Issues of Masculinity in North Indian History: The Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad

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Introduction

During the eighties historians of India in search of new insights into social change have turned increasingly to the study of gender relations. Here, as in many other fields of historical study however, 'gender' almost always means women: their experience, identity and strategies for survival. But there are good reasons, as a number of historians in different fields have recently stressed, for a stronger focus on masculinity as a part of gender history (Tosh 1994). A proper understanding of the field of power in which women have lived their lives demands that we look at men as gendered beings too: at what psychic and social investments sustain their sense of themselves as men, at what networks and commonalities bring men together on the basis of shared gender identity, and what hierarchies and exclusions set them apart. Yet for most historians in most fields, men continue to figure and be written about as ungendered beings, as the normal, the universal subjects of human history. If their identity as men matters, it does so only in minor, localised and discrete contexts. It is women who are the principal 'carriers' of gender, and women feature therefore as a particular subgroup, of interest to women's history specialists, historians of the family and the like. There is the same underlying sense here that was evident in that famous and notorious observation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762: 324): 'The male is only a male at times; the female is a female all her life and can never forget her sex'. For a man's nature is vested in his reason and not in his body; man's nature as reason means that he can transcend bodily particularity in a way not possible for women. These are, of course, familiar ideological

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constructions about gender identity, but have nonetheless proved remarkably resistant to change at the level of historical writing.

It is a striking testimony to this peculiar social invisibility of masculinity that it has remained so little studied in the history of South Asia generally, and of north India in particular. For here, of course, most regional elites have sharply differentiated between and differently valued men's and women's identities; patrimonial power has been a strong and enduring feature of local as well as regional and imperial political systems; high-profile codes of kingship and warriorship have been central in securing legitimacy and loyalty for political authority; and pre-colonial indigenous as well as Western imperial states both employed elite military identities to recruit local support, and used gender relations and the deportment of women as a test of civilised values. Given these saliences, the study of masculinity ought to receive much closer attention if we are to be successful in the development of 'new' social histories for South Asia, less constrained by inherited colonial conventions and invisible forms of cultural bias.

This paper will focus on rulership, warfare and masculinity in 18th century north India, and for three reasons. First, it is very difficult to specify how the coming of colonial society changed gender roles and identities without knowing very much about the 18th century, although this has not deterred many historians from trying. Second, and following on from this, one of the wider questions for any historian of gender in South Asia arises out of suggestions by Ashis Nandy and others that pre-colonial Indian societies worked with rather fluid and permeable gender identities, in which ideas about bisexuality and androgyny featured strongly and in which 'softer' forms of creativity and intuition were not strongly identified with femininity, nor values of violence and power with masculinity. It was upon these malleable and multiplex identities, Nandy (1983) argues, that Victorian colonial culture imposed its much more rigid and dichotomous ideologies of gender, setting masculine against and above feminine, and establishing a homology between political and sexual dominance that juxtaposed the manliness, rationality, courage and control of British rulers—essentially British middle-class sexual stereotypes—against degenerated, effete and superstitious colonial subjects. In this way, Nandy argues, the rather small sectors of Indian society in which the martial values of the Kshatriya order predominated came during the colonial period to threaten and partially to displace those more fluid and diffuse identities of Indian tradition (ibid.). This reconstitution of Indian gender values and identities under colonialism is an important one, and a starting point for me is the late pre-colonial period.

Third, the recent work of Mrinalini Sinha (1995) on 'Colonial Masculinity' in late 19th century Bengal has raised some extremely important questions about the significance of masculine identities as a cross-cultural means of establishing hierarchies and affirming common identities. Sinha

examines the ideological constructs of the 'manly Englishman' and 'effeminate Bengali' in a range of different political contexts. She shows how colonial rulers and Indian elites alike employed them in complex ideological manoeuvres, sometimes to institute a hierarchy, sometimes to suggest commonalities. This is a very interesting approach, in that it extends into the field of masculine identities questions about the links between gender, race and imperialism which are already the subject of intense scrutiny and debate from the perspective of women's histories (Chatterjee 1995; Jayawardena 1995; Sangari and Vaid 1989). These latter have illustrated how colonial officials, missionaries, Indian reformers and nationalists alike came to agree that the domains of women and family, 'custom' and community lay properly outside the normal realm of politics and the state. This emerging consensus about the domains of the public and private, politics and the 'domestic' helped establish a significant framework for cooperation between Indian politicians and the colonial state (O'Hanlon 1994). Sinha (1995) adds greatly to this discussion by showing how conceptions of masculine identity could also in some contexts help cement this consensus. However, these insights again raise the question of colonial change, and of how far there may be elements of an older north Indian practice in these interplays between masculine identity and political power.

