Parsoji finds Shahu to be a bit strange,
Khando relays the information about Shahu’s marriage and convinces him to eat from Shahu’s
plate, thereby verifying the young prince’s pedigree for all those assembled.936

Khando’s instrumentality to Shahu’s patronage of the Nagpur Bhonsle line does not
figure in the Chitnis bakhār; rather, Chitnis suggests that Parsoji fought on behalf of Tarabai.
Instead, Chitnis displays a more acute preoccupation with proving the fidelity of his ancestors. In
his re-telling, Tarabai asks her supporters to take an oath over a plate of rice and milk that they
will support her against Shahu. When she demands that Khando do the same before leaving to
meet Shahu, he equivocates, pleading that he is a lowly writer who would not trangress the

933 BL, Mss Marathi, G33, 6b-8a; NBB, ed. Kale, 25-6.
934 Khando Ballal is nowhere mentioned in Sohoni’s history of the Peshwa Bhat family. Instead, Sohoni
avers that Balaji Viswanath’s patron Dhanaji Jadhavrao who facilitated his introduction to Shahu. See
Peśvāncī Bakhar, ed. Herwadkar, 3.
935 Most genealogies of the Nagpur Bhonsles state that Parsoji had two brothers, Bapuji and Sabaji. While
the published Gupte bakhār states that Parsoji’s brother Bapuji was first invited, another unpublished
Gupte manuscript mistakenly gives Maloji as the name of this brother. The Chitnavis bakhār suggests
that Parsoji was accompanied by both of his brothers. See BL, Mss Marathi, G33, 7b; Mss Marathi, G46,
15a; NBB, ed. Kale, 26.
936 BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 7a-8a.
designs of his master. Like his earlier inclusion of the character of Balaji Avaji’s third son to assume blame for writing letters against Sambhaji, this plot detail strategically excuses Khando’s disobedience in defecting to Shahu.

The final extended episode in Khando Ballal’s life for which there is significant agreement between the Nagpur and Satara bakhars concerns Khando’s reaction to the punishment of Tarabai’s main partisan, the pant pratinidhi Parshuram Trimbak Kulkarni. In Chitnavis’ condensed account, Shahu seizes the pant pratinidhi upon taking Satara fort and immediately places a spike into his chest in preparation for plucking out his eyes. Once Khando realizes what is about to happen, he removes the spike from the pant pratinidhi’s chest and exclaims that he should be spared because he had guarded Satara fort against Aurangzeb. The Gupte bakhar does not refer to the method of punishment but notes that Khando was in the middle of taking his bath when he received word of Shahu’s actions. He implores Shahu to be merciful on the basis of the loyal service of the pant pratinidhi’s son Shripatrao in Hyderabad and Bidar. All of these details appear in the Chitnis bakhar, but the episode comes much later in the narration of Shahu’s reign. Here the pant pratinidhi does not receive leniency in recognition of his son’s loyalty; rather, he is to be punished because his son was supporting the rival Bhonsle line at Kolhapur. Chitnis further specifies that a court wrestler was holding the pant pratinidhi down by means of a stake and his foot when Khando entered the scene, pried the wrestler off of him, and threw himself at Shahu’s feet in full prostration.

This episode is roughly parallel to Sambhaji’s punishment of Khando Ballal’s father Balaji Avaji, transforming Khando into a corrective and expiatory figure within the relationship

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937 Chitnis, Thorale Šāhū Mahārāj Yāṅce Caritra, 17-18.
938 BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 9a.
between his family and the Maratha polity. Yet, Khando Ballal’s speech in Chitnis’ narration of this episode reveals how his text expands the virtue of loyalty that I have argued is integral to the ethic of patrimonial service put forth by these scribal histories. Having prostrated himself before Shahu, Khando pleads, “I am an offender in all ways. First pluck out my eyes or cut off my head, and then if you wish to punish the pratinidhi, give the order.” Confused and somewhat mollified, Shahu demands to know what Khando means to say. He explains, “Maharaj! Such a harsh punishment should not be applied to Brahmans. You are well aware of what befell the kingdom on account of what Sambhaji Maharaj did. Because of this, I have taken the liberty of lifting up the wrestler without your orders.” When Shahu then demands to know how he should act, Khando advises, “A servant like the powerful Parshurampant should not be harmed. Only if he has committed some shocking deed should he be so harmed. Put him in chains and lock him up.”940 Finally, when iron chains are brought out, Khando demands that someone of the pant pratinidhi’s stature be bound with chains of silver. In this account, not only does Khando intervene against Shahu’s command as a humble supplicant, but also he instructs the ruler on what punishment ought to be applied in the case of a distinguished Brahman official. As I explored in the last section, such episodes reflect Chitnis’ understanding of rājnīti as an objective, portable ethics accessible to scribes and kings alike.

The Satara and Nagpur bakhars take different courses following Khando Ballal’s intercession with Shahu. While Chitnis continues to narrate the remainder of Shahu’s reign, emphasizing the ongoing service of Khando and his sons and grandsons, Chitnavis and Gupte follow the careers of their own families at the Nagpur court. This section has shown that these authors presented a common origin story of scribal patrimonial service anchored in the loyalty of the first two citnīses of the Maratha state, Balaji Avaji and Khando Ballal. In emphasizing the

940 Chitnis, Thorale Šāhū Mahārāj Yāñe Caritra, 36-7.
deeds of these figures as well as those of the later scribal-diplomatic elites at Satara and Napgur, they used the bakhar genre to highlight their families’ contributions to Maratha politics and government. British East India Company residents at these courts recognized that scribes held knowledge of the past, yet they would largely ignore the vital relationship between scribal histories and their legacies of service. Company officials took the first step in transforming these rich testimonies of the political life of scribal classes into more or less verifiable chronicles of political events. In so doing, they laid the foundations for a new epistemic regime that would hold sway long after the demise of British imperial rule in India.

**Scribes and the Making of Company Historical Knowledge**

When he was summoned by his son Balwantrao in 1819 to provide documents to James Grant Duff, Malhar Ramrao Chitnis was living about seven kilometers southwest of Satara city in the village of Jaitapur. He had inherited the inām title to Jaitapur as part of the patrimony of his father Ramrao Jivaji. But the political turmoil of the past decade had put him in a situation of financial insecurity. As he stated in an order to the headman of Jaitapur on March 11, 1806, Khanderao Nilkanth Raste, a follower of Peshwa Bajirao II, had appropriated the inām revenues of Jaitapur for the past two years.941 His family may have lost their hereditary rights to land in the aftermath of the Peshwa’s punitive war (1798-1800) against Chhatrasingh Bhonsle, the brother of the Satara ruler and Malhar Ramrao’s patron Shahu II.942 They may also have been subject to a tax imposed by Yashwantrao Holkar after his assault on Bajirao II in 1803.943 Nevertheless, Malhar Ramrao retained his status at the Satara court, participating in the

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941 PD, Satara Jamav Daftar, rumal no. 1743, unnumbered document.

942 Chhatrasingh had made common cause with the Kolhapur Bhonsle rājā in a bid for independence from the Peshwa, but he was eventually captured and imprisoned.

coronation ceremonies of Pratapsinha in 1808 alongside the highest officials of the ruling

Meanwhile, recurring disputes between Peshwa Bajirao II and allied Maratha leaders created an opportunity for the Company to further consolidate its power in the western Deccan. When Holkar invaded Pune, Bajirao fled to Bassein and entered into a subsidiary alliance with the Company in exchange for protection. The terms of such alliances between Indian rulers and the Company specified that rulers were not to pursue negotiations with external parties without the Company’s knowledge. Nevertheless, Bajirao continued to pursue independent and clandestine political schemes. When his agent Trimbakji Dengle assassinated the Baroda minister Gangadhar Shastri Patwardhan in 1815, the Company condemned the assassination as a major breach of faith. On June 13, 1817, Mountstuart Elphinstone, the British resident at Pune, imposed a new treaty that essentially stripped Bajirao of any claim to sovereignty. Rather than submitting quietly, Bajirao, in close coordination with the government of Mudhoji II alias Appasaheb Bhonsle of Nagpur, ordered an attack on the British residency at Pune on November 5, 1817, precipitating the Third Anglo-Maratha War. After only twelve days of battle, British forces victoriously entered Pune city and planted the British flag on Shaniwar Wada, the residence of the Peshwas. Bajirao evaded British custody until June 1818, but his defeat in battle marked the effective end of sovereign Maratha rule in the Deccan.

