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History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century Eastern India

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If power is mediated by knowledge,[1] then the early decades of British colonial rule in India were indeed, as Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai, the intellectual and historian par excellence of those times wrote, a time of 'half-knowledge'.[2] The decades between 1757 and 1772 witnessed the implantation of this colonial regime in Eastern India through the transformation of the English East India Company from a mercantilist trading corporation into the paradoxical status of 'merchant-sovereign and the sovereign merchant'[3] at the same time. The role of sovereign thrust upon the officials of the company the far from easy task of administering this society in ways that were most conducive to the extraction of the largest possible surplus from it for its new masters. This in turn made it necessary for the newly formed colonial state to direct a scrutiny into the economic resources, potential and the existing configuration of various categor-

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge; Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–77*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon *et al.* (New York, 1980).

[2] Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai, *Seir Mutaqherin*, trans. Nota Manus, 3 vols (this edition: New Delhi, 1990). This reference is to vol. 3, p. 27.

[3] William Bolts, *Consideration on Indian Affairs* (London, MDCCLXXII), preface, p. vi.

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ies of claims upon the surplus.[4] However, as the early British administrators soon discovered, this task was impossible to accomplish without a thorough understanding of the institutions through which political power had been exercised, and the customs and traditions in which it had been grounded in pre-colonial Eastern India. In other words, there was an urgent need for the colonial regime to acquire a thorough knowledge of the past in order better to control the present in their recently acquired territorial possessions. Despite its long association with the subcontinent, these were precisely those aspects of Indian society that had hitherto fallen outside the range of things about which the company had felt compelled to acquire systematic information, simply because they had not seemed imperative to the successful pursuit of their commercial interests. Now, the exigencies of power compelled the early colonial state to embark upon a quest for information about the Indian past. The precise form assumed by this quest was the historical and it led to the production of the first colonialist histories of India.

Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee have explored the significance of the emergence of a colonialist historiography in the development of a modern Indian agenda to create a 'nationalist' historiography of the subcontinent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[5] The latter phenomenon, which was of crucial importance in the construction of Indian nationhood, grew out of a contest in which the Indian nationalist elite sought to appropriate from their colonial rulers the right to create and represent their version of India's past.[6] What has gone unrecognized so far is that the Indian 'nationalist' historiography of the nineteenth century was preceded by a trend in the later eighteenth century, when the pre-colonial bureaucracy engaged in a similar contest for self-representation with the newly formed colonial state. Although these two historiographies, i.e. the 'nationalist' historiography of the nineteenth century and the

[4] For general discussions on the establishment of the East India Company's rule over Eastern India, see e.g. N. K. Sinha (ed.), *The History of Bengal 1757–1905* (Calcutta, 1969). For a more recent treatment of the same subject, see P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead. Eastern India 1740–1828* (The New Cambridge History of India, Cambridge, 1987).

[5] Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications* (S. G. Deuskar Lectures on Indian History, 1987, Calcutta, 1988) and Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nation and its Pasts', pp. 76–94 and 'Histories and Nations', pp. 95–115, in his *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993).

[6] *Ibid.*

earlier historiography of the later eighteenth century were chronologically separated from each other by a few decades, they essentially represent the polarization of the Indian intellectual milieu between the later eighteenth century and the mid- to later nineteenth centuries as a result of the experience of colonial rule and the impact of a colonialist education on the world view and intellectual orientation of the Indian literati as well as the quite different social and political contexts from which the pre-colonial and colonial Indian literati were derived.[7] This paper studies the conscious endeavour of a segment of the pre-colonial Indian literati to represent their political traditions and principles to the East India Company's state in Eastern India during the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries through the production of a genre of histories and administrative treatises in the Persian language[8] (See Appendix). A great many

[7] For social background and intellectual orientation of the colonial middle class/literati in Eastern India, see J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society. Twentieth Century Bengal* (Berkeley, 1968); Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1971); Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (New Delhi, 1973); Rajat K. Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal, 1875–1914* (Delhi, 1984); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Delhi, 1986), and several essays in the *The Nation and its Fragments*; Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered. Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Delhi, 1988). The social background and intellectual orientation of that segment of the pre-colonial literati who are relevant to this paper have been discussed below.

[8] The specific histories that have been used in this paper are as follows: Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai, *Seir Mutaqherin*, trans. Nota Manus, 3 vols (this edition: New Delhi, 1990); Ghulam Hussain Salim Zaidpuri, *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, trans. Maulavi Abdus Salam (Calcutta, 1904); Francis Gladwin, *A Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal* (a translation of Salimullah Munshi's 'Tarikh-i-Bangala') (Calcutta, 1788); Karam Ali, 'Muzaffarnama', the Khudabaksh Library MSS (I am also grateful to Shaista Khan for permitting me to consult her unpublished English translation of this work. Direct quotes from the 'Muzaffarnama' in this paper are based on her translation); Yusuf Ali Khan, *Tarikh-i-Bangala-i-Mahabat Jangi*, trans. Abdus Subhan (Calcutta, 1982); Maharaja Kalyan Singh 'Ashiq', *Khulasatu-t-Tawarikh*, trans. Sarfaraz Hussain Khan, *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, vol. 5, 1919, vol. 6, 1920 and vol. 9, 1923; Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari, 'Tarikh-i-Muzaffar Jang', the Oriental and India Office Records (henceforth O&IOL). I wish to thank Rasul Hajizadeh, the Penn State University, for help in translating portions of the 'Tarikh-i-Muzaffar Jang'. In addition I have used excerpts from histories as given in H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians* (henceforth: *E&D*), vol. 8 (this edition: Allahabad, 1964). Specific references to these histories have been made at appropriate places in the paper.

This paper analyses the rearticulation of Indian/late Mughal political traditions in eighteenth-century Persian works and administrative treatises. It does not attempt to address the question of whether these Persian works can be regarded as 'history' in the modern sense of the term or whether they are examples of a pre-modern historical consciousness. This issue is an important and a complex one which deserves separate treatment and cannot be satisfactorily discussed in this

of the latter treatises in particular are buried in the voluminous administrative records of the East India Company's rule in India and specifically in those relating to the later eighteenth century.[9] The abundance of such reports makes it impossible to make exact and specific references to them in one essay. I have specifically referred to and used two such administrative commentaries as representative examples of the genre. There is a strong possibility that both these commentaries were authored by the same person—by a certain Atmaram who claimed years of experience as a revenue official in Bihar.[10]

As is well known, some of these works were in fact commissioned by the first colonial authorities as a means of acquiring knowledge about the histories and traditions of the people over whom they ruled (this point has been explored at greater length below). The Persian histories thus embody a tension created by the fact that the authors were voluntarily or involuntarily communicating insights into India's history, customs and practices to an alien political regime, while at the same time seeking to represent the ideology and values which characterized the social and political order that had created them. Thus, these texts were not merely proofs of either the willingness or refusal of Indians to collaborate in a project of transmitting information about Indian society to the English East India Company's government.[11] The act of communicating insights about India also became part of an act of self-representation—sometimes quite overtly so. Secondly, the circumstances in which these Persian texts were produced, i.e. amidst the strains that inevitably accompanied

paper. The articles by Guha and Chatterjee referred to in footnote 2 are primarily about the creation of an Indian historiography of India in the nineteenth century and except for very general observations, they are not directly concerned with the issue of whether Mughal or late Mughal historical works can also be considered to be histories in the modern sense.

[9] The records of the East India Co. such as the Proceedings volumes of the various Provincial Councils of Revenue and The Committee of Revenue (located in the West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta) contain countless such administrative reports.

[10] Oriental and India Office Records (O&IOR): Home Miscellaneous, vol. 68, 'Substance of a Persian Treatise on the Revenues of Bengal', undated and by an anonymous author in 'Mr. Murray's Papers on the Revenues of Bengal', also undated (hereafter referred to as Persian treatise) and Home Miscellaneous, vol. 387: 'Abstract of Accounts Relative to the Soubeh of Bihar Prepared & Delivered by the Canongoes of Several Parganas, Fasli, 1180 A.D.' (hereafter referred to as 'Atmaram's Account'). Both these commentaries may have been authored by the same person.

[11] R. Guha, *An Indian Historiography* , p. 6.

the transition from pre-colonial to colonial rule, caused this act of self-representation to assume the form of a political tradition that was consciously recast and rearticulated to suit the exigencies of late eighteenth-century Eastern India. This development itself is thus of importance in the history of political discourse in pre-colonial South Asia. Finally, this genre of histories and chronicles also served as vehicles through which Indians expressed some of the first coherent political critiques of colonial rule. The first part of this paper establishes the social context from which the texts on which this paper is based were derived. The second part analyses the political tradition that was being actively reconstructed through these texts.