Masculinity: Some Definitions

Masculinity might be defined, then, as that aspect of a man's social being which is gendered: which defines him as a man and links him to other men, and conditions other aspects of his identity, such as of class, occupation, race and ethnicity. Masculinity is therefore at once a public social status, a role within family and household, a subjective identity, and a rhetorical trope in public discourse. Though linked, each of these meanings demands a different mode of study, draws on different kinds of evidence and has a different explanatory range. For the present argument, four broad points need to be noted here. First, masculinity is not, of course, an innate quality, but rather a cultural fabrication, a public social status which must be striven for and maintained in specific social contexts, and to which the recognition of peers is essential. What principally sustains masculine identity is not, as we might think, perceived differences from women alone, but also the recognition and affirmation of other men. Second, masculinity necessarily draws on a repertoire of cultural forms. What counts as 'masculinity' has, of course, always been culturally variable and class-specific. In the case of Britain, for example, historians such as Michael Roper and John Tosh (1991) have explored a shift in the codes of manliness current among governing and professional classes during the later 19th century. These codes moved from the moral earnestness of

the Evangelicals and Dr. Arnold, with their emphases on moral courage, sexual purity and civic virtue, to the muscular and 'imperial' masculinity of the 1890s. What many of these 19th century studies also suggest is that at the level of the individual too, lived masculine identities were expressed in a range of different contexts. They were expressed in the household, workplace, tavern, and in the range of all-male associations that embodied men's privileged access to the public sphere: from craft guilds and chambers of commerce to voluntary associations and working men's clubs. All of these were contexts in which men could develop and demonstrate 'manly' qualities and competence, and inspect and affirm these in other men.

Third, it needs to be stressed that these differing codes emphasise not only the power and authority of men over women, but some forms of masculinity over others. As R.W. Connell (1995: 76-80) has argued, codes of masculinity in most societies have their own pecking orders. Ruling groups not only valorise particular features of their own masculine code; they often stigmatise others as marginal, deviant or criminal, particularly those which seem to undermine or discredit men more generally as possessing a proper authority over women. The history of homosexuality in most modern Western societies forms an obvious example. For this reason it is appropriate, in most cultural contexts, to refer to a plurality of 'masculinities'. Last, a further difficulty in the study of masculinity in most cultural contexts, even those with very explicit ideologies of masculinity, lies in its relative social invisibility. Men appear simply as the norm against which women and children are measured as different. Women's reproductive role is held both to define their identity and to constrain what status and identities they may occupy, whereas men as a sex are not seen to be confined in this way or any other. This apparent 'naturalness' is, of course, the very quality which makes gender identity and masculinity in particular such a powerful means of instituting hierarchy and establishing authority. Yet it also makes it difficult to study: as John Tosh (1994: 180) has said, masculinity seems to be everywhere and nowhere.

Codes of Martial Masculinity in Pre-colonial North India

How, then, might these concerns contribute to our understanding of political culture in 18th century north India? This was, of course, an extraordinarily fluid world, as the political reach of Mughal power shrank, and was superseded in many parts of the subcontinent by a wide array of large and small regional power-holders. Some of these, such as Bengal, Awadh and Hyderabad, had once been Mughal provincial governorships; some, such as the Jats of the Punjab and the Marathas of western India, represented elements of popular peasant insurgency against Mughal power; and some were 'Rajput' kingdoms, representing the martial values

and kingly aspirations of the dominant Hindu landholding communities of Rajasthan. Some again were established by successful warrior mercenaries, such as the Afghan Rohilla kingdoms around Delhi, or by skilled revenue farmers who, with the support of Hindu bankers and local clansmen, were able to assume the powers and appurtenances of Hindu kings (Bayly 1988). In this wider north Indian context, the archetypal Hindu warrior order of the Rajputs provided the most obvious example of high-profile martial values, and their elaborate codes of honour have consistently attracted the attention of colonial chroniclers and modern historians alike (Fox 1971; Joshi 1995; Peabody 1996; Tod 1920; Ziegler 1981). However, this paper examines masculinity in some rather different contexts, because my aim is to suggest some general arguments rather than to explore in detail the history of a particular group. I wish to examine the gendered culture surrounding those alliances—between kings and their lesser political clients, between rulers and their military servants, between mercenary leaders and their warbands—that was the stuff of 18th century politics and warfare. Here, I want to argue that codes about martial bravery and correct manly behaviour formed part of a wider common language and set of assumptions which have remained largely unexamined in the historiography of pre-colonial north India.

John Richards (1981, 1984, 1993) has extensively studied the codes of martial honour in the Mughal empire at its height from the later 16th through to the early 18th centuries. The Mughal state needed to bring about key changes in the martial cultures of its most important military servants. In particular, the 'free' warrior aristocrats of local north Indian society and the self-sacrificing individual *ghazis* or warriors of the Indo-Muslim tradition had to be persuaded that the primacy of individual or group honour in battle should be second to the needs and disciplines of imperial service. Richards and others have mapped the novel ideological, institutional and ceremonial devices through which the Mughal state worked to achieve these aims, often with extraordinary success. Stuart Gordon has also broadened our understanding of the way in which martial codes worked in pre-colonial India. He has drawn our attention to what he sees as three distinct 'zones of military entrepreneurship', marked primarily by cultural rather than military differences. The Rajput/Mughal zones emphasised heavy cavalry mounted on costly imported horse, an ethic of personal devotion and self-sacrifice, service based on the *mansabdari* system of graded ranks, which was difficult to enter, costly to maintain and operated over very large distances; and the special patronage of a small number of prominent Rajput families who were able to consolidate their 'kingly' powers through Mughal service. The Maratha zone of western India, based on pioneer peasant settler communities who returned home from campaigning to their fields in the monsoon season, included light cavalry mounted on local horse, tactics of guerilla warfare specifically designed to frustrate heavy cavalry, plain, low-capital and informally-run