Prior to the commencement of open war, Pratapsinha called upon Malhar Ramrao and Balwantrao Malharrao to obtain the Company’s support in a bid to restore the sovereign authority of the Chhatrapati. After conferring at the family seat at Borgaon, Balwantrao and


945 For this official’s relationship to the Kayastha Prabhu diwāns of Baroda, see Chapter 4.
several other officials despatched Rango Bapuji, a descendent of the Rohidkhore despânde Dadaji Naras Prabhu, to Pune to establish friendly relations with Elphinstone. According to testimony given much later in 1837, Balwantrao had recommended that Pratapsinha shift his allegiance from Bajirao to the British and requested that they restore him to his former authority should Bajirao fail to maintain the terms of the subsidiary alliance. Balwantrao also asked that the British reinstate his family’s confiscated land rights. A member of the Chitnis household honored Balwantrao’s role in these negotiations in a poem commemorating the war with the British and Pratapsinha’s subsequent coronation at Satara. His overall assessment of events is not favorable to the Peshwa:

The entire administration in the hands of the minister
Being [therefore] continually not in the hands of the king
After which some days and years passed
Which then seemed somewhat fitting
The minister Bajirao guarded the kingdom in every way
Near him there was an envoy of the copper-colored [English] officials
In remaining, he incited the strength of his mind in every way
In losing his mind, he pursued many schemes to seize the kingdom


947 B.D. Basu, The Story of Satara, ed. Ramananda Chatterjee (Calcutta: 1922), 352-4. This testimony was originally written in Marathi and delivered via Pratapsinha’s agent Rango Bapuji to John Milne, a retired EIC medical officer, who translated it into English as part of the body of evidence presented to Parliament after Pratapsinha was accused of treachery and deposed. For Rango Bapuji’s role in the plot, see Conclusion.

948 Deccan College Museum, rumal no. 55, file 1, “Krshnarva Râm Cîtnîs Yâne Sâtârcyâ Pratâpasinhâcâyâ Jivanâvara Racallele Kâvya,” śloka 2, stanzas 5-6. While the attached archival memo states that this poem was written by Krishnarao Chitnis in Borgaon in Shirale district in 1818/9, we have no independent verification of its authorship. Details in the poem’s narrative and the fact that the manuscript was submitted to the journal Bharatavarsha by Balwantrao Chitnis suggest that its author was a member of the Chitnis family. If the journal is right in giving his full name as Krishnarao Ramrao, he may have been Malhar Ramrao’s brother. See “Śrîpratâpsîmha-Caritra,” edited by D.B. Parasnis, Bhâratavarsha, no. 3, (Satara, September 1899): 1-8.
The poet then conveys that at the height of battle, “the son of Mallari (Malhar) Balwant by name of the family of Chitnis” was sent to the “general of the copper-colored people” to discuss the state of affairs. After this meeting, Pratapsinha relinquished all the weapons in his possession and met with the British on amicable terms in the hopes of securing his authority after Bajirao’s defeat. The poet underscored the efforts of the scribes in executing this work of negotiation:

   On this occasion, when the army came close to the king
   Together with those whose names ought to be heard
   Both sons of the ciṭnīś by the names of Yashwantrao and Balwantrao
   Who did all of the work that arose, Yashwantrao and Balwantrao

   Though he was called to Jaitapur in May 1819 to attend to an ailing daughter, Balwantrao maintained a residence in Satara after the close of the war and in fact received permission to build a new house in Shaniwar Peth in the city. He remained in the confidence of the re-installed Pratapsinha, but his influence competed with that of the resident James Grant Duff. Hailing from Banff near Aberdeen, Scotland, Grant Duff had served in the First Bombay Native Infantry in a number of roles, including Persian interpreter, and eventually he became an assistant to Mountstuart Elphinstone, who was made commissioner of the Deccan in 1818 and governor of Bombay Presidency in 1819. After the Third Anglo-Maratha War, Elphinstone appointed him as the resident at Satara on April 11, 1818. In this capacity, Grant Duff was responsible for educating the young rājā and preparing affairs of state for his eventual management, should he demonstrate himself to be a competent ruler. As part of his education,

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Pratapsinha kept a diary of events at court, including Grant Duff’s research in preparation for the composition of *A History of the Mahrattas* (1826).  

Like Mountstuart Elphinstone’s *Report on the Territories Conquered from the Peishwa* (1818) and Richard Jenkins’ *Report on the Territories of the Raja of Nagpore* (1827), Grant Duff’s *History* incorporated information provided by local informants. The persistent debate on the relationship between European officials and Indian informants in the production of knowledge about India has intellectual, institutional, and political dimensions that are beyond the scope of this chapter. In the most basic terms, we may divide this literature into two main camps. Proponents of the “colonial knowledge” thesis have argued that knowledge-production was a technology of colonial rule that produced profound epistemic transformation, while their critics have pointed to the central role of Indian informants and assistants in colonial knowledge-production, especially in the Company period, as well as to the significant continuities between pre-colonial and colonial forms of knowledge. This chapter offers a corrective to the assumption that the primary effect of Indian participation in the making of Company knowledge was to enable epistemic continuity. Critics of the “colonial knowledge” thesis are right to highlight the independent achievements of “precolonial intellectuals” employed by Company officials, yet they are at times too sanguine in their evaluation of the extent to which these achievements shaped Company officials’ conclusions about Indian history, society, and politics.

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Certain disciplines, such as grammar and epigraphy, did preserve pre-colonial knowledge, yet knowledge produced for governing Indian subjects largely discarded insights deriving from experiences of politics and political service – such as rājnīti – in favor of knowledge deemed “useful” to government in the mode of political economy. A comparison of Company knowledge-production at Satara and Nagpur shows that Indian court officials and assistants worked to forefront local knowledge and experience; however, their efforts were either dismissed or subordinated to the imperatives of Company government.

Grant Duff issued a general jāḥīrnāmā (announcement) calling for Satara residents to provide any relevant documents they might have, but he relied on court officials to provide Marathi (Modi) documents from the secretarial archives at Satara.955 He also drew on Company records and existing English, Marathi and Persian accounts, including the Chitnis caritra, the Sabhāsad Bakhar, Khafi Khan’s Muntakhab al-Lubab, the Gulshān-i Ibrāhim, and Orme’s Historical Fragments.956 As Prachi Deshpande has shown, Grant Duff aimed to produce a comprehensive fact-based historical narrative along the lines of the “philosophical histories” of the Scottish Enlightenment.957 Such histories, grounded in the discipline of political economy, examined an assemblage of natural, environmental, and human indicators to characterize the

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955 Kulkarni, James Cuninghame Grant Duff, 95.

956 For full list of sources, see Kulkarni, James Cuninghame Grant Duff, 105-110.

957 Deshpande, Creative Pasts, 72-80.
origins and advancement of human societies on a deep evolutionary scale. In the terms of this project, texts such as Chitnis’ *caritra* might be sources of more or less useful information about the origins of titles, revenue categories, and other matters that the Company sought to manage, but their deep connection an existing tradition of service was considered to be at best irrelevant and at worst pernicious.

Over the course of July 1819, Grant Duff regularly called Balwantrao Chitnis to his residence to interview him and to coordinate his efforts to retrieve and transcribe state papers. Two additional officials usually accompanied Chitnis: Vitthalpant Phadnis, who had been charged with supervising the affairs of Pratapsinha, and Aba Parasnis, the Persian scribe of the Satara government. Elphinstone’s former assistant Balajipant Natu, who continued to represent Company interests at Satara, also participated in these interviews. Pratapsinha privately discouraged Chitnis and Phadnis from handing over state papers to Grant Duff in an indiscriminate manner. He instructed them to sort through documents beforehand and immediately return documents to storage after showing them to Grant Duff, rather than leaving them with him. Any document transported was to be noted down and stamped. Grant Duff’s demands made it difficult to adhere to this protocol. During one session on July 15, he requested that a particular bundle of papers be left with him so that his private scribe and Parasnis could take them to an upper floor and make copies of them, which he estimated would take fifteen days. When Phadnis rejoined that the copies could be made in Parasnis’ house or in Grant Duff’s

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958 The influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on early Company officials such as Sir James Mackintosh and William Erskine through institutions such as the University of Edinburgh and the *Edinburgh Review* was significant. For example, Mackintosh attended the University of Edinburgh and later served as a judge in Bombay, where he founded the Bombay Literary Society in 1804. He also wrote several notable works on the French Revolution, the laws of nations, moral philosophy, and other pet topics of the Scottish-British Enlightenment. See Jane Rendall, “Scottish Orientalism: From Robertson to James Mill,” *The Historical Journal* 25, no. 1 (March 1982): 43-69; Martha McLaren, “From Analysis to Prescription: Scottish Concepts of Asian Despotism in Early Nineteenth-Century British India,” *The International History Review* 15, no. 3 (August 1993): 469-501.
residence, presumably in the presence of the officials, Grant Duff indignantly demanded to know why his intentions were being doubted. He added that his plan was to publish a book in England that would redound to their benefit.959 In this manner, Grant Duff and Natu often clashed with Pratapsinha, Chitnis and the other court officials.

