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Power, Patronage, and Piety

EDITED BY

GAVIN R.G. HAMBLY

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EMBATTLED BEGAMS: WOMEN AS POWER BROKERS IN EARLY MODERN INDIA

Richard B. Barnett

Some women in early modern Indian regimes wielded genuine political and social power. The Begams of Awadh (north India) are a case-study in leadership-roles.

The literature on women's history of colonial and post-colonial India continues to grow rapidly, enriched by wide-ranging methodological and theoretical debates.[1] The overwhelming majority of these works focus entirely on the modern era. The student of late pre-colonial India, however, does not enjoy such a developed literature, since the problematics, assumptions, and even source materials are not only situationally different, but far less familiar.[2] Vast realms of instructive information on women await exploration within the usual eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century topics such as regional regimes, political and economic re-formulation, cultural re-definition and creativity, military adventurism, and resistance to the insistent *imperium* of the new European presence. Although we may safely assume that early modern history is just as gendered as colonial and post-colonial, there is no consensus on its configurations, or how it constrained or emancipated its women actors. In contrast either to the highly questionable stereotype of the Golden Age of Gender Equality in Vedic India, or to that of the assertive, professional or owning-class reformers of the colonial period, the view of women in the eighteenth century seems limited to two extremes: either they were brazen courtesans, or voiceless, unseen nonentities rustling within the latticed corridors of the zenana, the women's quarters.

We seek a contextualized, de-romanticized view of women and their roles in the period between empires. What follows is thus meant as a partial and tentative assessment of roles that a few women

managed to play during this immensely formative period. This was a time when, although Indian political autonomy was no doubt eroding, Indian elites outside British territories still enjoyed a great deal of cultural, political, and psychological autonomy, within which many millions of Indian women were testing not only the changing limits on their power and selfhood, but ways to expand and even transcend these limits. I will focus on several women power-brokers in Awadh, in the central Gangetic plains. Their roles were, as we shall see, fascinating, but not necessarily typical. Early modern India had dozens if not hundreds of women power-brokers, in as many distinct circumstances with as many unique resources at their disposal.

THE AWADH BEGAMS, 1764–1815

Warren Hastings was Governor-General of India from 1772 to 1784, and was later impeached by the House of Commons on charges of abuse of power. The bill of impeachment had four articles; three of these articles had directly to do with his dealings in Awadh, north India's most powerful state, and the most controversial one involved the Awadh Begams, whom Hastings was accused of 'plundering.' I mention Hastings and the trial only to note the international importance of these women; we will avoid the trial itself because it grew out of internal British politics and the birth-pangs of empire rather than accurate information. The charge that Hastings had exceeded his authority in dealing with the begams prompted Richard Sheridan, MP, to make what is still regarded as the most eloquent speech ever delivered to the House of Commons. Needless to say, it is not regarded as the most accurate.

The two noble women known as "*The* Begums of Awadh"—although there were several others until the state was annexed in 1856—were not only *sharīf*, noble, but closely connected to the increasingly powerless but highly respected Mughal court in Delhi. One was Ṣadr al-Nisā' Begam, the daughter of Sa'ādat Khān, Awadh's dynastic founder. She was also the only widow of Safdar Jang, his successor, and the mother of Shujā' al-Dawla, who ruled Awadh from 1754 to 1775. The other was popularly known as Bahū Begam [Daughter-in-Law Begam], Shujā''s favorite wife and daughter of the Īrānī Mughal noble Ishāq Khān Najm al-Dawla. Her wedding to Shujā' in 1745 was the single most expensive Mughal ceremony

in the history of the Empire, costing half again as much as the wedding of Shāh Jahān's favorite son, Dārā Shukoh.[3] Although they did not always agree, they enjoyed not only status, but considerable economic and political power. Bahū Begam's skills as a power-broker recall those of another great Īrānī dowager, Jahāngīr's consort Nūr Jahān. Bahū Begam was tactful, intelligent, self-aware, and experienced in advising her male relatives, and she overcame her illiteracy by developing a large administrative apparatus in Faizābād, then the capital of Awadh, commanded by two able eunuchs from the harem.[4]