military service and the patronage of locally dominant landholding communities deeply attached to their land rights in western Maharashtra. The *nayaka* warrior ethos of south India emphasised infantry-based armies, the devolution of many state functions in service grants which helped establish local power-holders, and the close involvement of *nayaka* warriors with Hindu temples and sects. Gordon argues that the persistence of these very different military cultures provides fresh insights into Mughal failures in central and southern India. The Mughals possessed only one model for the integration of local military talent, which was a successful blending of Mughal and Rajput. Holding blindly to this single norm for a correct cavalryman, warrior tactics and terms of service, the Mughals failed to assimilate and deploy the cultural symbols and assumptions that might have enabled them to find solid bodies of imperial servants amongst the Maratha communities of the Deccan (Gordon 1994).

Whilst these accounts have been illuminating, they overlook the important ways in which these were masculine as well as simply martial identities. As I have suggested elsewhere, gender actually stood at the heart of Mughal attempts to recruit an elite of committed supporters (O'Hanlon forthcoming). The Mughals, under the emperor Akbar in particular, sought to make imperial service not just one path to successful manhood in the field of worldly action, but the only one. Only in the emperor's service, which blended together Persian courtly skills with the warrior traditions of the central Asian steppe, could a man realise his highest inner qualities: of purposeful action and heroic striving for the highest ideals, of resolute personal courage tempered by discretion and self-control, of personal honour expressed and safeguarded through dignified personal submission to the legitimate authority of the emperor, who was himself presented as the 'perfect man' (see Rizvi 1975: 357-60). These codes were explicitly contrasted with the qualities of women on the one hand, and on the other, with the crude, uncultivated and inferior forms of masculinity that lay outside Mughal service: intemperate warriors, petty rulers little better than robbers and thieves, unwashed rusticity. While at first remarkably effective in creating a distinctive ethos for an 'elite' imperial service, this effort to project a single ideal of cultivated manliness as its monopoly gradually weakened over the course of the 17th century, as divergent norms and models emerged. This was in part a result of the increased brilliance and luxury of the Mughal court under the emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, and the elaboration of much more complex codes for courtly and cultivated forms of masculinity, increasingly divorced from the ethos of warriorship: man as refined gentleman connoisseur, patron of fine arts, judge of the exquisite in fabrics and gems, a gourmet of fine foods, elegant in person and fastidious in dress.[1]

Challenges to Mughal models also emerged in the encounter with other forms of normative military masculinity that were current among the Marathas, Sikhs and Afghans who were drawn into the north Indian

military labour market and sometimes into service with Mughal armies. Often peasant brotherhoods in arms, these emphasised a soldierly plainness and informality as Gordon had described, but also carried important codes for martial masculinity. Set off against the simplicity and straight comradeship of the warband were not only the feminine worlds of women and home, but also the dandified luxury of the court, where men were adorned with jewels instead of arms, and gold was the coin of devotion to the empire, rather than the lives of loyal soldiers. From this perspective, the 'feminised' worlds of the court and the harem were drawn into a kind of homology, to suggest a model of simple and soldierly masculinity ultimately superior to Mughal norms.

Thus, the 'zones of military entrepreneurship' that Gordon (1994) discusses do not actually contain within them a single homogeneous military culture, but rather rival attempts to establish hierarchies of masculinity, in the manner described by R.W. Connell (1995) above. These distinct, competing and publicly displayed norms powerfully shaped what it meant to be a man in 18th century north India at the level of individual identity and experience. Rival masculinities also offered a means of defining and assigning value to different realms of activity. They were powerful foci in the struggles to create and sustain new group loyalties that were so central to state formation from the late 17th century. They could make the difference between success and failure in military and diplomatic negotiations of many different kinds, in which a military commander's personal reputation and frequent pubic display of the right qualities of martial masculinity could play a crucial role. As we shall see, however, there also continued to exist shared basic norms of martial masculinity, about what constituted bravery and correct manly behaviour in warfare, set against the values of women and the domestic. If men were different from one another in the manner of their military service, these differences receded before the larger divide between men and women.

I shall look at these processes through the early 18th century example of the Mughal military servant and founder of the city of Farrukhabad, Muhammad Khan Bangash (*c.* 1665-1743). As a Pathan, a soldier with enormous personal battle experience and a Mughal military servant, Muhammad Khan was adept at manipulating these competing codes of masculinity and gaining advantage at strategic public moments through his assertion of his own plain soldierly Pathan style. Yet he was able to selectively draw on other codes, to show his competence in the knowledge and skills of the court, and also command its material luxuries.