Let me examine a couple interviews in greater detail. Earlier I described a conversation between Chitnis and Grant Duff on July 7 in which Chitnis promised to retrieve informative papers from his father Malhar Ramrao. Grant Duff followed up with him the next day, but Chitnis pleaded that his father still had not arrived from Jaitapur. He offered to provide whatever information came to mind but conceded that this information could not be certain. With some annoyance, Elphinstone replied that the work was progressing in a sluggish manner. Still, they carried on. Having been joined by Parasnis, they viewed a list (vādī) that specified the amounts of the revenue headings that Grant Duff had mentioned (e.g. bātī, sardešmukhī). The officials urged Grant Duff to view these figures with the caveat that there was no single custom or practice (cālī) in revenue administration.960 For example, in territories jointly administered with “mogal governments” (i.e. the government of the Nizam of Hyderabad), revenue was collected in accordance with the sāt-cālīs arrangement whereby the Marathas claimed forty percent and the Nizam sixty.961

Grant Duff expressed concern about the existence of such variation. He asked whether or not there was some elder in the city who might be able to provide more reliable information. Balajipant Natu advised that they bring in a clerk of the amātya, Sadashiv Bhagwant, who had

961 See Chapter 1.
papers containing relevant information. Next, Grant Duff asked about the precise meaning of the term svarājya. Chitnis stated that it referred to territory under the fixed management of the government, but Natu interjected that this answer was inaccurate and would be corrected by Bhagwant. Yet, once he arrived, Bhagwant had nothing to add beyond what was contained in the documents he had already given to Phadnis. Natu also objected to Chitnis’ reading of an order (farmān) provided with reference to the antiquity of sardēsmukhī and caūthāī revenue. Natu claimed that the word sādhle (acquired) should have been read as sādhel (will acquire) based on the location of the mātrā line signifying the tense of the verb. Grant Duff mirthfully commented that the officials fought well (achā ladhīte) when an argument ensued.962

Malhar Ramrao Chitnis announced himself at court on Friday, July 9, 1819. The next day, Balwantrao Chitnis and Phadnis presented Malhar Ramrao’s papers to Grant Duff, pointing to the figures recorded for the stipendiary and proprietary income of the members of the ashtapradhāna council.963 With reference to his inquiry regarding sardēsmukhī and caūthāī, they again urged that there was no fixed or permanent practice in the management of revenue and that these types of grants could be traced back to Shivaji, despite the fact that the dating of the farmān could only trace them to 1715 at the earliest. In support of this claim, they presented a 1694 grant (vatanpatra) of Cheul province to Khando Ballal, and, though they did not have documentation, they testified that Shivaji had given Mawal province to the Shirkes in


In this fashion, officials cited custom and precedent to caution Grant Duff against fetishizing documents as the only trustworthy representations of historical reality.

But Grant Duff continued to press officials to provide more material. On Sunday, July 11, he probed Chitnis about whether or not any agreements (tahanāme) from the period of Shivaji were available. Chitnis explained that all of those documents had been lost in the Mughal siege of Raigad. At the suggestion of Natu, Grant Duff harbored suspicions that there were additional papers in the possession of either Pratapsinha or Chitnis, but both insisted on several occasions that they had nothing further to offer. Chitnis also pointed out that he had given a copy of his father’s bakhar to Grant Duff. Grant Duff ordered a scribe Narayanrao to prepare an English translation of the bakhar in consultation with Chitnis. At the same time, he considered it to contain numerous falsehoods and exaggerations and on several occasions pushed Chitnis to verify its contents. For example, Grant Duff on July 19 sought further clarification on the activities of various holders of the pratinidhi title. Chitnis replied that he would have to check some papers (kāgad) at home. Thinking he had caught Chitnis in a lie, Grant Duff asked which papers he referred to, prompting him to clarify that he still had notes (tācane) on the basis of which the bakhar had been prepared.

Grant Duff was particularly concerned that the bakhar was biased in favor of Shivaji and his successors. The story of Shivaji’s killing of Chandrarao More, a local ruler who refused to

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964 While the former claim is included in the Chitnis caritra, neither received mention in Grant Duff’s History. In keeping with his practice, he relied on the Mughal farmāns to establish the dating of these grants. See Grant Duff, A History of the Mahrattas, vol. 1, 449-462; for Khando Ballal’s grant at Cheul, see Chitnis, Sambhāji Mahāraja Āṇī Thorale Rājarām Māharāja Yāṇći Caritre, 75.


submit to Shivaji’s overlordship, was troubling in this regard. In the July 19 interview, he asked Chitnis whether More was considered to be a Mughal servant or a rebel. Four day later, he noted that the bakhar had mentioned that Shivaji killed Chandrarao More but omitted the fact that More had helped Shivaji in the Radtondi mountain pass near Mahabaleshwar. This fact was apparently included in another book in Grant’s possession. Chitnis defended the bakhar, saying that if it did not say More had helped Shivaji, then More had not helped Shivaji. Grant Duff was unmoved. He peppered him with more questions, declared a painting of the war between Ram and Ravana to be full of lies, and lamented the lack of Hindus who were knowledgeable in the sciences of the “new books.”

Chitnis mounted an even stronger defense of his father’s bakhar in a later conversation on August 11 as recorded in Pratapsinha’s diary: “The good that happened was written as good; the bad that happened has been written as bad. Sambhaji Maharaja’s behavior was not good, and he destroyed everything, as has been written. Shivaji Maharaj’s behavior was good, as has been written.” He firmly believed that whatever his father had written down should be regarded as true.

Grant Duff’s opinion of the Chitnis bakhar was far more ambivalent. On July 17, 1819, he wrote to Elphinstone that it was “a mass of nonsense, though not despicable as it stated some important facts.” The following year, he was somewhat more generous, stating that it was “on the whole most valuable…but is in general defective in the early details we wish to get.” Similarly, in the History, he opined that Chitnis had not made “good use” of his materials;

968 For Chitnis’ account, see Herwadkar, SaptapraKaranaṭmaka Caritra, 54-5.


however, he valued the materials themselves, praising Shivaji’s instructions to his officers, written by the hand of Balaji Avaji, as “very complete and satisfactory.”\footnote{Grant Duff, \textit{A History of the Mahrattas}, vol. 1, 120.} Grant Duff recognized the stature of Chitnis’ lineage and held an especially high opinion of Balaji Avaji. He noted his “acuteness and intelligence” and even stated that he was indebted to him for the papers that allowed him to understand the institutions of the early Maratha state.\footnote{Grant Duff, \textit{A History of the Mahrattas}, vol. 1, 238, 308.} He also reproduced some of the episodes in Chitnis’ life-stories of Balaji Avaji and Khandu Ballal, despite his objections to the veracity of his \textit{bakhar}.\footnote{For example, see his rendering of Khandu Ballal’s assistance to Rajaram in evading capture by Mughal authorities after the fall of Raigad in Grant Duff, \textit{A History of the Mahrattas}, vol. 1, 368-370.} But he ignored much of the concrete information in the \textit{bakhar} regarding the careers of scribal officials. More generally, he remained steadfast in his view that the Chitnis \textit{bakhar}’s value for historical understanding of Maratha politics and government was restricted to what could be verified against “original” documentation.