I. The Texts and Their Social Context

Eastern India was the first region where the English East India Company was able to assume sovereign political power in 1772. This development represented the culmination of a period of about fifteen years starting in 1757 when it had exercised varying degrees of de facto and de jure political power over this region. This colonial regime could, of course, emerge only after it had brought about the demise of the Mughal successor kingdom of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa (1700–72) with its capital at Murshidabad.[12] The histories and chronicles on which this paper is based were composed by the bureaucracy of the erstwhile rulers of Murshidabad. This was very much in the tradition of Indo-Islamic history writing which was characterized by the production of narrative histories and commentaries on political matters, in particular by people who had served as government officials and were thus familiar with and well informed about governmental institutions and their workings.[13] The antecedents of the nawabi bureaucracy who authored the eighteenth-century histories can be traced to the establishment of Mughal administration in Eastern India in the sixteenth century and more recently to the development of a regional state in this area during the earlier part of the eighteenth century. The latter process was

[12] See footnote 4 for references to works dealing with the establishment of the East India Co.'s political power over Eastern India.

[13] For general observations on Indo-Islamic historiography and on the authors who composed them, see Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India*; K. A. Nizami (ed.), *History and Historians of Medieval India*; Mohibbul Hasan (ed.), *Historians of Medieval India*; Harbans Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography During the Reign of Akbar*.

initiated by the emergence of Bengal and Orissa as a united and practically autonomous kingdom owing only theoretical political submission to the Mughal emperor at Delhi during the first decades of the eighteenth century; the merger of Bihar in 1733 led to the enlargement and further enrichment of this already semi-autonomous kingdom.[14] Despite this political break with the parent Mughal system as far as actual administrative subordination was concerned, the nawabs of this new realm and the ruling class that developed here quite deliberately preserved the political culture and social norms associated with the former. Thus, the nawabs of Murshidabad retained the Mughal mansabdari system but with some modifications. In fact, one of the first steps taken by the rulers (nawabs) of Murshidabad in their bid for autonomy from the control of the Mughal imperial centre at Delhi was to appropriate almost completely from the latter, the right to recruit, promote and distribute offices to the bureaucracy which served in this region—particularly with respect to mansabdars. The nawabs sought to use the distribution of jagirs to the mansabdars in Eastern India as a means to create a regional ruling class with territorial roots whose loyalty could be counted upon.[15]

Below the mansabdari positions, there existed a variety of administrative posts which were staffed by people who have been described as 'technicians'[16] of the state, i.e. a skilled professional corps of lower and middle status officials who served in diverse capacities—as revenue officials, news-writers, subordinate military commanders, managers of princely or aristocratic households, etc. Even below this pool of 'technical' officials were a number of humbler but no less important administrative positions like those of the qanungo, the keeper of revenue accounts at pargana level, etc. These were the people without whose careful record-keeping and handling of the nitty gritty of administration no government could function. Regional professional and scribal families—mainly North Indian Kayasthas and Bengali

[14] For general accounts relating to the establishment of Mughal rule over Eastern India and the development of a semi-autonomous kingdom in this region, see Sir J. N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal, Muslim Period 1200–1757* (this edition, Patna, 1973) and Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead.*

[15] Philip Calkins, 'Mughal Decline in the East: The Mansabdari System Rebuilt', unpublished paper, and 'Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal, 1700–1740', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 29, 4, 1970.

[16] John F. Richards, 'Norms of Comportment Among Imperial Mughal Officers', in Barbara Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, 1984).

Baidyas and Kayasthas—played predominant roles in these middle- and lower-level administrative posts, in fact much more so than is usually recognized in established historical formulations regarding the support base of this kingdom.[17] These local service-gentry families constituted a solid bloc of administrative talent and experience which was derived from a tradition of having served earlier governments in diverse official capacities. Single families sometimes monopolized a particular office through several generations.

The question that the foregoing discussion leads to is as follows: was there some kind of bureaucratic culture that was shared in to a greater or lesser degree by all those—from mansabdars to qanungos—who served the government of the nawabs of Murshidabad? The highest bureaucrats, i.e. those holding mansabdari rank, constituted a very important segment of the social aristocracy (perhaps the most important segment) both in the Mughal empire and in the break-away nawabi of Murshidabad. They played leading roles in court rituals and ceremonies, enjoyed close personal interaction with the ruler and were expected to adhere to the aristocratic or courtly culture of the times. In the circumstances of nawabi Bengal and Bihar, an elite culture had developed which was shared in by the wealthiest merchants, people who held land on various kinds of privileged tenures and, of course, by mansabdars.[18] This essentially Mughal courtly culture denoted the adherence to what was known as 'mirzai' or certain norms of conduct expected specifically of a Mughal gentleman, and, more specifically, from a Mughal grandee.[19] Its component elements included things like the possession of refined tastes in the appreciation of music and the fine

[17] Philip Calkins, 'The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group', identifies mansabdars, mercantile interests and landed magnates (i.e. zamindars) as constituting the support base of this kingdom. Bengali language local/regional histories contain detailed information about local service gentry families and their involvement with government service. Such work enabled some of them to secure mansabdari positions and/or special revenue collecting rights (i.e. zamindari rights) from the rulers/nawabs of Murshidabad. Representative examples of such local histories are: Nabinkrishna Bandyopadhyaya, *Bhadrapurer Itibritta* (Murshidabad, 1910–11); Rasiklal Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen* (Calcutta, no date); Kumudnath Mullick, *Nadia Kahini* (Calcutta, B.S. 1317); S. Dhar, *Nabab Harekrishna* (Calcutta, 1910).

[18] Kumkum Chatterjee, 'Poetry, History and the Late Eighteenth Century Inquilab', unpublished paper presented to the conference on 'Cultural Production and Cultural Change in the Ottoman, Safavid and the Mughal Empires, 1500–1800', The University of Pennsyvania, May 1993.

[19] Maulavi M. Hidayat Hussain, 'The Mirza Namah (The Book of the Perfect Gentleman) of Mirza Kamran with an English Translation', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 9, 1913.

arts, an ostentatious style of living, the patronage of poets, artists, religious figures and institutions, philanthropic activities and, in the case of mansabdars, a tradition of valour and military bravery.

Lower ranking mansabdars were usually not regarded as being in quite the same category professionally as the highest mansabdars. But they together with other middling status officials—people who have been referred to earlier as the 'technicians' of the empire—often comprised an influential group of people who possessed strong connections with eminent nobles holding the highest mansabdari ranks and with powerful personalities within ruling circles. They also shared the same Persianized, courtly culture that characterized the elite and formed part of the lesser nobility or the outer rim of the aristocratic circle—a status that derived originally from their familial and social connections. In fact, many of the authors of the Persian histories on which this paper is based—for instance, Yusuf Ali Khan, the author of the *Tarikh-i-Bangala-i-Mahabat Jangi*, Karam Ali, the author of the 'Muzaffarnama', Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai, the author of the *Seir Mutaqherin*, the magnum opus of the age, and others fit very well into this category of the lesser nobility (See Appendix).

But even though certain segments of the nawabi bureaucracy in Bengal and Bihar adhered to a general elite culture, it can be maintained that there was a specific bureaucratic culture which by the eighteenth century had come to be shared in by various strata of Mughal officials as well as officials in Mughal successor states such as Bengal and Bihar. This bureaucratic culture is traceable to those mansabdars who came from mansabdari lineages through being the sons and grandsons of former mansabdars and were called khanazads. John F. Richards describes the prevailing culture among the upper reaches of the Mughal bureaucracy or 'the proper behavior and attitude for the Mughal nobles or amirs' as 'khanazadgi' which he in turn defines as 'devoted, familial hereditary service to the emperor'. Significantly enough, by at least the later seventeenth century, this culture of khanazadgi had filtered down to the middle-level, non-mansabdari officer corps, or the lower mansabdari officer corps of the empire as well to become an important element in creating what must be described as a bureaucratic esprit de corps.[20] Bhimsen Burhanpuri, the author of a well-known autobiographical memoir, embodies this spirit very accurately. Bhimsen belonged to a family

[20] Richards, 'Norms of Comportment', pp. 262–76.

with a long tradition of staffing subordinate and middle-level official positions in the Mughal provincial administration in South-Central India. Bhimsen had no qualms in describing himself and the members of his family as khanazads.[21] Even more significant is the fact that other professional groups—artists for instance—were also appropriating this term and its ethos and describing themselves as servants of the empire.[22] The lesser nobility and the middle-level bureaucrats of the nawabi regime in Eastern India certainly identified themselves as being part of a large corps of professional administrators whose duty was to keep the elaborate governmental machinery in operation. I would like to suggest that by the eighteenth century this ethos was quite strongly prevalent too among the holders of some of the really subordinate administrative positions. Atmaram, the author of one (and perhaps both) of the administrative treatises that have been used extensively in this paper, held the office of qanungo of pargana Sherghatty in Bihar during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Atmaram would probably not use the term 'khanazad' to describe himself or the earlier generations of his family. But more than anything else, his description of himself as the son of Kriparam and the grandson of Jeyaram as well as the descendant of several other ancestors all of whom, he claimed, had held the same office for one hundred and forty-two years,[23] establishes his strong identification with an official position, which in his account also became an indispensable part of a personal heritage.