Manipulating Masculinity in 18th Century North India: Muhammad Khan Bangash of Farrukhabad

The Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad were Pathan mercenaries and service people who came to Hindustan in the late 17th century and settled in Mau-Rashidabad in the Doab region of north India.[2] After two decades of service amongst the warring rajas of Bundelkhand, Muhammad Khan himself entered the imperial service in 1712 in support of Farrukhsiyar, one of the princely contenders for the Mughal throne who led the coup which displaced the emperor Jahandar Shah. With Farrukhsiyar's victory, Muhammad Khan was raised to the rank of a commander of 4,000, given assignments on revenue in Bundelkhand to support his troops, and styled Nawab. Like other emergent state-builders, he proceeded rapidly to found his new city, Farrukhabad, as the centre for his household and those of his 22 sons. Here also he settled his *chelas* (followers), the 'sons of the state' whom he recruited in great numbers from almost every social source—fellow Pathans, local rajas and Rajputs, Brahmans, Bamtela Thakurs: some 4,000 by the end of his life (Irvine 1878: 340). These favoured young men, whose loyalty seemed more predictable than that of troublesome and ambitious brother Pathans, were entrusted with great responsibilities: in the military, as soldiers, bodyguards and paymasters; in the household and even as revenue collectors and deputy governors of provinces.

With this formidable apparatus, Muhammad Khan entered on his career as a powerful player in the political upheavals in Delhi following Farrukhsiyar's deposition in 1719. Petitioned alike by the rival successors Abdullah Khan and Muhammad Shah in 1720, he threw in his lot with the latter and fought in the main body of the battle which brought Muhammad Shah to victory. Raised in rank and granted the title of Ghazanfar Jang, Lion in War, he spent the 1720s engaged with his sons and *chelas* in subduing the mutinous Hindu rajas of Bundelkhand, and much of the 1730s trying to put together alliances to contain the Marathas in their northward expansion. This demanded those classic skills of negotiation and alliance-building that historians have identified as so central to 18th century politics and warfare. Muhammad Khan needed to maintain his credit and continue to press his claims at court: when, for example, his appointment to the governorship of Allahabad was transferred to a rival in 1732 as a result of animosities he had raised in Malwa (Irvine 1878: 304). He had to win allies among the Bundela rajas and lesser chiefs, such as the powerful Chattersaul raja, whom he persuaded to submit to imperial authority in 1729, only to learn that powerful factions in Delhi were trying to undermine him by inciting Chattersaul to further hostilities (ibid.: 297). He had to build friendships with powerful players in the wider political system, such as Sa'adat Khan of Awadh, then himself receiving overtures from the Bundelas and to whom Muhammad Khan

appealed for aid as the Marathas pushed northwards later that year; or with Nizam-ul Mulk, with whom he concerted in 1731 against the Marathas in Malwa. He needed at the same time to maintain control over his threatened estates in Bundelkhand and later in Malwa. Most of all, Muhammad Khan needed to be able to attract good troops and keep them loyal even when he had little to pay them with, and it was clear that his star in the imperial court was waning.

In many ways, then, Muhammad Khan's path to power was a common one, and the political and military relationships he needed to sustain are now familiar to historians. Central to them were the codes for martial masculinity discussed above. At one level, these codes were shared ones. A man was most a man as a soldier, in the company of other men. What distinguished a man was his prestige as a skilful and fearless fighter, his ability to draw other battle-hardened warriors to his standard, his aura of success as a commander, his soldierly dignity in the conduct of diplomacy, and his fierce regard for the honour of his household and his women. These qualities were displayed in very direct and physical ways: in the splendour of men's physiques, the dazzle of equipage, the grim efficiency of their weapons and the magnificence of their fighting animals. Here, allies, troops, patrons and rivals continually weighed and judged, challenged and affirmed each other's possession of the manly qualities and competence deemed essential in the successful ruler, ally, military commander and warrior. Ridicule and failure always loomed as possibilities, as the qualities of the inner man revealed themselves to this audience of his fellows, and were appraised by practised eyes. Here, as suggested in the foregoing, men constructed and sustained masculine identity very much in relation to their peers.

Juxtaposed against these codes, and running through Irvine's account of the Bangash Nawabs, is the contrast with the realms of women, the household and harem. Of course, the brilliance of a man's household demonstrated his control over women, and their display for the enjoyment of honoured allies formed an essential tool of diplomacy. But too much association with women made a man womanly; his real place lay with his fellow-men and soldiers. As we shall see, a defining moment in the gathering of an army lay in the moment of a commander's appeal to his men, that those who preferred to be at home with their women and children should leave and only those prepared for danger and death set out together on campaign, pledged to mutual loyalty. Running alongside this theme in the life of Muhammad Khan is the parallel contrast between his own soldierly plainness and the luxurious, effete and money-oriented world of foppish amirs and urbane courtiers in Delhi. Here, we see him making the worlds of the court and the harem homologous, juxtaposed to his own superior martial simplicity. Moreover, this was not only a tactic in Muhammad Khan's negotiation with Muhammad Shah. It was also used against him by his own *chelas*, and formed an important theme

in the way that he received and entertained other rulers and military men in the search for prospective allies.