The relationship between historical experience and historical knowledge within the research and writing enterprise of the Nagpur resident Richard Jenkins took a very different form. Jenkins had served as the acting resident at Nagpur since 1807 when his predecessor Elphinstone was called away on separate business. He became the official resident in 1811.\footnote{For the earlier history of the Nagpur residency, see Chapter 6.} As early as August of that year, Jenkins shared with Elphinstone his desire to obtain “all the information which can be procured on the various important topics of investigation presented by the ancient and modern states of this Country.”\footnote{BL, MSS Eur E11, letter from Richard Jenkins to Mountstuart Elphinstone, 8/11/1811, ff. 153.} He also asked Elphinstone to forward any information on the connection between the Nagpur ruling family and the Peshwa and relayed that
his assistant Barry Close was beginning to study the Gond peoples of the region and to form an idea of their language. In November, Jenkins procured a short sketch of the government from “an old female domestic” in the Nagpur rājā’s palace. Yet his research efforts seem to have been limited by the constraints of the residency arrangement. He hoped that these efforts would accelerate once he received permission to establish a subsidiary force at Nagpur, but the old rājā Raghuji Bhonsle II avoided a formal alliance with the Company.

Upon Raghuji’s death on March 23, 1816, his son Parsoji succeeded to the throne. But because Parsoji was young and mentally troubled, he was unable to retain the loyalties of leading officials. The Persian scribe and counselor Shridhar Laxman, whose career I discussed in chapter 4, immediately retired to Varanasi. Jenkins presumed that he so abruptly quit public affairs because he was disgusted with the machinations of the Kayastha Prabhu scribe Narayan Yashwant alias Naroba Chitnavis, who Jenkins dismissed as “a poor Carcoon [kārkun] or under writer in the office of the Chitnaveese.” As referenced in Chapter 4, Naroba had been Krishnarao Madhav’s assistant, and at this juncture, he was a key member of a faction that had coalesced around Raghuji’s widow Bakabai Bhonsle and adopted son Dharmaji Bhonsle in opposition to the ambitions of Raghuji’s nephew Mudhoji II alias Appasaheb Bhonsle. While Krishnarao’s brother Gangadharrao Madhav held the official title of ciṭnavīṣ, Naroba had cultivated a close relationship with the late rājā and took part in external negotiations with the Peshwa and other Maratha governments. He also aimed to impose his control over the process of


978 NAI, HRR, file no. 203, letter from Jenkins to the Earl of Moira, March 25, 1816, ff. 171-2.

979 NAI, HRR, file no. 203, letter from Jenkins to the Earl of Moira, April 22, 2016, ff. 242.

980 NAI, HRR, file no. 203, letter from Jenkins to the Earl of Moira, March 29, 2016, ff. 178-196.
negotiating an alliance with the Company. Instead, Appasaheb eventually locked him up with the rest of those who opposed him.\(^{981}\)

Having consolidated his authority as regent, Appasaheb and Jenkins ratified a treaty of perpetual alliance on May 27, 1816. In July, Jenkins sent a long description of the physical boundaries of the Nagpur state, the composition of the government and army, and the distribution of land-holdings, revenue, and expenditures to the Governor-General.\(^{982}\) Much of this information was later included in his *Report on the Territories of the Raja of Nagpore* (1827). In February 1817, Parsoji Bhonsle died of mysterious causes. Jenkins suspected that Appasaheb was involved in his death but still supported his succession. His suspicions were exacerbated by reports that Appasaheb was pursuing a secret communication with Peshwa Bajirao II in contravention to the terms of the subsidiary alliance.\(^{983}\) Hence, Jenkins understood the arrival of a robe from Pune on November 24, 1817, just a few weeks after Bajirao’s attack on the Pune residency, to be an ominous sign of Appasaheb’s intentions. Two days later, Appasaheb ordered his own attack on the residency, which resulted in his rapid defeat and surrender. Like Bajirao, he fled from British captivity and remained in exile in Jodhpur until his death in 1840.

Having taken full control of the Nagpur state, Jenkins began to make arrangements for the installation of Raghuji II’s grandson, to review and reorder the government, and to ramp up his research efforts. Sometime between the end of 1817 and 1820, he solicited an account of the Nagpur Bhonsle dynasty from Beniram Dube, who was mentioned in Chapter 5 as envoy to the Company government at Calcutta during the administration of Warren Hastings. Dube relayed

\(^{981}\) NAI, HRR, file no. 203, letter from Jenkins to the Earl of Moira, June 13, 2016, ff. 294.

\(^{982}\) NAI, HRR, file no. 203, letter from Jenkins to the Earl of Moira, July 18, 1816, ff. 307-345.

\(^{983}\) NAI, HRR, file no. 204, letters from Jenkins to the Marquess of Hastings, May 30 and July 10, 1817, ff. 141-162. For the terms of the treaty, see *A Collection of Treaties*, ed. Aitchison, vol. 5, 93-99.
the request through members of court to Gangadharrao Madhav Chitnavis. Jenkins’ instructions specified that the writer should produce an account (bayānā) of the Bhonsle line (silasilā) focusing on how the first Raghuji Bhonsle obtained his grants and titles from Chhatrapati Shahu; who he campaigned against; who he elevated; and who he brought into servitude.984 Chitnavis’ account was later translated into English for Jenkins’ perusal.985 He gave similar instructions to his deputy Captain Wilkinson in 1822. It was on the orders of Wilkinson that the Kayastha Prabhu official Sakharam Mahipat Gupte with the advice of his uncle Balwantrao Mahipat composed his bakhar.986 A second partial bakhar dated to May 17, 1822 was written by Sakharam Mahipat and Krishnarao Mahipat Gupte along with two other officials on the orders of Jenkins and Nagpur’s chief general, Siddiq Ali Khan.987 As we explored earlier, these scribal histories departed from Jenkins’ imprimatur in their emphasis on the accomplishments of scribal officials, including many members of their own families. Finally, Jenkins also procured short narrative accounts of Bhavanipant Kalo, Raghuji II’s lead general and diwān; the Afghan rulers of Seoni-Chhapara; and several other local feudatories of the Bhonsles.988

Jenkins gained more access to local government records than Grant Duff by delegating the research work to his main agent and interpreter, Vinayakrao Anandrao Aurangabadkar. Aurangabadkar had worked for Jenkins since the latter’s appointment to Nagpur in 1807.989 He is

984 BL, Mss Marathi, G33, ff. 1a-b.
986 BL, Mss Marathi, D32, 1a-b.
987 BL, Mss Marathi, G46, ff. 1a.
988 BL, Mss Marathi, D39.
989 BL, Mss Marathi, D34, 2a.
most likely the person designated in Jenkins’ correspondence as his “Marhatta Moonshee,”
though he was equally if not more proficient in Persian.\footnote{990} In this capacity, he had been
responsible for writing and carrying messages between Jenkins and the Nagpur rājās. In 1815, he
began collecting information on the past and present state of the government and its environs.\footnote{991}
The archive that Aurangabadkar amassed for Jenkins was vast and eclectic. He authored a short
account of Berar; an early statement (\textit{kaifiyat}) of Nagpur’s history composed of partial narratives
(1812); a relatively condensed full history of the Nagpur Bhonsles with a very pronounced
chronological ordering and short accounts of major court officials; a Persian version of the same;
and two much longer histories interspersed with oral testimony, documents, figures, and
references from other \textit{bakhars} and \textit{tārīkh}s.\footnote{992} With the exception of the 1812 \textit{kaifiyat}, these
works appear to have been composed between 1816 and 1827. Many of the documents that
Vinayakrao extracted were also included in separate ordered compilations and abstracts of
official papers, including the correspondence of Raghuji Bhonsle II.\footnote{993} It is also likely that
Vinayakrao accompanied Jenkins and prepared field-notes from tours of the Chandrapur and
Chhatisgarh districts near Nagpur in 1820 and 1823, respectively.\footnote{994}

Aurangabadkar presented the materials that he gathered in such a manner that Jenkins
would easily be able to comprehend them. He was especially meticulous about summarizing

\footnote{990}{See, for example, NAI, HRR, file no. 204, letter from Jenkins to the Earl of Moira, May 9, 1817, ff. 81.}
\footnote{991}{BL, Mss Marathi, D33, ff. 2a.}
\footnote{992}{See BL, Mss Marathi, D33-34, B26; IO Islamic 3062.}
\footnote{993}{See BL, Mss Marathi, D35-36 for compilations of documents; D37-38, B14 for compilations of Raghuji Bhonsle II’s letters; and D29-30 for collections of \textit{sanads}, which though not explicitly attributed to Vinayakrao may have been put together by him.}
\footnote{994}{BL, Mss Marathi, D44, D46.}
content and establishing a linear chronological order with reference to multiple dating systems. Each event in the longer histories of the Bhonsles is variously assigned a śālivahāna śaka year used in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist calendars; a hijrī year, a fašlī year, and a suhūr year used in Islamic calendars; and a Christian/Gregorian isavē year. At the beginning of his major document compilation, he listed each document in tabular fashion with a short summary of its contents and the date of its production, including day and month information in the Hindu vikram saṃvata and Islamic systems and in some cases, the year according to the rājyābhisheka śaka calendar created during Shivaji’s rule. He also includes a list of the cyclically recurring names of vikram saṃvata years; a cheat-sheet with the year for each calendar corresponding to 1819 A.D.; and a brief explanation of how the nine-year difference between suhūr/arabī and fašlī years is to be calculated on the basis of a formula (śloka) he heard from a reputable gentleman (saṃbhāvita grahasta).