Since scholarship was regarded as a hallmark of the grandee, education was highly valued in artistocratic circles.[24] Among scribal and professional families too there was a high premium on education since their ability to earn a living depended on their possessing certain educational and professional skills such as accounting and record-keeping. Other component elements of gentry education included the ability to write a fine hand, an elegant epistolary style and the ability to read, write and speak Persian—the language of courtly society and also the language of government and business.

[21] V. G. Khobrekar (ed.), *Sir Jadunath Sarkar Centenary Commemoration Volume. English Translation of Tarikh-i-Dilkasha. Memoirs of Bhimsen Relating to Aurangzeb's Deccan Campaigns* (Bombay, 1972); also Sir J. N. Sarkar, 'A Great Hindu Memoir Writer', in *Studies in Mughal India* (New York, 1920), pp. 231–41.

[22] Richards, 'Norms of Comportment', pp. 262–76.

[23] 'Atmaram's Account'.

[24] There is a dearth of historical literature on formal education and intellectual life in pre-modern India. Some direct and indirect references are found in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Interestingly enough, some among such service-gentry families were also beginning to learn English in the eighteenth century.[25]

History appears to have been an important subject of study by those with scholarly interests. The strongest proof of this lies in the fact that there was an established tradition of earlier historical works circulating among and being read by those interested in them.[26] Many of the eighteenth-century histories being used here were, for instance, heavily dependent on earlier works for facts, dates, etc.[27] The former shared with earlier works the conventional features of Indo-Muslim historiography in general terms of form (i.e. the emphasis on the doings and sayings of rulers and their nobles) and expressive style (i.e. profusely eulogistic references to rulers and the nobility in terms derived from traditions of Islamic scholarship as it had developed in the Middle East and in India since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries). In the tradition of Indo-Islamic history-writing since the time of Emperor Akbar (1556–1605) they regarded history as a discourse about political power as articulated through the institution of government.[28] The hypothesis of this paper, of course, is that an entire genre of histories composed in late eighteenth-century Eastern India embodied important new ideas about politics and about the function of those who laid claims to shares of political power as compared to the philosophy of politics expressed in classic Mughal historiography. Unlike the cases of other contemporaneous early modern regimes—the Ching state in China and the trans-continental Ottoman state, for example—which too possessed large bureaucracies,[29] we know very little about the intellectual parameters of the later Mughal or the nawabi bureaucracy in South Asia.

[25] See e.g. Rasiklal Gupta, *Raja Rajballabh Sen* and other local histories in Bengali referred to in footnote 17.

[26] *E&D*, vol. 8, pp. 5–20 contains references to this feature: Subhan Rai Khatri's 'Khulasatu-t-Tawarikh' was allegedly based on the 'Mukhtasirut Tawarikh', an earlier work, while Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai's *Seir* was supposed to have been based on Subhan Rai's work. Also, see Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India*, p. 1.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] For this feature of historiography since the time of Emperor Akbar, see Zahiruddin Malik, 'Persian Historiography in India During the 18th Century', p. 143, in Mohibbul Hasan (ed.), *Historians of Medieval India.*

[29] For earlier Islamic polities, see e.g. R. Mottahedeh, *Loyalties and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, 1980) and C. F. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1981). For the Ottoman and Ching bureaucracies, representative examples would be, Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, 1986), Thomas A. Metzger, *The Internal Organization of the Ching Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973) and *Escape from Predicament. Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* (New York, 1977).

In the light of this, the Persian histories being used here assume a special significance. They do not give us a comprehensive idea about the intellectual orientation of the late Mughal bureaucracy and gentry. But, as a genre, they do permit us a glimpse of certain facets of their ideology and perceptions.

A feature whose importance cannot be emphasized enough is the timing of these texts. Almost all the histories referred to here were written after 1772, i.e. after the formal assumption of the government of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by the English East India Company. The architects of these narratives were therefore attempting to rearticulate a tradition in a situation where the Mughal and the nawabi ruling system from which their ideology of government was derived was in varying degrees of disarray and there were already portents that the regime which the company was attempting to consolidate would be based on different principles. Secondly, almost all these texts were dialogic in nature, i.e. they were predicated on the presence of an audience to which they were speaking. The audience—implicitly or explicitly—was the new governmental regime, usually embodied by individual employees of the East India Company. At any rate, as will be shown below, the fact that these eighteenth-century histories were written for the eyes of and under the gaze of the 'hat wearing' Englishmen who now held the reins of government in their hands, became a vitally important element in shaping the reconstructed political tradition.

II. The Reconstructed Tradition

The Paradigm of Decline

To the nawabi bureaucracy, the broadest relevant historical context against which they could make sense of the political environment in which they lived was the Mughal empire. This political system and the principles it was believed to have been founded on were regarded as the most legitimate ones within the South Asian subcontinent. The nawabi of Murshidabad formed the subcontext—but a subcontext that was inseparably associated with the broader context of Mughal hegemony. The Mughal imperium was usually territorialized in these Eastern Indian chronicles as 'Hindustan', thereby betraying the general Northern Indian orientation of the nawabi bureaucracy. However, the term Hindustan was also, generally, loosely extended

to mean the entire South Asian subcontinent. The historical past of this geographical area was predominantly regarded as synonymous with the rule of the Mughal dynasty; with the reigns of specific emperors serving as reference points or landmarks in an otherwise flat historical terrain comprised of many centuries of Mughal rule.

From almost the beginning of the eighteenth century and definitely from the 1720s and 1730s, it increasingly became clear to almost anybody who was a conscious observer of political developments in the subcontinent that the empire—the broadest paradigm or concept that provided the framework for contemporary political perceptions—was in trouble. When contemporaries attempted to understand better or explain this troubled state, some of the most frequently used terms to describe it were 'confusion' in the sense of chaos or the lack of order, 'subversion' in the sense of the overturning of some established structure or phenomenon and 'revolution' in the sense of a very basic or fundamental change.[30] The term 'inquilab' which was used frequently in eighteenth-century histories and other literary forms included in its meaning the range of connotations associated with the word 'revolution' and also, possibly, the word 'subversion'. As Lehmann pointed out, in its eighteenth-century sense, 'inquilab' or 'revolution' was closer to its primary meaning of revolution as an observable fact, as in the revolution of the earth or the planets. Inquilab, therefore, literally meant turning and by the extension of its meaning to political affairs, it was used to convey the meaning of change. In this sense, inquilab or revolution included in its meaning any change of fortune, a change in the personality of the ruler or a change in dynasty.[31]

But irrespective of the terms that were used to denote decline, what stands out in these eighteenth-century histories is the clear conviction of its authors as well as other contemporaries that they could actually pinpoint and date the commencement of the process of decline although there was no consensus about it. Ghulam Hussain categorically dated it to the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb and believed that the process had accelerated from the reign of Emperor Farrukhsiyar; Atmaram, the former qanungo of Sherghatty, dated it

[30] O&IOR: Home Miscellaneous, vol. 68: 'Mr. Murray's Papers on the Revenues of Bengal', undated; Coast & Bay Abstracts (O&IOR): Fort William General Letter, dated Jan. 29, 1726. The term 'revolution' occurs very frequently in almost all the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century works used in this paper.

[31] F. Lehmann, 'The Eighteenth Century Transition in India: Responses of Some Bihar Intellectuals', unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1967.

to the fourth year of the reign of Emperor Shah Alam;[32] William Bolts, an English free merchant in eighteenth-century Bengal, Bihar and Benaras, dated it to the invasion of northern India by the Persian military adventurer, Nadir Shah, in 1738–39.[33]

The discourse of decline perceived matters a little differently in the case of Bengal and Bihar. Here, the process of decline was not perceived as a prolonged trend gaining in momentum with every successive decade since the early eighteenth century. Neither was the ending of the Murshidabad nawabi attributed to a succession of unfit rulers. In the case of Eastern India, the decline, as portrayed by nawabi scholar-bureaucrats like Karam Ali, Ghulam Hussain and others, was in fact more of an abrupt demise—an inquilab or revolution brought about by the unwise actions of a single, incompetent ruler (i.e. Nawab Sirajuddaula, 1756–57). This in turn led to the accession of the 'hat wearing firingees' (i.e. foreigners) or the English to the position of sovereign over this kingdom. As many of these historians saw it, the tragedy of this particular inquilab lay in the fact that the company's regime also failed to measure up to what the former believed were the standards of good government.

Usually, these texts offered no clear distinctions between the symptoms of decline and the causes of decline. In the general tradition of late Mughal historiography, the Eastern India-based authors also referred to factors such as bad rulers, laxity in the implementation of administrative regulations, financial problems, etc., as undifferentiated causes/symptoms of the increasing weakness of the empire.[34] Both Ghulam Hussain Salim and Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai referred generally to the assumption of independence by Mughal, provincial governors to be a cause/symptom of the increasing weakness of the empire.[35] But, despite this assertion, their ultimate view on this point and with particular reference to the Murshidabad nawabi was that this exemplified neither cause nor symptom of decline. On the contrary, this kingdom represented a miniaturized

[32] *Seir*: 3, pp. 159–60; Home Misc., vol. 387: 'Atmaram's Account'.

[33] Bolts, *Considerations on Indian Affairs*, p. 150.