Let us look at the varied contexts in which these themes worked themselves out in Muhammad Khan's career. I shall look at four contexts: juxtapositions between household, court and harem; the staged fighting contests between picked warriors that were such an important part of court entertainment; the hunting and animal fights, that figured equally importantly as court recreation; and the battlefield.

Muhammad Khan played very interestingly with themes of luxury and plainness, masculinity and effeminacy, and the world of the warrior and the harem. He had an enormous female establishment: 22 sons and 22 daughters who reached adulthood, 1,700 concubines in the private apartments of his palaces, and nine further establishments each containing women drawn from all classes—Kachi, Chamar, Koli, Rajput, Banya, Brahman, Sayyad, Mughal, Pathan and Shekh (Irvine 1878: 339). Irvine describes his principal pleasure-house in the Paen Bagh as magnificent (ibid.: 277). Yet Muhammad Khan made a very deliberate point of keeping his own public style austerely plain. According to Irvine: 'He always wore clothes of the commonest stuff. In his audience hall and in his house the only carpet consisted of rows of common mats, and on these the Pathans and *chelas* and all persons, high or low, had to be content to sit' (ibid.: 338). The point, however, was not just to display a soldierly plainness, for this might be taken as poverty. Muhammad Khan intended rather that his visitors should see this as a deliberate preference over luxury and pomp. Irvine describes how:

> When any noble from Delhi visited the Nawab, no change was made, the same mats were spread to sit on, and the same food presented. The visitors were astonished at the contrast between his great wealth and power, and the simplicity of his personal habits. Then, for each day after their arrival, the Nawab would name a *chela* to entertain the visitor sumptuously (ibid.: 338).

The implication here was that Muhammad Khan understood his visitor's weakness for luxury and feasting, and so indulged it through one of his *chelas*, but was himself above it.

This comes out very clearly in Irvine's account of the visit of Nawab Umdat-ul-Mulk Amir Khan to Farrukhabad. Umdat-ul-Mulk and his followers seem to have affected the mannered style of fashionable dandies, with lamp-black on their eyelids, their teeth blackened, their hands and feet reddened with henna, rings on their fingers and ears, and bracelets on their wrists. Muhammad Khan and his son Kaim Khan evidently decided to have some fun with them. The Nawab was invited over for an audience, and Muhammad Khan received him in the most austere style: the reception room set out with common white cloths and pillows, the utensils for distribution of *pan* (betel) leaves of wood and base metal,

and Muhammad Khan himself very simply dressed. 'Nawab Amir Khan was much amused at this poor display. On the road back he said to Kaim Khan, "Though your father is a Bawan Hazari [a holder of very high military rank], he looks like a villager, why do you not teach him better?".' Meanwhile, Muhammad Khan ordered his *chela* Ja'far Khan to prepare the most stunning reception for the Nawab. 'Ja'far Khan got out some thousands of silver vessels, he cut up many thousand rupees' worth of gold brocade, and spread scarlet broadcloth all over his *bagh* [garden]. He sent for all the favourite singers, and made ready the most exquisite meats.' After the dinner, many of the most valuable items, the silver dishes and gold brocade were casually given away to the servants and the singing women. Muhammad Khan completed this elaborate piece of public one-upmanship on Amir Khan's next visit. He gave him a handsome present and made apologies for his own humble style of entertainment. For, as he said, 'he was only a soldier' (Irvine 1878: 338-39).

These publicly-made juxtapositions between the worlds of the soldier on the one hand, and on the other of the womanly realm of the harem and the luxurious world of the court, emerge again and again. During the battle of Karnal in 1739 against the invading Persian forces of Nadir Shah, Muhammad Shah put Muhammad Khan in charge of his women. After the defeat of the Mughal forces, Muhammad Shah enraged Muhammad Khan by reproaching him bitterly for his absence from the battlefield. The latter kept to his house and evaded all efforts to make him come to the court until Nadir Shah's own men were sent to bring him. Muhammad Khan told his men that his last hour had come, and went to the court evidently prepared to recover his reputation, or die in the attempt. He went arrayed in full battle armour, with mail-shirt, breastplate and backpiece, helmet and gauntlets, with his shield, sword and dagger at his wrist. Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah were seated together in the hall, along with 200 men with naked swords on either side. 'The master of ceremonies announced Muhammad Khan, stating that he was armed and refused to leave his sword at the door, on the grounds that he was a soldier, not a noble, and that a soldier's jewels were his arms'. This gambit worked, for Nadir Shah ordered him to be admitted armed, and then congratulated Muhammad Shah on the loyalty of his servant Muhammad Khan. The latter followed up his advantage, remarking to Nadir Shah that actually 'none was so faithless as he; for had he been staunch His Majesty would not have easily come so far; and he regretted that he had not been posted to the van of the army'. Muhammad Khan's credit continued to rise, and Nadir Shah invited him forward to receive the costliest of robes. Muhammad Khan then delivered his final salvo:

> Putting on the robes, he made his obeisance, but gave no money offering. Nadir Shah's wazir, thinking this was wrong, asked the reason. Muhammad Khan answered that it was not a soldier's business to give tribute

> of gold and silver: that he left to amirs and wazirs. He was only a soldier, and his head was his offering (Irvine 1878: 331-32).