Aurangabadkar explained in the introduction to this compilation that he had gathered and numbered these papers (kāgaj) stored in the treasury and in the house of the Chitnavis family in order to write his history (tavārīkh) of the Nagpur Bhonsles. He stated that he gained access to these papers through the auspices of Gangadharrao Madhav Chitnis. Furthermore, he noted Chitnavis’ descent from Rakhmaji Ganesh, the cousin of Govindrao Khanderao Chitnis who migrated with Raghuji Bhonsle I from Satara to Nagpur. Aurangabadkar’s reliance on the papers of the Chitnavis’ family and recognition of their ties to the Satara Chitnisces demonstrates the extent to which his and Jenkins’ project benefited from the accumulated knowledge of the scribal establishments of Satara and Nagpur.

995 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, 2b-15a.
996 BL, Mss Marathi, D35, 17a-20b.
Aurangabadkar incorporated the historical experience of the Chitnavis scribes in the form of testimony (jubānī) in his most extensive history of Nagpur. This history is a remarkably catholic pastiche of original narrative; translated and/or condensed sections from existing bakhars and tārīkhs; transcriptions of documents ranging from grants (sanads) to orders (ājñāpatre) to agreements (vādi); and eyewitness testimony (jubānī) offered by individuals conversant with the events described. In the preface, Aurangabadkar states that he wrote this text on Jenkins’ orders to supplement his shorter kaifiyat and Persian history so as to bring the account of the dynasty up to 1817. In addition to his own works, he made reference to six existing histories in Persian and twenty-five in Marathi. The Persian list is impressive and includes several texts composed by authors associated with the Nizam of Hyderabad: al-Hamdani’s Sawānih-i Dakan, Shah Navaz Khan’s Maʿāṣir al-Umarā’, Azad Bilgrami’s Khizānah-i ʿĀmirah, and the Tārīkh-i Āṣaf Jāh. The Marathi titles are less specific, but they include bakhars from Pune and Nagpur, which likely included those of Gangadharrao Madhav Chitnavis and Sakharam Mahipat Gupte.998 He adds that during his employment with Jenkins, he listened to the testimony of the ruler’s officials and included them in his history.

The most frequently quoted individual in Aurangabadkar’s history is Yashwantrao Ramchandra, the son of the Hyderabad envoy Ramchandra Dado, who was one of the most influential negotiators between Jenkins and the Nagpur rājā. But Aurangabadkar spoke to many other individuals who held titles to landed property and government office. Sometimes, he simply attributes testimony to person(s) of Berar or Pune (e.g. through the descriptors puṇevāle, varādkar). The number, diversity, and physical placement of testimony suggest that Aurangabadkar made an effort to be as inclusive as possible, even going so far as to place

998 BL, Mss Marathi, D34, ff. 1a-2a.
testimonials in the margins of the page. While some testimony was probably hearsay or rumor, the language of certain testimonials indicate that Aurangabadkar did speak directly to individual officials who had worked at Nagpur for many years. Consider Vyankatrao Kashi’s testimony to his part in the murder of Peshwa Narayanrao, which we discussed in Chapter 5: “Testimony of Vyankatrao Kasi. Sabaji Bhonsle made contact with Nawab Nizam Ali Khan. Over there in Pune, Raghoba Dada conceived a plan to place himself on the throne and so reached out to Hayedar Nayek [Haidar Ali] for his help. So I and my brother, named Laxmanrao, went to Pune to meet with Dadasaheb on behalf of Mudhoji Bhonsle senā dhurandhar.” Aurangadkar interpolated testimony of this kind with bits of narrative from multiple texts and documents from the Nagpur secretariat without comment as to its “veracity” compared to other sources. By treating his materials in such an exceedingly egalitarian manner, he assembled a far more polyvocal compilation of historical experience than what passed muster with Company historians.

Prior to submitting his official report to Governor-General Lord Amherst on July 27, 1826, Jenkins composed a draft history with a section entitled “Historical memoir of the Mahratta Rajahs of Nagpore.” While he later reproduced some portions of this text in the final report, much of it was omitted. The “Historical memoir” is more explicit about its source materials and less certain in its judgments. Jenkins made notes in the margins next to claims about which he was uncertain. He included many narrative episodes from the Chitnavis and Gupte bakhars as well as some pieces of individual testimony. While drafting, Jenkins continued to search for documents to verify details of time and place. For example, he wrote in the main body of the text that Raghuji Bhonsle I died in February or March 1755. Next to it, a marginal note in pen states that “the general report of persons at Nagpore places this event one if not two

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999 BL, Mss Marathi, D34, ff. 55a.
years earlier,” but that this report must be false given the dating of another event. A second, later marginal note in pencil confirms the March 1755 death-date on the basis of a sanad granted by Janoji Bhonsle to a priest for a ceremony performed thirteen days after his father’s death.\footnote{1000 BL, IORPP, Mss Eur F34, ff. 100b.} His recounting of Narayanrao’s murder mentions the involvement of “Mudhoji’s vakeels,” but it does not name Vyankatrao and Laxmanrao Kashi, much less state the particulars of their lineage and service.\footnote{1001 BL, IORPP, Mss Eur F34, ff. 152b-153a.} Although Jenkins had allowed Aurangabadkar to build a deep and variegated archive, he ultimately privileged those materials that helped to corroborate the facts of a rather narrow dynastic history.

Jenkins’ report was published in 1827 by the Company government press at Calcutta under the title Report on the Territories of the Rajah of Nagpore. The Report’s historical section features almost none of the details about the scribes, counselors, and diplomats of Nagpur that figured so prominently in Chitnavis, Gupte, and Aurangabadkar bakhars. Some of the officials with whom Jenkins dealt, such as Gangadharrao Chitnavis, are named in the section on the administration, but their lineages and longer careers of service not given place.\footnote{1002 Jenkins, Report, 150.} Overlooking the considerable political work accomplished by the holders of the title of citnavīs, Jenkins puts it simply, “The Chitnuveese is the general secretary, in whose office all orders, grants, and letters are expedited or answered.”\footnote{1003 Jenkins, Report, 148.} Most strikingly, Jenkins thanks several of his British assistants with providing information for the report, but he never credits Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar. All of the potential richness of historical understanding that Jenkins had gained by partnering with local officials to complete his research – instead of working against them like Grant Duff – was

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ultimately lost in his final product. Lost too was the contribution of Aurangabadkar in making that product possible.