[34] For this tendency in late Mughal historiography in general, i.e. in works not relating to Eastern India, see e.g. Ali Mohammed Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, trans. M. F. Lokhandwala (Baroda, 1965). See also, Zahiruddin Malik, 'Persian Historiography in India During the 18th Century', pp. 147–9, in Mohibbul Hasan (ed.), *Historians of Medieval India*. References to causes/symptoms of decline in works of Eastern India-based writers occur in *Seir*, 3 vols, 'Muzaffarnama', 'Atmaram's Account', etc.

[35] *Seir*: 2, p. 413.

reproduction of most of the laws, institutions and principles that had characterized the system of Mughal government. As Ghulam Hussain saw it, the emergence of the nawabi of Murshidabad sort of arrested the steady, downward slide of the empire because it kept at bay the forces of disorder and the collapse of governmental regulations by creating for a while an oasis of peace, prosperity and good government.[36] He in fact also regarded the semi-autonomous kingdoms of Awadh and Hyderabad in more or less the same way.[37] None of these three Mughal successor states, i.e. Awadh, Bengal and Bihar and Hyderabad had reached their positions of virtual autonomy by overt rebellions or warfare against the collapsing Mughal central administration. Since decline was seen to be associated with violence, disorder and subversion, the absence of these factors in the rise of the three kingdoms referred to above explains why contemporary observers found it difficult to see these states as causes of imperial decline or as its manifestations. By the same line of reasoning, then, it is not difficult to see why the Eastern India-based historians persisted in viewing the activities of the Sikhs, Jats and the Marathas—regional powers who also sought to shake off Mughal authority, but who did so overtly and through frequent military confrontations—as generally little more than disturbers of peace and order and as perpetrators of subversion.[38]

III. The Ruler, the Bureaucracy and the Goal of Government

In these eighteenth-century historical writings, the primary issue of importance (although cloaked by minute details about the doings and sayings of individual rulers and their nobles) was the nature of government. Government was regarded as the practical, tangible manifestation of political power, and as something that ultimately underlined the moral and ethical foundations of political authority. The overall consensus among these scholars seems to be that the goal of good government was the happiness and well-being of its subjects. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, who was unrestrained in his admiration of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan's government in Bengal and

[36] The *Seir* and the *Riyaz* contain generous praises of the Murshidabad nawabs Murshid Quli, Shujauddin and Ali Vardi.

[37] *Seir*: 1, pp. 153, 156, 246–7, 257, etc.

[38] *Seir*: 1, pp. 67, 81–90, 110–11; *Riyaz*, pp. 337–8.

Bihar (1740–56), praised it as one that made 'the ease of the people as well of the nobility its foremost objective'.[39]

These eighteenth-century texts perceived governmental ideals to be general, moral objectives which were not dependent on considerations of rigidly defined religious doctrine, or the values of particular ethnic or even dynastic groups. There are instances in most of these histories when particular political personalities are praised for their zeal in propagating Islam.[40] But the term 'Islam' seems to have been used often to denote a particular kind of overarching cultural and political order rather than Islam in its strict scriptural sense. Similarly, ethnicity or race could become factors of secondary importance in the evaluation of the behaviour of those holding shares of formal or de facto political power. This point is best illustrated when Ghulam Hussain discussed the activities of the Mughal crown prince Ali Gauhar (later the Mughal emperor Shah Alam) in Bihar during 1759–60. In the former's description, the arrival of prince Ali Gauhar in Bihar with a large army was initially welcomed by the majority of the people in that region because of the 'favours and good government which they had formerly experienced from the Prince's forefathers and his ancestors'. But after the prince had spent some time in Bihar, the attitude of the inhabitants changed completely towards him. The plundering activities of the Prince and his army devastated the countryside and exposed the people to a great deal of oppression and hardship. They now began to 'pray for the victory and prosperity of the English army' which appeared now to them to be their saviours. This swing in attitude in favour of the English East India Company and its army is explained according to Ghulam Hussain by the fact that its behaviour towards the ordinary people of the area was marked by discipline and restraint and was therefore exemplary.[41] Thus, the philosophy of government that was lauded in these texts was one that upheld the welfare of its subject population above everything else.

An analysis of the function and importance of the currently reigning monarch occupied, of course, a place of primary importance in the discourse of these eighteenth-century historians.[42] According

[39] *Seir*: 2, p. 113.

[40] For example, Gladwin, *Narrative of Transactions*, p. 109.

[41] *Seir*: 3, pp. 189–90.

[42] The repeated praises of the personal qualities of Nawabs Murshid Quli (Gladwin, *Narrative of Transactions*, p. 109); Shujauddin (*Seir*: 1, p. 279); Rustum Ali's 'Tarikh-i-Hindi' (*E&D*, vol. 8, p. 67) and Ali Vardi (*Seir*: 1, p. 341), for

to the classic Mughal concept of kingship which had developed specifically since the time of Emperor Akbar, the ruler was not merely the mortal head of the political system, but enjoyed almost a divine mandate to rule. Physically, thus, he was a divine embodiment of royal authority.[43] As Blake explains, the patrimonial character of this emperor-centric polity had to adopt certain bureaucratic features out of sheer and pressing practical necessity.[44] Thus emerged the patrimonial-bureaucratic Mughal state with its large corps of mansabdars and other administrative personnel. However, the central importance of the emperor, both symbolic and real, was not impaired, at least under Akbar's immediate successors. All mansabdars were the monarch's personally appointed servants; their loyalty was not to an impersonal administrative system but to a personalized sovereign. The bonds between these chief subjects and the ruler were perpetually renewed through ritualized personal contact at the royal court. With ordinary subjects too, emperors sought to emphasize the real power and mysticism surrounding their persons through customs like the daily royal darshan (i.e. the viewing of the emperor by his subjects, usually from a distance, as, for instance, from a jharoka or window of the royal residence).

The eighteenth-century histories are also based on the assumption that the ruler was of supreme importance to the political system. However, the architects of these texts made an important deviation from earlier historiography by positing a significantly different role for the ruler as compared to the classic Mughal theory of royal authority.

In the political tradition that was being recast in the later eighteenth century, the monarch was seen as continuing to hold a position of the utmost importance in the political system. But, significantly enough, it also appears to be somewhat of a ceremonial or decorative position. The personal qualities—competence, sense of justice, etc.—of monarchs were certainly not discounted as factors of importance. But there was also the emerging notion that the ruler should abide by the institutions of Mughal government that had come down to the eighteenth century at least since the sixteenth century, as well

example, indicate this, as do open criticisms of the later Mughal emperors (e.g. *Seir*: 1, p. 20).

[43] J. F. Richards, 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir', in J. F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison, 1978).

[44] Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad. The Sovereign City in Mughal India 1639–1739* (Cambridge, 1991).

as the principles on which it was believed that these institutions were based. In other words, what the eighteenth-century historians were saying was that these institutions of government had acquired a legitimacy and efficacy through centuries of actual operation; they upheld a kind of society which these scholar-bureaucrats supported because they were convinced that it was the right kind of society. This strong consciousness of government as a set of time-tested institutions based on specific moral principles by implication tended to diminish somewhat the paramount importance of personal qualities possessed by the individual ruler. This sort of institutional or bureaucratic consciousness comprises a strong theme in the writings of particularly perceptive contemporary historians like Ghulam Hussain; it is even stronger in the writings of humbler administrative personnel like Atmaram, the former qanungo of Sherghatty.[45] The latter, unlike Karam Ali or Yusuf Ali Khan or any of the other aristocratic writers, had little or no personal contact with either the Mughal emperor or the grandees at the fading Mughal darbar at Delhi or, for that matter, with court circles at Murshidabad or even at the subordinate darbars at Dacca or Patna in Eastern India. Therefore, in their perception more than in those of the aristocratic segment of the bureaucracy, the rulers appeared to be distant figures whose reigns served as markers in a long continuum of administrative history.[46] This is probably what Fleischer refers to as bureaucratic consciousness or 'kanun consciousness' in his study of the Ottoman bureaucrat and intellectual Mustapha Ali.[47]

An exploration of the implications contained within this ideology, however, is inextricably associated with notions about the role of the bureaucracy in a political system. Bhimsen Burhanpuri, the middle-level Mughal bureaucrat par excellence, had never served under the Murshidabad nawabs, nor been present in Bengal during his long and chequered official career. However, Bhimsen's famous memoirs and the philosophy contained therein serves as a mirror for the general philosophy among the middle to upper middle-level of the Mughal bureaucracy in the seventeenth century and their later Mughal/nawabi counterparts in the next century. In Bhimsen's description:

He [i.e. God] hoisted the banner of love in the field of the human body by making the heart the ruler of the empire of physical body of the man and

[45] 'Atmaram's Account'.
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, ch. 8.