Evidently, the defence of the harem was a persistent source of difficulty, for at the battle of Panipat 22 years later, we find Muhammad Khan's son Ahmad Khan in much the same situation, 'directed to guard the women, his force being so small. The Nawab refused indignantly, saying that such work was fit for eunuchs, he would fight in the front' (Irvine 1879: 127).

These themes of martial values over those of harem or court could be played with in interesting ways, and used in a variety of situations to enhance a man's reputation and strengthen his bargaining position. Muhammad Khan found himself at the other end of these tactics in dealings with his *chela* Daler Khan. By birth a Bundela Thakur, Daler Khan was a warrior of legendary daring and courage. He also delighted in the splendour of his troops, and spent a year's income from the province he governed in equipping a magnificent body of 1,700 horse. Pressed urgently by Muhammad Khan for remittance of revenue, Daler Khan marched his men in state to the fort and presented them in all their splendour to Muhammad Khan as he sat in court. Protesting his humility as a mere soldier, 'Daler Khan took up the Nawab's shoes and stood behind his seat, saying, "I am only fit to carry your shoes, you may give the Subah to whom you like, one who will bring you heaps of money; these seventeen hundred men are all the revenue you will get from me." Again this worked: it made Muhammad Khan smile, he embraced Daler Khan and sent him back to his district' (Irvine 1878: 286).

Public contests between picked warriors, on the other hand, offered opportunities for the display of qualities of martial masculinity that were more generally shared. Here, of course, there were very long-established Mughal precedents. For Mughal elites, sports and games of many kinds were a source of court recreation, an arena in which aspirants for promotion could catch the emperor's eye and, of course, a means of training and character-building. The emperor Akbar's close adviser Abu'l Fazl described these aims quite explicitly in his justification for the game of *chaughan*, the Indian form of polo which served so importantly as a means of training Mughal heavy cavalry. Some, he said, viewed *chaughan* just as a game,

> but men of more exalted views see in it a means of learning promptitude and decision. It tests the value of a man, and strengthens the bonds of friendship. Strong men learn in playing this game the art of riding, and the animals learn to perform feats of agility and to obey the reins. Hence his majesty is very fond of this game. Externally, the game adds to the splendour of the court, but viewed from a higher viewpoint, it reveals concealed talents (Abu'l Fazl 1977: 309-10).

For 18th century courts too, public contests of picked warriors had important practical benefits, keeping men fit outside the campaigning

season, honing battle skills and building an *esprit de corps*. But such occasions also served a number of vital political purposes, combining display with sociability, prestige with the consolidation of loyalties and friendships. Allies could be entertained with feasting and women, joint projects for military expansion discussed and the disposition of enemies surmised. Equally importantly, these occasions were nodal points for generating information about the relative dynamism of different military and political players in the field, information which was both fed into wider military labour markets in north India, and disseminated through the courts and armies of other potential opponents or friends. On such occasions, allies, rivals and subordinates could scrutinise one another's troops, appraise their bodies, their skills and equipage, and guage their military élan.

Muhammad Khan had to survive this kind of public testing shortly after his reputation was redeemed with Nadir Shah and Muhammad Shah. He attended another public audience with the two kings, taking with him a renowned Indian Muslim archer, wonderfully expert but slight of stature. Nadir Shah called out a champion, a great big man, from amongst his own troops, and asked Muhammad Shah to match him. The little archer offered to go, but Muhammad Khan refused: 'he did not want to be turned into the laughing stock of the army'. But the archer insisted on putting himself forward. With his man in the ring, the spotlight was firmly on Muhammad Khan, and his mettle now publicly to be tested, 'the perspiration poured down Muhammad Khan's body from anxiety, and he muttered a prayer to God'. Seeing his opponent, the Persian said he would lift him and carry him off on his lance point. The two galloped at one another inconclusively, until the Persian's lance struck home, lifting the archer's body from his horse like a tumbler. It looked as though Muhammad Khan was to be humbled: 'Nadir Shah began to laugh, and the countenances fell of those on the other side'. But then, wounded as he was, the Indian turned and let fly an arrow with such violence that it penetrated the Persian's headpiece, so that the man sat dead on his horse. Full of praise, Nadir Shah bestowed a dress of honour on him, no doubt much to Muhammad Khan's relief (Irvine 1878: 333).

Often these public contests could involve players from far afield. Muhammad Khan's son Kaim Khan was himself a renowned lancer, so much so that a Maratha warrior came all the way from Poona to try him. Kaim Khan put him up and entertained him while he checked his credentials. Having done so he fixed a day for the tournament, which was to be held in an open space in the Ganges riverbed where the troops usually exercised. His soldiers all assembled to watch, and the two warriors rode out into the plain.

> There they contended till full noon, but neither had been touched. Now, the Mahratta had a handkerchief round his arm, such as they

> usually tie above their other clothes. The Nawab decided to try and loose this handkerchief with the point of his spear. He touched it repeatedly, but being wet with perspiration the knot had become extremely tight. After some hours, however, the Nawab succeeded in untying it with his lance and carried it off on his point (Irvine 1878: 372).