**Conclusion: The End of Politics**

Amidst the accusations of conspiracy and treachery that rocked the final years of Chhatrapati Pratapsinha’s reign, Balwantrao Malharrao Chitnis on May 23, 1837 while sitting in a prison cell prepared a statement in defense of his conduct towards the new Company state. Rango Bapuji, another Kayastha Prabhu follower of Pratapsinha’s about whom I will say more in the Conclusion, brought this statement to a Company doctor by the name of John Milne. Milne’s translation of its opening lines reads:

> During a long line of ancestors up to this moment, they and I have been in the habit of serving the Maharaj Sirkar, with all our ability and energy, during the lifetime of each of the sovereign princes of these dominions, and they also have done everything good for us within their power, and still I have the prospect of their favour which we have always enjoyed; and I have derived every happiness during a long period in serving such a noble prince as his present Highness, which I have enjoyed both before the time of the treaty and since its execution between the Maharaj and the British East India Company.\(^{1004}\)

Balwantrao’s language, even in translation, strongly recalls the idea of *vamsa-paramparāgat sevā*, or hereditary service, that undergirded the tradition of Kayastha Prabhu service in the Maratha state for over one hundred years. But the force of Balwantrao’s invocation of this language in this context lay in its contestation of the opinions of those officials who had turned Pratapsinha against him. Apparently, these officials convinced Pratapsinha that Balwantrao had inspired the Company’s dissatisfaction with the Chhatrapati.\(^{1005}\) Milne in a separate letter stated that Balajipant Natu – referenced earlier as Elphinstone’s and Grant Duff’s assistant – and other


Brahmans had conspired against Balwantrao because of his attacks on their caste. 1006 Both Pratapsinha and Balwantrao had been involved in public disputes with the orthodox Brahman faction at Satara over the question of Maratha and Kayastha claims to Kshariya status. 1007 Now, it seems, both had fallen afoul of the Company, while Brahmans like Balajipant Natu were on the ascendant.

The fall of Maratha rulers like Pratapsinha Bhonsle of Satara and Mudhoji Bhonsle II of Nagpur signaled a contraction of the political possibilities open to Kayastha Prabhu scribal administrators. In the first half of the nineteenth century, these possibilities were increasingly confined to either staking one’s claim to a particular caste status, as exemplified by the Kshatriya debates at Satara, or to a particular set of rights to land. In the absence of a sovereign state with a coherent ethical purpose, what had long been merely one reason for doing politics – access to social and economic resources – was fast becoming the only reason for doing politics. In the Conclusion, I will reflect further on this contraction of politics under colonial rule with reference to some of the paths that Kayastha Prabhu officials took in the years leading up to the rebellion of 1857.

In this chapter, I have charted a brief, but deeply rooted efflorescence of a tradition of scribal writing on political ethics that defied this contraction. Through his composition of a text on rājnīti, and an accompanying caritra of the Bhonsle rājās, Malharrao Ramrao Chitnis explicated the virtues of political conduct and, even more importantly, made a case for their trusteeship by scribal officials. Linked to this didactic purpose was a commemorative one evident in both the Chitnis caritra and the bakhrs composed by scribes at Nagpur. Kayastha Prabhus narrated and sometimes embellished the deeds of their ancestors in order to lay claim to

1007 O’Hanlon, Caste, Conflict, and Ideology, 24-41; Wagle, “Ritual and Change.”
the ethical inheritance of the Maratha polity. Company historians were blind to these intentions and instead understood scribal-authored histories to be inadequate to the writing of factual history. Yet, the case of Richard Jenkins’ research assistant Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar demonstrates that even those employed in the Company’s enterprise of empiricist history-writing could find creative ways to incorporate different kinds of sources and to recognize the experiences of the unseen officials and operatives whose talents were essential to the politics of the Maratha state.
CONCLUSION: One Last Oath

“The time is very strange and difficult. Each and every man, whether small or mighty, should spend his days with honor in his own solicitude and confinement. This is my concern. It does not seem to be the time to give or accept anyone’s trust. Each day that I pass is a blessing. I am bankrupt here. I do not have any money or grain. Let it be. Just as God allows, so I will live.”

-Letter from Shridhar Laxman Nagnath to Narayanrao Vaidya, December 12, 1823

The scribe, counselor, and diplomat Shridhar Laxman handwrote these stoical lines from Varanasi, where he had retired from Nagpur in 1816 to escape the turmoil surrounding the death of his late employer Raghuji Bhonsle II. While he hoped to pass the remainder of his days in peaceful obscurity, Narayanrao Vaidya, the son of his old colleague and friend Baburao Viswanath Vaidya, needed his help to win back inām rights to the villages of Waiagaon and Mundgaon in Berar. These rights were among those granted to Shridhar, Baburao, and the scribe Krishnarao Madhav in recognition of their successful brokerage of an agreement between the Pune and Nagpur governments prior to the battle of Kharda of 1795. But Ramchandra Dado, Nagpur’s vakil at Hyderabad, and his son Yashwantrao Ramchandra maintained a competing claim to Baburao’s inām. Narayanrao and Shridhar protested this claim in light of the fact that the former Governor-General Richard Wellesley had confirmed Narayanrao’s inheritance, presumably after the Second Anglo-Maratha War of 1803. Perhaps not coincidental to his reversal of fortune was the fact that he, following in his father’s footsteps, had been one of the main conduits of clandestine communication between the deposed rulers Appasaheb Bhonsle of Nagpur and Peshwa Bajirao II of Pune. Narayanrao’s proprietary claims were tainted by his

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1008 BISM, Vaidya Daftar, rumal 21, no. 36, letter dated December 22, 1823.

1009 See Chapter 4.

1010 BISM, Vaidya Daftar, rumal 21, no. 35, letter dated December 22, 1823.
political past as a new Company government of property took the place of the scribal politics of the old regime.

Along with Narayanrao’s contested rights to the revenues of Waigaon and Mundgaon, the rights conferred on Krishnarao Madhav after Kharda had been confiscated by the Nizam during the Second Anglo-Maratha War and subsequently released on the orders of Wellesley. But it appears that the descendants of Krishnarao Madhav were not able to hold on to these rights following the death of his son, the previously discussed bakhar author Ganghadhar Rao Madhav. Beginning in the late 1820s and early 1830s, the ownership of these rights came under the Company’s scrutiny because the heir of Ganghadhar Rao Madhav had been adopted. On December 6, 1850, an official by the name of B.H. Ellis found against the claims “preferred on the part of the Nagpoor Chitnees” to their inām villages in Berar. His reasoning was that because the current claimant, Haibatrao Anant, was only related to the “original grantee” through adoption, and because there were no “lineal descendants” surviving, “the guarantee of the British government must be considered to have expired.” Similarly, Ellis denied the petitions of Sridhar Narayan, the fourteen year-old adopted grandson of Sridhar Laxman. He stated, “It appears that the villages were assigned as a bribe to the dependants of the Nagpoor Raja, and in return for the gift, the grantees were expected to use their influence with the Raja, favorably for the interests of the Peishwa. The grant was a part of the corrupt system prevalent in the Poona court in the later years of the Maratta rule, and it is not surprising that villages thus obtained should not long remain in the possession of the grantees.” Under a Company state still scarred by the scandals of the Hastings impeachment trial, profiting from politics was anathema.

1011 NAI, HRR, file no. 207, ff. 9-12, 133, 149.
1012 NAI, HRR, file no. 489, ff. 46-7.
The Nagpur scribes were not the only losers in the new colonial order. Whereas the ownership of property was one of many modes of political action in the Maratha Empire, it became one of the only accessible ones in a world in which public politics was strictly policed. Rulers, counselors, and scribes had all become dependent on the largesse of a colonial state by turns magnanimous and miserly. The previous chapter explored the writing of history as a highly commemorative, didactic, and even nostalgic mode of politics that survived, while others, such as pageantry, performance, and violent revolt would become more widespread in the years leading up to the 1857 Rebellion. But in the eighteenth century, as I have argued in this dissertation, there were far more opportunities for individual mobility and achievement – on behalf of oneself, one’s household, and one’s government – for those who mastered the practice of jawāb-suwāl politics. The scribal-bureaucratic classes of the Maratha Empire, both Brahman and non-Brahman, wielded their mastery of jawāb-suwāl to advance their social, economic, and professional status and contribute to the formation of enduring bonds between Maratha governments. In the Introduction and in many instances over the course of the dissertation, I explored jawāb-suwāl as a mode of dialogic communication entailing the exchange of oaths, sentiments, sacred objects, and agreements on the basis of a shared commitment to reaching a mutual understanding. Transcending any one specific political strategy or ideology, jawāb-suwāl pertained to a general procedural framework for doing politics that was critical to the social and professional mobility of the scribal-bureaucratic classes of the Empire.