He gave orders to the other parts and the limbs of the body to abide by the commandments of the heart. . . . Thus . . . each limb should have a definite work to do and must have clear significance and not a single moment should be wasted in having the responsibility entrusted to it so that the said limb should not become useless and crippled.[48]

In other words, just as the human body could not function without its limbs, the empire could not function without its bureaucrats. In fact, as these historians saw it, one of the most important duties of a ruler on ascending the throne or of an official on assuming an official post, was to appoint a body of bureaucrats to fill the most important administrative and military positions under him. This function was practically viewed as an acid test of the inherent abilities of a ruler since much merit was attributed to the ruler's power to recognize administrative talent in potential officials and to harness these qualities for the service of the empire. Personal likes and dislikes of the ruler were supposed to be lower in priority compared to the great task of selecting able officials to work for the realm. The Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar (1714–19), for example, is depicted as distributing the highest offices of his government to nobles like Abdullah Khan and Hussain Ali Khan whose support had enabled him to win the recent war of succession, but also to Chin Qilich Khan who had not been on his side in this war.[49] In this instance, Farrukhsiyar is shown as being willing to forget recent enmities and past alignments in order to avail himself of the services of Chin Qilich Khan, one of the ablest mansabdars of the time. Conversely, the selection of unworthy people betrayed the absence of this merit in the ruler and was a pointer to his basic lack of judgement as well as of his commitment to the welfare of the empire. Emperor Jahandar Shah (1719–48) is condemned for distributing high offices to members of his family who were not necessarily known for their administrative talents; but worse still, he sought to raise the relatives and friends of his mistress, Lal Kuar, to the most responsible public offices.[50] These subjects of Jahandar Shah's favour, particularly the latter group, are strongly denounced by Ghulam Hussain as undeserving people. This naturally raises the question as to who, in the views of these scholar-bureaucrats, was considered to be equipped with the right qualities to hold the highest public offices.

[48] V. G. Khobrekar (ed.), *Bhimsen's Tarikh-i-Dilkasha*, p. 1.
[49] *Seir*: 1, pp. 58–60.
[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7.

The people who were most suited to hold the highest civil and military offices of the state, according to the eighteenth-century historians, were people like themselves, i.e. men who came from families with long pre-existing traditions of bureaucratic service, preferably in the uper echelons of the mansabdari cadre. Since the higher mansabadari families constituted the aristocracy, it therefore also implied that these people had to be of noble birth and to have been raised in a culture of khanazadgi which was believed to instil in them the qualities and virtues required of the highest post-holders. The assumption was that this unbringing also endowed them with a much higher potential for being competent and able officials than those who did not possess such family backgrounds. Interestingly enough, professional success as a high official and conscious adherence to the other features of aristocratic life could upon occasion permit people from non-khanazad backgrounds to earn acceptance from the aristocratic writers of these eighteenth-century histories.

But whether descended from a mansabdari lineage or not, the function and duties of bureaucrats holding the highest posts were clear. A degree of loyalty to the ruler who recruited them to these offices was an obvious duty. But the foremost priority for them was believed to lie in 'despatching the affairs of state and promoting the welfare of the empire which conduct after all ought to be the intent and scope of [bureaucratic/mansabdari] employment and service'.[51] Secondly, an important new note that is evident in these eighteenth-century texts deals with the duty of the highest mansabdars to act as custodians of the empire. This idea, which was not expressed so strongly or openly as a component element of Mughal political ideology either under Akbar or his immediate successors, seems to have acquired a dominant position in the political traditions that the eighteenth-century historians sought to articulate.

As the late Mughal scholar-bureaucrats saw it, the nobility were not merely people who held office at the pleasure and whim of the ruler. On the contrary, they were a class of noble, competent individuals with family traditions of service to whatever political system they lived under. Thus, emperors and rulers could come and go—as in fact they did at the Mughal capital at Delhi through much of the eighteenth century—but this corps of dedicated, committed bureaucrats remained constant and provided a degree of stability by espousing the long-term welfare of the realm and of its subjects. Portrayed

[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 114–15.

in this way, the higher ranks of the bureaucracy appear in these texts almost as a group of vigilant protectors of the polity. In this capacity, they were expected to act as the conscience of the empire: to act as advisers and counsellors of kings and also to possess the courage to rectify the ruler's mistakes and to tell him when he was wrong. Such a role of the bureaucracy seemed to have been legitimated through the notion that it was the upper bureaucracy and their ancestors whose hard work had created the institutional foundations on which the government rested and, therefore, they had as large a stake in the well-being of the kingdom as the monarch.

Ghulam Hussain provides some of the best examples that illustrate this philosophy. The distribution of the highest offices and honours by Jahandar Shah to 'undeserving' people has been referred to above. His mistress, Lal Kuar, came from a family of musicians. Yet the emperor elevated her brother as well as her uncle to mansabdari rank.[52] In Ghulam Hussain's depiction, these people abused and exploited the power that they now undeservedly held. Lal Kuar's brother, Khoshal Khan, for instance, broke the law repeatedly and became a nuisance to the citizenry of Delhi. In these circumstances, some of the best-known Mughal mansabdars of the time—people who were steeped in the bureaucratic culture of the empire's highest official corps—attempted to protect the empire and its subjects from the baneful influence of those who had no right to be in such positions of power and influence.

The most illuminating example of the higher bureaucrats' role in steering the emperor and the administration away from moving in what was perceived of as the wrong direction is furnished by the instance of Jahandar Shah's alleged efforts to endow the governorship of the province of Akbarabad on his mistress's unworthy brother, Khoshal Khan. In Ghulam Hussain's history, Zulfiqar Khan, the prime minister (wazir) of the Mughal empire, on being informed of this plan, deliberately insulted Khoshal Khan. When this news reached the ears of the emperor, Zulfiqar Khan used the opportunity to deliver a sharp and sarcastic rebuke to the latter:

> . . . the nobility, your servants, are from father to son in possession of serving the crown in viceroyalties, governments and such other employments; and the custom of your imperial ancestors has been only to amuse themselves with dancers and singers whose merits it was customary to reward only with pensions and bounties. So soon as these last shall aspire to digni-

[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7.

ties and governments and shall contrive to take possession of them, there shall remain then no other party for your nobility but that of betaking themselves to the profession just forsaken by the dancers and singers. . . . For after all . . . your dispossessed Governors and Generals . . . have a right to earn their bread as well as any others.[53]

In Ghulam Hussain's narrative, this stinging reprimand from his prime minister shamed Emperor Jahandar Shah into acquiescing in stopping Khoshal Khan's undeserved elevation within the administration.

When analysed further, these examples yield more insights into the eighteenth-century aristocrat-cum-historian's notions regarding the role of people of their class and professional background in the polity. As Ghulam Hussain and others like him saw it, society was divided into different spheres where people endowed with different qualities and abilities were positioned. People like Lal Kuar, Khoshal Khan and their friends and families belonged to a sphere which could not be permitted to intersect with the sphere to which belonged people like Zulfiqar Khan. The narration of the above incidents by Ghulam Hussain in his history no doubt reflects the insecurity and resentment experienced by career mansabdars—especially of khanazad backgrounds—at the 'invasion' of the highest ranks of the administrative service by people from different social and professional backgrounds, as well as their determination to exclude these 'upstarts' from these positions. However, in the conscious construction of a late Mughal/nawabi political ethos in the later eighteenth century, such practical insecurities found formal expression in the formulation of a political tradition in which powerful mansabdars regarded the empire and its government as practically a sacred trust which it was their duty to guard from corrupting influences. This right, however, was not seen as one that they had undeservedly usurped for themselves. On the contrary, it was believed that they had earned it on account of their dedication to the cause of the empire and its governmental institutions. This right was also rooted in the fact that they had the training and experience to be the most competent people to make judgements about how the government should be run.

What needs to be particularly emphasized here is that the professional competence of which mansabdars were so proud did not merely denote an adeptness at the day-to-day task of administration. In the eighteenth-century texts being used here, mansabdari com-

[53] *Ibid.*

petence was also associated with virtue, i.e. an understanding of and adherence to certain ethical principles on which the institutions of government were based. The importance of these underlying ethical/moral principles in the organization of government has been discussed at greater length below. But the examples cited above also point to the importance given to virtue as a necessary quality among the late Mughal/nawabi ruling class. For instance, when Zulfiqar Khan remonstrated with Emperor Jahandar Shah about the lack of wisdom in appointing his mistress's brother, Khoshal Khan, to a governorship, the moral advantage *vis-à-vis* the emperor lay with him. It is true that Emperor Jahandar Shah acquiesced in the suggestion made by his prime minister (wazir), Zulfiqar Khan, partly because he owed his life and his crown to the latter's abilities. But, more importantly, Zulfiqar Khan's 'undaunted firmness'[54] in his adherence to what was perceived of as the principles on which Mughal administration was based shamed the emperor into giving in to the wishes of his prime minister.