A further context in which these shared qualities of martial masculinity could be demonstrated lay in dealings with animals. Eighteenth century India was a context in which humans and animals lived in close proximity and came into contact in many daily situations. Animals thus offered a vivid and immediate means of symbolising a whole range of human relations and qualities. At a simple level, celebrating a man's war animals offered another means of talking about his own qualities. Thus the bards celebrated Daler Khan's horses, the sheer physicality of their descriptions almost as an extension of himself as a warrior:

> their hoofs stamp the ground as soon as the foot touches the stirrup; they go like the wind, these milk-white steeds ... by strong chains two grooms lead them; they pull at the chains and plunge and prance. They have arched backs, are white, youthful, strong and young. They are as if formed in moulds out of gold, they are of beautiful shape and form. They have cloths of gold stuff and brocade of every colour, green, yellow, black, white, purple ... they leap and bound, in strength they are like elephants. Sahib Asgar, these are the steeds of a great lord (Irvine 1878: 370).

In rather more complex ways, courtly hunting provided a multiplex arena for the display of manly and martial qualities. Many historians have described the multiplicity of purposes served in the royal progress of the court through the countryside: the display of kingly wealth and the ability to offer protection, manoeuvres for the army in which potential rebels could be overawed, an opportunity to enquire into local affairs and offer access to humble subjects (Blake 1991: 145-47; Mackenzie 1988: 175; Pearson 1984). For armies on the move, hunting and war were very closely related, providing not only fighting practice and a test of the troops' resolve under stress, but an arena for individuals to display their courage and a means of scouting for information about enemy positions. Thus in the days before his final battle with the Bundela rajas, Daler Khan slowly advanced through the Bundela countryside towards Maudha to meet them, hunting in the forests as he went within a few miles of the Bundela armies, and testing the courage of his troops so close to the enemy (Irvine 1878: 365-66). Muhammad Khan too used hunting in this way. Having persuaded the Chattersaul raja to offer his submission to the Emperor, Muhammad Khan spent much of his time with the Raja's eldest son, Harde Sah, and 'frequently made excursions and hunting

expeditions together, and talked of setting out together on a *mulkgiri* [expedition of conquest]' (ibid.: 297).

What is not clear is how far the killing of animals offered a means for the expression of individual masculinity homologous to the excitement and release of sexual conquest, as John Mackenzie (1988: 42-43) has described for a later generation of colonial British hunters. Of course, the courtly hunt in India used hunting animals, such as the cheetah and falcon, on a much larger scale than did colonial hunters, with their greater enthusiasm for combat between the individual hunter and his quarry. It may be that themes of dominance and conquest in the Indian context were enacted more in the formalised contests between fighting animals of all kinds, that featured as a large part of both courtly and popular recreation. Certainly, the staging of fights of large animals formed a centrepiece in every ruler's demonstration of his power and majesty, and the size and rich variety of their animal parks were always an important index of prestige.[3] Many contemporary descriptions of warriors in battle liken them to fighting animals. Thus the bardic tradition celebrating Daler Khan describes how his men 'leapt into the midst of the foe, like the chitah seizes and shakes a deer ... like elephants black as lamp-black, maddened, lifting up their tusks, they drove all before them' (Irvine 1878: 369). Elephant fights carried particular meaning. They could be used as symbolic struggles for the throne, as when Akbar staged a fight between elephants belonging to his rival sons to get an omen as to his successor (Abu'l Fazl 1977: 467). The staging of elephant fights also expressed royal status, and had been a jealously-guarded prerogative of the Mughal throne until the 18th century emergence of regional powers beyond Mughal control, anxious to exercise their own kingly powers. Ahmad Khan employed them in 1761, to the evident fury of Shuja-ud-Daulah:

> The newswriters sent letters to Shuja-ud-daulah, informing him of Ahmad Khan's daily life and stating that he rode in a *palkhi*, that he caused elephants to fight, that he had established a Gulalbari or royal pavilion, and had assumed other privileges of royalty. Shuja-ud-daulah writhed like a snake when he read this, and at once he made a minute report to the Emperor, adding that to mount the throne was the only step, which now remained for Ahmad Khan to take (Irvine 1879: 136).