My account of the practice of politics in the Maratha Empire unfolded over the course of three sections on the structures, practitioners, and transformations of politics from the early eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. The first section explored the formation, evolution, and transformation of the political structure of the Maratha Empire. Over the course of the
eighteenth century, the Empire incorporated new territories and peoples and pursued working relationships with rivals and enemies. Chapter 1 explicated the politics of imperial expansion through an account of the Maratha conquest of the Mughal province of Berar in central India. A junior branch of the Bhonsle clan consolidated an autonomous kingdom in Berar with its capital at Nagpur by deploying a flexible repertoire of strategies of conquest. These strategies included the establishment of a durable diplomatic framework for adjudicating joint rule of Berar through the sāt-cālīs revenue distribution agreement with Nizam Ali Khan of Hyderabad. But the seamless implementation of this agreement depended upon the Bhonsles’ intimate friendship with the Afghan rulers of Ellichpur, one that exceeded the strategic exigencies of politics. Mudhoji Bhonsle recognized and affirmed the secular power of the nawâb Ismail Khan Panni and the sacral power of the ghāzī Abdul Rahman Dulha Shah through the sponsorship of the construction of a new outer court for a magisterial, centuries-old dargah outside Ellichpur.

Such promiscuous affiliations exposed the Bhonsles’ government to recurring suspicions of sedition in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a subject that I tackled in Chapter 2. Existing grievances between the Pune and Nagpur governments, including unpaid debts, failure to fulfill military service obligations, and tensions regarding the Peshwa’s usurpation of the sovereign authority of the Chhatrapati Maharaja, precipitated violent conflict when Janoji Bhonsle joined several rulers and notables in defecting to the Nizam. The ensuing civil wars of the 1760s clarified the need for formal processes of diplomatic communication. Individual kārbhārī were punished for their role in the civil wars; however, their mediation through the exchange of fresh agreements laid the foundations of a peace that endured for over three decades.

The second section moved from the structure to the practitioners of politics in the Maratha Empire in order to demonstrate how social mobility facilitated political transformation.
In Chapter 3, I described the evolution of the functional niche of Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu scribal officials within the bureaucracy since the days of Shivaji’s founding of the Maratha state. I demonstrated that particularly under Chhatrapati Shahu, Kayasthas monopolized a type of salaried office known as darak that encompassed many different forms of administrative writing. Certain Kayastha households were able to retain rights to such offices over multiple generations, which in some cases allowed them to amass considerable wealth and property. To illustrate the upward mobility of Kayastha scribes, I followed the socioeconomic trajectory of the Chitnis household of Satara from the early to the late eighteenth century. Beginning with Shivaji’s chief scribe Balaji Avaji, and accelerating under his son Khando Ballal, the total revenue claimed by the Chitnises increased; however, their core holdings continued to be a set of villages, including their family seat at Borgaon, located near Satara. Over time, these holdings constituted a stable vatan to which they were entitled even after falling out of favor under Peshwa Narayanrao.

The ways in which the Chitnis and Chitnavis households of Satara and Nagpur and associated Kayastha scribal households at Kolhapur, Pune, and Baroda transitioned from administration to politics was the focus of Chapter 4. Though subject to the whims of fickle rulers and the resentments of orthodox Brahman priests, Kayastha scribal-bureaucrats were able to advance themselves into positions of considerable political and diplomatic responsibility and work across caste and community divides by mobilizing common skill sets. I concretely illustrated how the functional continuities of record-keeping, letter-writing, soldiering, revenue management and diplomacy manifested in the careers of individual Kayastha officials, namely Babaji and Govindrao Nilkanth and Nilkanthrao Trimbak at Kolhapur; Govindrao Khanderao and Yashwantrao Mahadev at Satara; and Mahipatrao Dinkar, Vyankatrao and Lakshmanrao
Kashi, and Krishnarao Madhav at Nagpur. What these careers demonstrated is that although caste affiliation was powerful in the private sociality of the household, professional affiliations were more determinative in the public sociality of the court. The possibility of strategic cooperation between individual Brahmans and non-Brahmans was most vividly evident in the alliance between the Kayastha cīṇavīḍ Krishnarao Madhav, his Brahman co-administrator and muniṣṭī Sridhar Laxman, and the Brahman envoy Baburao Viswanath Vaidya.

The third section of the dissertation honed in on the transformation of politics in the late Maratha Empire at the cusp of the British conquest of India. In Chapter 5, I illuminated how scribal-bureaucrats deployed the practices of jawāb-suvaḷ communication to confront the unprecendented challenge of the nascent political monopoly of the British East India Company. Customary exchanges of sentimental words, oaths, and agreements allowed for the pursuit of anti-Company alliances – first, between Nana Phadnavis of Pune, Mudhoji Bhonsle of Nagpur, Nizam Ali Khan of Hyderabad, and Haidar Ali of Mysore in 1781, and secondly and less successfully, between Raghuji II Bhonsle of Nagpur, Daulatrao Shinde of Ujjain, and Khanderao Holkar of Indore in 1803. Drawing on the historical research of Company residents like Charles Warre Malet, the Company came to understand these relationships in terms of a lawless “confederacy” bent on the extraction of plunder at all costs. It was this conception of “confederacy” that ultimately served as the pretext for Governor-General Richard Wellesley’s decision to take up arms against Maratha rulers in the Second-Anglo Maratha War, and the imagination of Maratha predation that undergirded this conception would later justify the Company’s war of pacification against the non-sedentary elements of the military economy of the Deccan in the Third Anglo-Maratha War.
Finally, in Chapter 6, I examined the writings of Kayastha scribal-historians, demonstrating how they employed commemorative and didactic modes of narration of the Maratha past to distill insights into the ethics of politics. As exemplified by the work of Malhar Ramrao of the Satara Chitnis household, bakhar narratives served to document the major events within the polity, to record the deeds of one’s forebears, and to pool ethical wisdom for posterity. Company historians, such as James Grant Duff of Satara and Richard Jenkins of Nagpur, relied on and commissioned such narratives, yet they ultimately deemed them to be empirically inadequate for the project of a scientific history of the Marathas. But if viewed on their own terms, these narratives are eclectic assemblages of local memory, documentary materials, and classical Sanskrit knowledge that reveal the ways in which Maratha rule opened up new possibilities and pathways for diverse groups. Between high and low, and below the gaze of the rājā and the Raj, was a world teeming with scribes, secretaries, counselors, diplomats, and countless other skilled entrepreneurs who made politics happen.

Looking backward to the fluid world of the eighteenth-century Maratha Empire and forward to the fractures that emerged during and after the events of 1857, Rango Bapuji Gupte on November 14, 1831 composed a long and colorful petition (arzī) describing his efforts to recover his vatan, the despāṇde seat at Rohidkhore once held by his ancestor Dadaji Naras Prabhu and appropriated by the pant saciva Shankraji Narayan. He recounted that just as his grandfather Ramaji had given his life at Panipat for the sake of the family vatan, so he had agreed to a scheme to meet with Company officials at Pune, including the resident Mountstuart Elphinstone, to negotiate the release of Chhatrapati Pratapsinha Bhonsle from his gilded cage at

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1013 MIS, eds. Rajwade and Deshpande, vol. 2, pgs. 299-308. For Dadaji Naras Prabhu, see Chapter 3.
After consulting a Chitnis-authored *bakhar*, the Company officials intimated that they might be open to such a plan, but they required some means of communicating with Pratapsinha. Donning the guise of a beggar, Rango went to the Satara fort and hid a note from the Chhatrapati in a poultice covering a self-imposed leg wound resembling a dog bite, but he was captured before he could escape. Though subject to a harsh beating and shackling, he did not divulge his purpose and managed to return to Jaitapur to meet with the Chitnises and several other co-conspirators. When asked how they could reward him for his bravery, he replied, “Before you made a promise (*vacana*) that you would deliver over the *vatan* from the *saciva*. You and Chitnis and Babaji [Phadnis] ought to fulfill this promise now that the deed is done. Then my master [?] at the time of worshipping Ram made a promise on holy basil, saying, ‘Today it is the Maharaja who makes this promise. The Maharaja will carry out this promise. We will use every means to give your *vatan* to you.’”

In politicking, as in life, one’s word was one’s bond, yet for that same reason, one’s bond might be worth nothing more than words. Rango Bapuji never salvaged his patrimony, and Pratapsinha was released from the Peshwa’s captivity only to be placed under the watchful eyes of the Company. Now, politics was neither the expression of Maratha sovereignty nor of its afterlife, but only of its memory.