Interestingly enough, the overtly important role played by the nobility in steering the empire on the right course became especially important only when the ruler was perceived to be straying from the norms and customs by which their administrative systems were supposed to be run. Thus, discussion of the history of the kingdom of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa—a topic that is of the greatest importance in most of the histories being used in this paper—do not for the most part seek to highlight the role played by its mansabdars as vigilant custodians of the political system. The explanation lies in the fact that there is near unanimity among authors like Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, Salimullah Munshi, Ghulam Hussain Salim, Yusuf Ali Khan and others that the first three rulers of this kingdom were excellent administrators and rulers, imbued with the right principles and values.[55] Actually, as long as these rulers maintained intact most of the outward forms of the Mughal administrative system and did not seek radically to alter governmental institutions like the mansabdari system, the bureaucratic elite, from which most of the eighteenth-century historians were drawn, had little reason to worry about the well-being of their class. They and people like them continued to be selected to fill the most responsible offices in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa; it was also

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[55] The *Seir*, *Riyaz*, Gladwin, *Narrative of Transactions*, Yusuf Ali, *Tarikh-i-Bangala-i-Mahabat Jangi*, all contain scattered comments which reveal positive opinions held by the historians.

they who made up the majority in the close and select ring of advisers and counsellors who exerted the maximum influence over the nawab and therefore over the entire kingdom. The authors of the histories thus had little reason to be threatened by the actions of Murshid Quli (1700–20), Shujauddin (1720–40) and Ali Vardi Khan (1740–56). As they emphasized in their eulogies of these rulers, they were exemplary precisely because they relied on the professional nobility in the running of the kingdom.

If the political ideology being shaped in these eighteenth-century historical texts, perceived of the highest bureaucrats of the kingdom as people who had a stake in it, then by implication it also imposed on them the task of preserving the governmental institutions and the political system by actively getting rid of unfit rulers. At any rate there is no clear condemnation of those who actually did this. The nawabi of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa provides some of the best instances of such cases. In 1740, Ali Vardi Khan usurped the throne of Murshidabad from the son of Shujauddin, the recently deceased nawab and the person to whom Ali Vardi and his entire family were indebted for their professional advancement. Ali Vardi's action in killing Sarfaraz Khan, the heir of Shuja, is acknowledged to be an abhorrent act which initially horrified the people of Murshidabad. But even this action is legitimized on the ground that Sarfaraz Khan 'had no talents for government ... and that, had his government lasted but some time more ... endless confusions would have been the consequence of his incapacity ... disorders ... and disturbances would have been the consequence ... and would have brought ruin and desolation on these countries and their inhabitants'.[56] Ali Vardi, on the other hand, turned out to be an able and virtuous ruler who governed his kingdom well.[57]

The removal of Nawab Sirajuddaula (1756–57) from power through a conspiracy constitutes one of the best-known events in the history of early modern India. It paved the way for a dramatic escalation of the political power of the English East India Company in Eastern India, led to the ultimate establishment of its governance over this region and this in turn became the vital first step towards the creation of a British empire in India. Most of the historians who authored the texts being used here were contemporaries of Nawab Sirajuddaula. Their treatment of the latter's removal from power is treated in the same

[56] *Seir*: 1, p. 342.
[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 341–2.

way as the case cited immediately above. Ghulam Hussain Salim, Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai and Karam Ali are unanimous in agreeing that the real cause for Siraj's elimination from power lay in the fact that he lacked the qualities and virtues that good rulers ought to possess. The tragic flaw thus lay in Siraj's own personality. He is portrayed as unwise and capricious and, worst of all, he ignored and humiliated the nobility who had helped the previous nawab to rule wisely and well. What eventually led to Siraj's downfall, according to these contemporary commentators, was that he raised to importance certain undeserving people who gave him bad and unwise advice.[58] Thus, in the opinion of the historians, the participants in the pre-Plassy conspiracy were doing what they had to do in order to free the kingdom of a tyrannical and oppressive ruler. This goal, in other words, almost made it legitimate to seek to displace the current ruler, whose servants they were supposed to be.

By the extension of the same logic, there is little condemnation of ambitious aristocrats who sought to carve out power bases of their own from the parent Mughal political system. The Bengal nawabs—from Murshid Quli to Ali Vardi—who are eulogized by the eighteenth-century historians had done precisely this; but instead of being castigated for disloyalty, they were held up as practically ideal rulers. Ghulam Hussain's comment on similar kingdom-building activities by the Mughal noble and mansabdar Chin Qilich Khan in Hyderabad in Southern India and by Saadat Khan in Awadh in Northern India are ambiguous at best—but not openly censorious.

As he and the other scholar-bureaucrats saw it, as long as able and 'virtuous' (here virtuous meant a commitment to the moral principles on which the main institutions of Mughal government were based) nobles were able to provide good government to the regions under their control without overtly rejecting Mughal supremacy or jettisoning the Mughal system of government too radically, it was of little significance whether they were appointed officials of the Mughal government or practically autonomous rulers.

IV. Government as a System of Moral Principles

It has been stated above that the later eighteenth century witnessed the recasting of a political tradition by the late Mughal/nawabi bur-

[58] 'Muzaffarnama', *Riyaz*, pp. 363–4, *Seir*: 2, pp. 186–7, 193.

eaucracy in Eastern India, in which government was depicted more as a system of customs and rules based upon moral principles rather than as a personalized, partimonial system where everything hinged upon the person of the current ruler. As the higher bureaucracy defined it, a good government was one that accepted as its pre-eminent goal the task of ensuring the welfare and happiness of its subjects as well as the prosperity of the country. A good government was characterized, therefore, as one in which subjects were assured of fast and speedy justice, were protected from oppression by public officials and where the rulers spent the income that they derived from taxes, so that it in turn contributed to the prosperity of the country. But underlying these recognizable signs of good governance lay the foundational principle on which the machinery of government rested: i.e. the practice and the support of virtue. In practical terms, this was understood as charity and generosity to the poor and needy; and to the aristocratic authors of the eighteenth-century historical texts, it meant, above all, the support of families and lineages with claims to holiness and/or nobility (as they saw it, virtues like refinement, scholarship, piety, etc., were derived from holiness and/or nobility).[59] To Karam Ali, an important method used by rulers to do this was to endow various kinds of revenue-free properties for the support and sustenance of such people, particularly when they were unable to earn a living for themselves.[60] However, to these scholar-aristocrats, a far more important method of ensuring the practice of virtue was to delegate administrative responsibility to noble and therefore virtuous, competent people, generally with khanazad-type backgrounds—in other words, to people like themselves and their families. Without this basic condition, the scrupulous adherence to 'custom' could not be ensured, nor would the system of checks and balances built into the administrative machinery prove effective.

The lower bureaucracy, i.e. people who served as revenue officials, accountants, etc., unlike aristocratic bureaucrats like Ghulam Hussain or Yusuf Ali Khan, had little actual contact with the ruler or with the circle of mansabdars who surrounded the latter. In their perception, therefore, government appeared to be even less of a personalized, patrimonial system and more of a machine-like system with its component functions bound together by a large range of administrative rules and regulations.

[59] *Seir*: 3.
[60] 'Muzaffarnama'.

To the lower bureaucracy, too, the principal aim of government was the 'welfare of the people and the prosperity of the country'.[61] But unlike the scholar-aristocrats, they perceived this as something that was attainable not through the practice of general, moral principles, but rather through concrete, specific administrative functions—the collection of revenue, for example, in accordance with rules which had been formulated earlier—in a classicized, Mughal past. In practical terms this would mean the adherence to practices like the separation of the revenue administration (i.e. the diwani) from the executive branch of government (i.e. the nizamat), the practice of revenue officials like qanungos submitting their accounts to the diwani rather than to the nizamat, etc. Reinforcing this tendency to perceive government as a mammoth machine which ought to function according to a range of set rules was the primacy attached by eighteenth-century qanungos like Atmaram to the government archive as a repository of actual records regarding previous custom, and hence a legitimizing authority in administrative matters. In fact, a tendency seems to be emerging in which greater primacy was given to records of prior administrative practice as enshrined in archival records over individual, current, views on similar matters. The almost mechanical precision with which revenue officials like Atmaram defined and established distinctions among different kinds of administrative terminology relating to various kinds of lands, land tenures, different categories of peasants, kinds of officials involved in the collection of revenue, detailed figures of collections made under different heads of revenue, etc., reinforces the mechanistic view of government being propagated by these petty bureaucrats.[62]

As the petty bureaucracy, exemplified by Atmaram, the former qanungo of pargana Sherghatty in Bihar, for instance, saw it, the ideal revenue administration associated with former times had become somewhat derailed because the 'customs' or rules which had kept it on the right track were being disregarded (e.g. the obliteration of the distinction between the diwani and the nizamat, the stoppage of the practice of land measurement at regular intervals, etc.).[63] It is necessary to keep in mind, however, that when Atmaram wrote about the deterioration of the system of revenue administration, he really used it as a microcosm of the empire, or the polity as a whole. The notion

[61] 'Atamaram's Account'.
[62] *Ibid.* and 'Persian Treatise'.
[63] 'Atmaram's Account'.

that these developments were attributable to human agency were present. But the stronger notion that comes through is that these instances of malfunction could be corrected quite simply—i.e. by appointing knowledgeable, experienced qanungos who knew exactly how the revenue administration should be run. The remedy suggested by Atmaram seems to suggest that to him the revenue collecting machinery could be restored to its prior condition by replacing a number of flawed parts with good ones.[64]

Like their counterparts in the mansabdari echelons of the administration, the qanungos too believed that they were indispensable for the smooth running of the empire. They might not have quite regarded themselves as partners in empire like some scholar-bureaucrats in this period. But they certainly believed that they were indispensable subordinates. As Atmaram wrote, 'the fact is that the affairs of the empire had been usually administered by intelligent mutsuddies'.[65] This intelligence was believed to be derived from their professional knowledge, grounded in their correct understanding of previous 'custom'.