Just as important a public arena for the display of these qualities was, of course, the battlefield itself. It is no accident that contemporary accounts abound with detailed descriptions of the ebb and flow of battles, for these were the dramatic theatres where a man's mettle could be displayed to most brilliant advantage, and put most violently to test. The *chela* and matchless warrior Daler Khan generated, as Irvine describes, a very rich folk tradition in celebration of his martial qualities. In these Hindi folk songs, we can see many of the themes illustrated above. As he carried his hunting party closer and closer to the enemy, local Muslims reproached

Daler Khan for his rashness and urged him to turn back, but that way, he said, lay disgrace. There followed the familiar moment of combat between men and military commanders, the appeal to choose war and honour over home, wives and children: 'Turning to his troops he harangued them, and offered to pay up and discharge all those who held their wives and children dearer than honour'. Some of his men left him, and with the others he went forward to the violent three-day battle in which he lost his life. Many Hindi bards and contemporaries celebrated his qualities. In body, he was a perfect specimen of manhood, 'his chest a yard wide', while the Pathans and Bundelas named him *surman*, brave, bold, 'the mark of which is that a man's arms are so long that his hands touch his knees when standing up. Daler Khan had this peculiarity (Irvine 1878: 368, 286). The descriptions of Daler Khan's last battle interweave themes of hunting, the dust and roar of combat and the bloody grappling of warriors: 'They gathered in Sihunda-garh, when came word of the war; they took up bow and arrow and repaired to the hunting ground of Mungas'. The tradition graphically describes the fight, 'like that of practised wrestlers; the blood flowed and turned the earth into mire', and the flash and roar of the guns as Daler rode in to attack:

> In many ways did he thrust with his spear, did brave Daler, the mighty. The cannon roared, the swords clashed, the rockets flashed like lightning clouds. They drew their *chapnal*, look at them once! On every side the Mughal and the Bundelas are mingled in one wave (ibid.: 368-69).

Conclusions

Most of my examples in the foregoing are from Farrukhabad. However, I hope that I have illustrated something of the way in which Farrukhabad diplomacy may have been part of a wider martial culture of 'imperial masculinity' that was a very important part of the north Indian political system. This culture was a complex rather than a monolithic one, incorporating both competing efforts to establish a hierarchy of higher and inferior forms of masculinity, and shared codes which juxtaposed men as soldiers generally against the social world of women. Peter Hardy (1981: 207) and others have suggested that outdoor activities in Mughal India provided an arena for Hindu-Muslim contact, and that shared ideals about bravery and correct manly behaviour in warfare, games and hunting helped promote inter-communal fellow feeling. This is an important point to appreciate about these shared codes of martial masculinity. Much of the social world in which they were expressed was essentially an outdoor one, consciously and deliberately juxtaposed to the indoor realms of court, household and harem. Men lived as particular social beings—as Hindu or Muslim, Rajput, Maratha or Pathan, as commander or common trooper, noble or servant—mostly within the indoor realm of the household. In

the outdoor world of the contest, the game, the hunt and the battlefield, the sectional values and identities of the household receded and the common pursuits and codes of martial masculinity could find freer play.

It is also clear from the foregoing that the British were not the first to use masculinity in the way that Mrinalini Sinha (1995) has described, as a cross-cultural means of establishing hierarchies and affirming common identities. The strength of what she identifies as 'colonial masculinity' may well owe something to longer established north Indian practice. Furthermore, these martial codes were above all syncretic and inclusive in character. This seems difficult to reconcile with Ashis Nandy's depiction of India's martial traditions as mainly Kshatriya or Rajput in character. In particular, Nandy seems to me mistaken in seeing Kshatriya tradition as a minor part of Indian culture that became inflated and generalised under the influence of British 'hypermasculinity', so as to efface a pre-colonial world of fluid and multiple gender identities. Pre-colonial martial values and practices were neither simply Kshatriya in origin, nor were they only a minor part of north Indian culture. Although they have been largely invisible to historians, they stood as an essential integrative aspect of more formal political and military institutions. These codes drew men together both in contests about and in recognition of commonalities of gender that often transcended other forms of cultural difference.

Lastly, it is worth asking what the longer term implications of these codes and identities may have been for gender relations in India, particularly in view of the colonial drive to pacification and demilitarisation. Of course, this drive was never fully successful, and the colonial state was only gradually more effective than its predecessors in disarming rural populations. Nevertheless, we do know that the Company's destruction of the military labour market and disbanding of armies through the first half of the 19th century denied military careers, whether seasonal or full-time, to a very significant proportion of the rural population (see Kolff 1990). Many historians have recognised that one of the consequences of colonial peace was to stifle opportunity for many sectors of the rural population, and so to lead to a hardening of caste boundaries. As suggested in the foregoing there may have been implications here too for communal boundaries. Elsewhere, I have argued that these processes also had important implications for women (O'Hanlon 1994: 20-38). As other opportunities for mobility declined, and social distinction came increasingly to rest on the niceties of social propriety, women's conduct became an increasingly sensitive index of status. Declining opportunities for the expression of martial masculinity may have been important here too, as the outdoor world in which they were affirmed contracted, thus focusing attention more closely on the indoor realm of household and family.

Notes

1. These emphases emerge very clearly in the genre of Persian 'conduct books' that appeared from the mid-17th century. See, for example, Husain (1913), and Ahmad (1975). See also Rosalind O'Hanlon (1996).
2. See William Irvine (1878, 1879). As will be seen, Irvine forms my major source for this essay, which is closely based on contemporary Persian and Urdu sources, including a large collection of Muhammad Khan's own letters. For an excellent discussion of the political context, see Seema Alavi (1995: 195-202).
3. See, for example, descriptions of the impressive animal parks in the north Indian state of Awadh, in Sharar (1984: 116-22).

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