Yet Rango Bapuji’s petition was not his last act. Roughly a decade later, he traveled overseas to London to advocate for Pratapsinha, who had been deposed and exiled to Varanasi in 1839 on the grounds of fomenting a sepoy rebellion. Perhaps this final episode led him to conclude – like so many others – that the Company was an unjust and duplicitous parvenu regime that could only be stopped through radical means. In the summer of 1857, he joined

1014 This scheme, as I briefly noted in Chapter 6, was hatched at Borgaon in conjunction with the *bakhar* writer Malhar Ramrao Chitnis and his son Balwantrao Malharrao Chitnis.

several supporters of the Chhatrapati Bhonsle dynasty in organizing a coordinated assault against the Company at Bhor, Parali, and other places near Satara. Though the Company quashed the revolt before it could get off the ground, it was later revealed that Rango Bapuji had helped to recruit thousands of individuals and to concoct an elaborate plan to plunder Company treasuries, release convicts, and ransom Europeans with the end-goal of installing one of Pratapsinha’s brother’s adopted sons as Chhatrapati. Rango’s own son was captured and, along with another of his relations and fifteen others, executed on September 8. Pratapsinha’s brother’s two adopted sons, his two queens, and his cousin – those who remained of the Chhatrapati Bhonsle lineage – were confined on Butcher’s Island (Jawahar Deep), a bleak outpost across from Bombay (Mumbai) harbor that now hosts an oil terminal. Some members of the royal family were eventually permitted to return to Satara. Along with certain officials who informed on the conspirators, such as Yashwantrao Malharrao Chitnis, they received modest pensions in exchange for their quiescence. Rango Bapuji was never found.

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APPENDIX A: Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu Family Trees

Rohidkhore deśpāṇḍe (Gupte)

Naras

Dadaji Naras (c. 1618-1692)

Krishnaji

Yesaji

Hirdas Maval deśpāṇḍe (Pradhan)

Baji Prabhu (d. 1660)

Mahadji (d. 1692)  Moroj  Ramji  Yesaj  Buwaji  Harji  Visaji  Antaji

Baji Mahadev  Khandobuwa

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1018 The five family trees provided here are meant to elucidate relationships between figures within key scribal households, but they are no by means exhaustive. Moreover, different extant genealogical sources are not always consistent.
Satara potnīs

Baji Murar Umrao

Murar Baji (d. 1665)  Sambhaji  Mahadji  Trimbak Baji  Shankraji

Gangadhar Sambhaji

Krishnaji Gangadhar

Anandrao Mahadev  Bajirao Mahadev (d. 1719)  Yashwantrao
Nagpur cīṇavīś (Randive/Vaidya)

Ganesh Rakhmagad

Rakhmaji Ganesh (d. 1771)

Chimmaji Rakhmagad (d. 1780)

Krishnarao Madhav (d. 1803)          Gangadharrao Madhav (d. 1830)
APPENDIX B: Yādī of Peshwa Madhavrao I and Janoji Bhonsle, March 23, 1769

Śrī


The vatan of Kada and the post of Nimbgaon belong to us. These posts have been stopped again and again. Rather than being stopped, they should as before be continued. One article (kalam 1).

Since the time of our late father, the post of Nimbagaon and the vatan have been in operation, and so should they be continued. The settlement of this question has taken place in this time and in accordance with that, it shall be done. So agreed (yenepramāne karār).

The armies that come into Hindusthan disturb the districts. The government’s armies should march via the road that armies in Hindusthan have marched since the beginning. One article.

The armies will march via the road that they have marched since the beginning. There will be no disturbance. So agreed.

You should not maintain any sort of politics. You should not put up any resistance. You should provide affectionate reassurance (mamtāpurvak nikhālas). Favor will be shown. So agreed.

Should any of our relations’ politics (bhāvabandacī rājkaraṇī) be brought before the government, they should not be heard separately. Ours should be reserved for us. You should not give shelter. One article.

You should manage their affairs. From here shelter will be given to no one. So agreed.

You should not be the case that an accusation is made on the basis of any trifling pretext. If there are documents related to us or evidence, tell us, make the accusation by the proper methods, and give the orders that should be given. One article.

There are disputes with the English in the province of Cuttack. Their resolution will not happen. So an army must be sent, or a dignitary must go. An order should be given. One article.

You should not put up any resistance. You should provide affectionate reassurance. Favor will be shown. So agreed.

You should manage their affairs. From here shelter will be given to no one. So agreed.

The grant (sanad) in our name states that Patna, Maksudabad, Cuttack, Varad (Berar), Chanda, Gondwana, Warghat, the grain levies (ghāsdānā) of Gangathadi with the exception of the government’s districts in accordance with agreements, and the sub-districts of Mandla and Bhopal are in operation. Those old lands that have been conquered since the time of our late king, namely Chhatisgarh and Chota Nagpur and Bastar, are ongoing until today. These should be continued and in accordance with the agreements, favor should be shown with no sort of complication from the government. One article.

The grant is as stated. So agreed.

There should be no complication from the government, and if there will be negotiations (jāb-svāl) related to revenue collection, they should be documented. There should be orders regarding this point. One article.
The government has no plan, and if your armies do not come, there will be no complication. If there is, orders will be sent for your armies to come, or a message will be sent to you. So agreed.

Each year, our creditors go to the government and complain and will importune us. But at this time the state has no funds. So no one’s petition should be given a hearing, and we should not be urged to pay. Later if some funds through good fortune become available, we will pay the proper loans according to orders. One article.

As stated, so you will not be urged to pay at this time. Later at your convenience you should. So agreed.

At this time, our ruin has occurred. So if some trifling person should come and disturb us, affectionate assistance should be provided. One article.

Assistance will be provided. So agreed.

Khan Muhammad of Daryapur complains about us every year; however, in accordance with our appointment, we go and take grain levies. Additional disturbances will not take place. On this point, a letter of reprimand (tākidpatra) should be sent to him. One article,

You should take the appropriate grain levies and not cause additional disturbance. Take the grain levies with ease and regularity. So agreed.

The negotiations related to revenue collection that ought to be written should be written. You should not maintain politics. So agreed.

The late Nana Saheb (Balaji Bajirao) treated us with affection like a son. So you should without guile continue to show us affection.

You should not deviate from this.

You should behave loyally. You should behave so as to preserve the wellbeing of this state. Favor and affection as if you were family will be shown to you as well. There will be no difficulty with this. So agreed.

The government has taken the fort of Amner. It should be given back. One article.

A grant should be given to Raghobawaji (Raghunathrao) such that the fort and its goods will be put into the possession of the senā sāheb subhā.

From the beginning, envoys have resided with the Nawab Nizam Ali Khan and with the English to pursue negotiations regarding Cuttack. So they will continue to reside and provide information to the government. They will not pursue negotiations without taking the government into consideration.

One article.

So agreed.

Armies roam to collect grain levies. On account of this, there are great and small disturbances. There should not be anger about this, and if you tell us to give it back, we will give it back. One article.

So agreed.
Both great and small servants within our household make false complaints and cause the government to become agitated. A full investigation of these claims should be made. If there is some fault on our part, bring it to mind and give the orders that ought to be given. One article.

A full investigation will indeed be undertaken. It will not be the case that a pretext will be found to make an arbitrary accusation. You should also behave straightforwardly. So agreed.

The agreement between Nawab Nizam Ali Khan and us regarding Varad (Berar) is ongoing. If either should notice some loss or excess, break the agreement, and cause discord, the government should assist us. Our peace and discord is the government’s peace and discord. One article.

So agreed.

Gopal Keshav disturbs the districts of Wasim, Darwa, etc in his administration of the sardeśmukhī. He should administer the sardeśmukhī appropriately and not cause additional disturbance. A letter on this point should be sent to him. One article.

A letter will be sent instructing him to administer it appropriately and not cause additional disturbance.

Both Nimbalkars attack our armies that come to collect grain levies. They should be warned about this, and letters should be sent to them. If they do not by chance obey, the government should punish them. One article.

Such letters should be sent to them, and they will also be warned. So agreed.

Letters have been sent to the rulers of Mandla and Bhopal stating that since before the lands of the senā sāheb are current; that they should not be disturbed; and that if they have been conquered, they should be released. Accordingly letters should be given. One article.

Such letters should be given. The sardeśmukhī of the province of Varad (Berar) has earlier been given to you in accordance with the agreement. So agreed.