V. The English East India Company: A Reversal of the Principles on Which Government Ought to Be Based

As the late eighteenth-century historians saw it, the English East India Company represented a negation of the principles and values according to which government had functioned in a classicized Mughal past. There was a general realization that the pattern of administration had begun to get distorted in many ways, even before the East India Company staged its inquilab or revolution in Eastern India. But the emergence of the company as the sovereign government of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa after 1772 seemed to make the restoration of government and administration to its former, ideal mores to be almost an impossibility unless the company altered the way it ruled its territories in Eastern India.

Many of these texts also bear signs of a strain that derived from the fact that these works had been written in the hope of securing the company's patronage and yet they were also the means through which some of the earliest coherent critiques of the early colonial

[64] *Ibid.* and 'Persian Treatise'.
[65] 'Atmaram's Account'.

regime were expressed.[66] The terms of the critique are significant because they drew upon the philosophy of political power and values contained in the eighteenth-century histories.[67] Historians like Ghulam Hussain and Karam Ali sought to distinguish between the symptoms or signs of misgovernance as well as the deeper, more fundamental principles from which they were derived. To both these authors, the greatest symptom of misgovernance lay in the declining prosperity of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and in the suffering and oppression of a wide cross-section of the people of these regions, i.e. ordinary people, cavalrymen and troopers who used to be formerly employed in the nawab's army, merchants, the nobility, etc. These symptoms of malaise in the life of the country and its people were diagnosed as springing from the fact that the company as sovereign betrayed a lack of commitment to certain moral and ethical principles on which these historians believed indigenous governments in their uncorrupted forms had traditionally been based.[68]

The company's lack of concern or 'affection', as Ghulam Hussain termed it, for the people of their territories in Eastern India was believed to be a serious deficiency in its administration. Karam Ali pointed out that the company's callous and apathetic behaviour during the famine of 1769–70 was sufficient testimony for example of such unconcern.[69] Secondly, the eighteenth-century critics of British rule also alleged that it gave a degree of primacy to the goal of extracting a financial profit from its kingdom in Eastern India that was incompatible with the ideals of a just and caring administration. The imposition of the East India Company's 'monopoly' over the

[66] The *Seir* e.g. contains many instances when Ghulam Hussain praised the English and yet this history also contained one of the strongest critiques of East India Company rule to be voiced in the later eighteenth century. Sometimes, the struggle of Ghulam Hussain and other late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers to tone down their criticism for fear that it would ruin their chances of securing the company's patronage led to the composition of strained and contradictory statements such as in the following passage from Hari Charan Das's 'Chahar Gulzar Shujai' (E&D, p. 229): 'It is said that the English are so just and honest that they do not interfere with the wealth of any rich men. . . . But from those who are powerful, they manage to obtain money by their wisdom and adroitness and even by force if necessary; but they are not oppressive and never trouble poor people'.

[67] A discussion of contemporary Indian views on British society and political system, though complementary to Indian critiques of the East India Company's government of Eastern India, is somewhat beyond the scope of this paper. For an analysis of the former, see Juan R. I. Cole, 'Invisible Occidentalism: Eighteenth Century Indo-Persian Constructions of the West', *Iranian Studies*, 25, 3–4, pp. 3–16.

[68] 'Muzaffarnama' and *Seir*: 3, pp. 158–213.

[69] 'Muzaffarnama'.

saltpetre and opium trades, for example, was attributed to this motive, as was the fact that every company employee used his official position in order to secure unfair advantages in trade.[70]

But the paramount reason that rendered the East India Company's government an undesirable regime was comprised by the fact that it did not regard the adherence to and the support of virtue as its guiding philosophy. The aristocratic historians who formulated this critique, of course, understood virtue to mean the support of noble and therefore deserving persons like themselves and their families. This factor also seemed to explain why writers like Ghulam Hussain and Karam Ali believed that the company was incapable of understanding the virtuous principles on which certain institutions of indigenous government were based. This resulted in the debasement and corruption of certain crucially important administrative offices like that of the judge (qazi), the supervisor of revenue-free lands (Sadr-us-sadr) and several others. These offices were now reduced to instruments of oppression over the subject body.[71]

But this tragic failure to understand the principles of government was attributed sometimes openly and sometimes implicitly by the historians to the fact that the English were alien to India and to its customs and did not seem to wish to overome this alienness. The later eighteenth century was a time when several of the company's officials were known to interact socially with the nawabi upper class, and noblemen like Ghulam Hussain stood on terms of personal friendship with several of them. Yet Ghulam Hussain too categorically stated that the problem between ruler and ruled lay in a sea of difference comprised of divergent political values and cultural practices that had yet to be bridged.[72] Karam Ali commented specifically on the strangeness of English social customs. Other writers referred to things associated with the English—ranging from the layout and architecture of the city of Calcutta to their governmental policies as 'foreign', 'strange' or different.[73]

According to Ghulam Hussain, the real defeat of Indian society *vis-à-vis* the English lay in the fact that the former had failed to make the latter succumb to its 'customs' as it had apparently succeeded in doing with earlier groups of foreign conquerors.[74] The net result was the

[70] *Seir*: 3, pp. 158–213.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] 'Muzaffarnama', *E&D*, p. 228: The Chahar Gulzar Shujai.
[74] *Seir*: 3, pp. 158–213.

emergence of a sovereign power that preserved its alien character and betrayed no desire either to understand Indian society or to care for its Indian subjects. Added to these problems of what the eighteenth-century historians perceived to be the self-imposed cultural alienation of the English was the economic devastation of the country, because the wealth that the company drained away from India was spent elsewhere and thus did not 'fertilize' the Indian economy. Ghulam Hussain may have been the first to characterize the nature of the East India Company's early government of Eastern India as a system of colonial rule.[75]

VI. Conclusion

Thus, Mughal political philosophy combined with the unique situation in Eastern India during the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries to necessitate a redefinition of an earlier political tradition. The company's attempts to consolidate its administration in Eastern India ultimately hurt the interests of the nawabi bureaucracy—from the aristocratic mansabdars to qanungos and other revenue officials. Immediately after its assumption of the sovereignty of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the company had been compelled to retain the nawabi bureaucracy in order to learn from them how to handle the ropes of government. However, growing familiarity with administrative matters prompted the company's regime to eliminate its dependence on high-ranking indigenous officials and to entrust the task of revenue collection to its own servants (this was not paralleled, however, by a lessening of interest on the part of the East India Company in securing information about Indian history and administrative practices from the former bureaucracy). By the early 1770s, former nawabi bureaucrats had no roles in the new administration. The loss of office was a hard blow for these people—it entailed the loss of power, prestige and prominence. But what made things worse was that this was also the period when the English East India Company's government began to resume the revenue assignments (jagirs) and rent-free estates that large numbers of the former bureaucracy had held as grants from the nawabs, thereby reducing them to desperate material straits as well.[76]

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Lehmann, 'The Eighteenth Century Transition in India'; also Kumkum Banerjee, 'Indigenous Trade, Finance and Politics: Patna and its Hinterland, 1757–1812', unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Calcutta University, 1989.

Most of the histories analysed in this paper were explicitly or implicitly written by officials of the recently decreased nawabi government with a view to securing employment in the company's administration. By depicting themselves as custodians of knowledge about Indian customs and traditions they hoped to persuade the new government of their indispensability in the task of governing the latter's new territories in Eastern India. The rearticulated political tradition that was expressed through the Persian histories and administrative tracts was thus grounded in the notion that the bureaucracy were the principal instruments of good government and the factor that in fact provided continuity in the task of governance. The redefined tradition was thus a response to the pressing material need felt by qanungos and other lower administratative officials as well as the aristocracy for support and patronage from the new regime.

As stated earlier, these histories also served as vehicles of self-representation by a segment of the nawabi bureaucracy which regarded itself as cognizant of the principles that had underpinned indigenous political systems. The preoccupation of the historians and the writers of administrative treatises with the ideals of good government as they understood them is the strongest testimony to this. The self-representational nature of these works is also revealed in the terms in which critiques of the company's government were presented. The new administration was regarded as the very opposite of the indigenous Indian regime it had replaced. The former was condemned as a negation of the ethical principles on which they alleged the nawabi government was based.

Significantly enough, several of the first colonialist English-language histories of India as well as detailed commentaries on Indian administrative practices were being composed during the same period[77] when the indigenous scholar-bureaucrats were engaged in

[77] The reference here is to works like Alexander Dow's *History of Hindostan* (3 vols, London, 1812–16); Charles Grant's 'An Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Finances of Bengal', in W. K. Firminger (ed.), *The Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company, 1812* (3 vols, Calcutta, 1917) and to countless administrative reports prepared by East India Company officials which are for the most part still 'buried in the archives' (Guha, *An Indian Historiography*, p. 9). Examples of such reports are scattered throughout the East India Co.'s administrative records which date in particular to the 1770s–1790s, i.e. the proceedings of the various Provincial Councils of Revenue, the Committee of Revenue, etc. (the West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta). Guha, *An Indian Historiography*, also contains references to such reports.

composing their histories and treatises. The latter works were in fact supposed to provide the basic information for the composition of the colonialist histories. Yet Indian political traditions as they came to be depicted in early colonialist histories of the subcontinent were generally different from the ways in which they had been represented in eighteenth-century Persian histories and administrative treatises.

Early British writings on Indian history did not constitute a tightly coherent historiography which expressed uniform views through a time span of several decades beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century. This historiography expressed differences of nuance, emphases and points of view, and the historians who produced these works were often separated from each other by considerably differing intellectual and political influences.[78] Some eighteenth-century writers—Alexander Dow, for instance—admired certain specific features of Mughal government[79] and resonances of such views are not entirely missing from certain later colonialist histories as, for instance, in Elphinstone's *History of India* published in 1841.[80] Despite the expression of such sentiments, however, the growing tendency in colonialist histories, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards, was to view pre-British Indian governments and, particularly, Indo-Muslim governments as brutal, capricious and oppressive.[81] Even Dow, despite his admiration for specific features of Mughal government, believed that the inherent nature of pre-British governments in India was despotic and arbitrary.[82] Such views became in time a not uncommon theme of later British colonialist writings on India and formed the basis for the rise of the concept of the cruel and unenlightened oriental despot.[83] Thus originated the notion of oriental despotism, one of the 'central categories'[84] used by the British to characterize Indo-Muslim and Mughal regimes in South Asia.

[78] See J. S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India. The Assessments of British Historians* (Calcutta, 1970).

[79] For example, see Dow, *History of Hindostan*, vol. 3, xxviii. For an analysis of Dow's views on the Mughal empire, see Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India*, pp. 18–19.

[80] For example, Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of British India* (London, 1841), vol. 2, pp. 143, 260, 317–18, etc.; for an analysis of Elphinstone's views on Mughal rule, see Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India*, pp. 143–6.

[81] I am indebted to the referee of this paper for pointing out that the composition and dissemination of many of the colonialist histories of India occurred in the context of Anglo-Indian debates about the East India Company.

[82] Dow, *History of Hindostan*, vol. 1, cxv, cl, cxl–cxli.

[83] For this concept, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (The New Cambridge History of India, vol. III.4) (Indian edition, New Delhi, 1995), pp. 6–9.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

The history of 'Muhammadan India' thus became in colonialist writings a dark foil which seemed to offset in sharper relief the benign and enlightened administration of the East India Company in India.[85] In the circumstances of colonial rule, the power to appropriate the ways in which the dominated society was represented naturally rested with the colonizer.[86] The British colonialist view of pre-British Indian governments therefore gained greater currency than the views of a group of pre-colonial scholar-bureaucrats whose writings, self-representation and political philosophy were in fact marginalized by the establishment of British colonial rule over South Asia. The Indian 'nationalist' historiography of the later nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, produced by a new middle class whose world view and intellectual parameters had been shaped by a colonialist education, also for the most part accepted, as a given premise, the notion that pre-colonial Muslim governments in India were inherently tyrannical and oppressive.[87]

The attempt at self-representation by scholar-bureaucrats of the nawabi regime thus failed to influence either colonialist views of pre-colonial political traditions in India or the emerging Indian 'nationalist' histories. The question has been raised as to the forms in which the nawabi ruling class in Eastern India tried to resist the penetration of British military-political power in the later eighteenth century and in the decades immediately beyond.[88] The histories discussed here constitute a form of scholarly 'resistance' or contestation in the sense that they became mediums for self-representation *vis-à-vis* the colonialist commentaries that were also being composed during this time.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 9. Even British 'orientalist' scholars who are known for their admiration of Indian culture and traditions confined their interest to ancient India and specifically to the achievements of the Aryans. It was believed that Indian culture subsequently suffered a decline which by implication was due to the establishment of 'Muslim rule' over India. For British 'orientalist' views on India, see David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1969), and Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley, 1997).

[86] The classic formulation of this view is in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

[87] Partha Chatterjee, 'Histories and Nations', pp. 95–115, in *The Nation and its Fragments*.

[88] Rajat Kanta Ray, 'Colonial Penetration and the Initial Resistance: The Mughal Ruling Class, the English Company and the Struggle for Bengal 1756–1800', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 12, nos 1–2, 1985–86. Of related interest is Gautam Bhadra, 'Prak-Rammohan Juge Companir Shasaner Prati Kaekjan Bangali Buddhijibir Manobhab', *Academy* (Bengali journal), no. 6, 1989.

Appendix

Authors of Persian Histories Composed in Eastern India During the Later Eighteenth Century and the Early Nineteenth Century

Author	Work	Date of Work	Social/Professional/Family Background of Author
Yusuf Ali Khan	Tarikh-i-Bangala-i-Mahabat Jangi	After 1763	Son of Ghulam Ali Khan, close associate of Nawab Ali Vardi (1740–56) and revenue collector of the crown lands (Diwan-i-Khalsa) of Bihar. Not known if Yusuf Ali held bureaucratic position/s but he was personally close to Nawab Meer Qasim Khan (1760–63) and accompanied the latter out of Bihar when he was defeated by the English company in July 1763. Yusuf Ali married the daughter of Nawab Sarfaraz Khan (1739–40). His son-in-law Ali Ibrahim Khan, a top bureaucrat of the nawabi government was later appointed chief magistrate of Benaras (1781–93) by Warren Hastings.
Hari Charan Das	Chahar Gulzar Shujai	After 1765	Grandson of Sagar Mal, Chaudhuri and qanungo of Meerut. He was an employee of Nawab Meer Qasim Khan (1760–63) and following the latter's defeat in 1763–64 by the East India Co. was employed by Meer Qasim's daughter.
Karam Ali (b. 1736)	Muzaffarnama	After 1772	Nawab Ali Vardi Khan (1740–56) appointed his father to the office of newswriter (wakianavis) of Burdwan and to the office of superintendent (daroga) of branding and verifying cavalry horses. The former office was held by the family till 1772. Karam Ali held the office of faujdar of Ghoraghat (1748–56) and may have held a position in the household of Shaukat Jang, faujdar of Purnea in 1756. His mother had a lot of influence with the ladies of Shaukat Jang's household. Karam Ali enjoyed an allowance granted to him by Nawab Ali Vardi from 1741–72.

Author	Work	Date of Work	Social/Professional/Family Background of Author
Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai (b. 1727–28)	Seir Mutaqherin	1781	Belonged to an aristocratic family of Iranian origin. His father served the Mughal and nawabi governments; several other relatives served the nawabi government. His mother was a relative of Nawab Ali Vardi (1740–56). He held a series of middle-level bureaucratic positions including one in the household of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, faujdar of Purnea.
Sarup Chand Khatri	Sahril Akhbar	1794–95	Described himself as 'an old servant of the state' (*E&D*: vol. 8, p. 313)—not clear whether he served an Indian ruler or the East India Company's government, or both.
Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari	Tarikh-i-Muzaffar Jang	About 1800	Grandson of Shamsuddaula Lutfullah Khan who held high office under the Mughal emperors Farrukhsiyar (1714–19) and Muhammad Shah (1719–48). Muhammad Ali Khan held the office of superintendent (daroga) of the criminal court (faujdari adalat) of Tirhut and Hajipur in Bihar.
Maharaja Kalyan Singh 'Ashiq'	Khulasatu-t-Tawarikh	1812	Belonged to a family with a long tradition of bureaucratic service. His grandfather and great grandfather had served high officials at the Mughal court as secretaries (diwans). His father, Maharaja Shitab Rai, became deputy governor (Naib Nazim) of Bihar (1766–73) and served under the nawabi government and the East India Co.'s government. Kalyan Singh succeeded his father as deputy governor of Bihar (1773–81) until he was dismissed from office by the East India Company.
Nawab Nusrat Jang (d. 1822) (Following Nusrat Jang's death, Sayyid Abdul Ghani wrote a sequel to the work)	Tarikh-i-Nusrat Jangi	Around 1817	Held an administrative position at Dacca at least until 1817. Sayyid Abdul Ghani who wrote the sequel was the son of an official (arzbegi) who had served under Nusrat Jang.

Author	Work	Date of Work	Social/Professional/Family Background of Author
Sadasukh Dehlavi (born in Delhi and died at Allahabad)	Muntakhabu-t-Tawarikh	1818–19	Was probably employed by the East India Co. as an official at Chunar towards the end of the eighteenth century.
Ghulam Hussain Salim Zaidpuri	Riyazu-s-Salatin		Was employed by Mr George Udny.
Salimullah Munshi	Tarikh-i-Bangala		