Shujā' deeply trusted his wife, and when heading off to fight the British at the battle of Baksar in 1764, he entrusted much of his treasury, and his official seal, to her custody. After narrowly losing at Baksar, and being reinstated as *nawāb* by the British, Shujā' continued to remit the annual revenue surplus to Bahū Begam, probably because she was his most trustworthy ally. She personally paid much of the British war indemnity after Baksar, which cost some two million rupees, or about £200,000.[5]

Ten years later, in 1775, Shujā' died, naming as successor his eldest son, Āṣaf al-Dawla. A pampered, lazy, impulsive, crude, and wilful youth, Āṣaf was supported by his mother, Bahū Begam, even though in his first few years he was manifestly unfit to rule, especially compared to his half-brother, Sa'ādat 'Alī. Bahū Begam, whose only son he was, supported Āṣaf through numerous challenges to his rule, the most serious from Sa'ādat 'Alī. He was also widely known to be sexually impotent, and thus unable to produce heirs. His marriage in 1770 to a prominent Tūrānī woman was accordingly unhappy and empty, and after one pathetic night—satirized shamelessly by one historian who was no friend of Āṣaf[6]—she retired to the obscurity of the late Shujā''s harem. Indeed, Āṣaf was widely regarded as an odd duck. In the words of the British Resident at Faizābād,

> It is not that the Nabob's State of Health in the least makes me apprehensive of his Death at the present Juncture, yet owing to his amazing Corpulency and as by his former mode of life he is totally debited with respect to Women. The possibility of Heirs unless his Constitution should take some very extraordinary Turn is precluded by the latter circumstance, and by the former we have great Reason to think him liable to a sudden Death.[7]

The treasury controlled by Bahū Begam was twenty million rupees, or about two million pounds sterling.[8] Let us state clearly that this was neither her property, nor hers to control by right. It was mainly state property, intermingled with her earnings. These earnings derived from agrarian tax-free revenues, market taxes, and control of the Faizābād and Ayudhya mints. Together with their male relatives living in Awadh and Delhī, both begams held six percent of the total land revenues of the state, and one-third of all *jāgīrs* (land holdings).[9] Everyone acknowledged that the begams would not surrender this largess without considerable dealing. For her part, Bahū Begam knew that, as a Muslim widow, she could neither spend it conspicuously, nor even give it away. Power lay, for her, precisely in keeping it as long as possible from others who could threaten her status. She and her mother-in-law thus became one of three roughly equivalent power groups in Awadh, along with the *nuwwāb's* court and the East India Company, the latter continuing to nibble away at the resources of the realm through the subsidiary alliance.

Āṣaf's heedless rule, which early on resulted in the cession of Banaras to the British, soon alienated most of the old aristocracy and his mother; his new appointees, partially in reaction, urged him to abandon Faizābād and make Lucknow his capital.[10] He was perfectly happy to be away from her, and from then on had no occasion to show any cordiality or affection, even during his brief formal visits. He knew she wished to have the vigorous and assertive rule of his father maintained, and he also knew *she knew* that he was not up to the task. The begams' position and influence survived even during an almost successful coup attempt by Sa'ādat 'Alī, which resulted in the retirement or emigration of most of the old military nobility, and the vigorous intervention of the British to keep Āṣaf, a compliant puppet, on the throne. The begams knew that their main political resource was status, which they effectively used to avoid surrendering their other great possession, the treasure. In exchange for handing over about three percent of it in the crisis that led to the coup attempt, they extracted an explicit pledge from the British that the rest would remain untouched in their hands. Their influence extended throughout north India, where aging notables, especially elite women, embodied traditional values and exemplified proper moral attitudes.

THE BEGAMS' VIOLENT ROLE IN THE REVOLT OF CHAIT SINGH, 1781

Āṣaf's mother and grandmother remained in Faizābād when he moved his capital in 1776 to Lucknow. By retaining most of Shujā''s treasure, and using it and their guaranteed *jāgīrs* to build their own patronage networks, they developed a rival center of power in north India, and made politics in Awadh a three-way affair, the other two parties being the *nawāb* and the Company.

They got a chance to strike a blow for autonomy in 1781, when Hastings, desperate for resources to fight the French and Mysore, abruptly levied a large tribute on the Mahārājā of Banaras, Chait Singh, who reacted by rebelling. Not only was this newly-ceded tract close to the begams' main land-holdings, but one of Hastings's favorites, Major Hannay, had secretly taken over the revenue farm of Gorakhpur in eastern Awadh. His rapid and violent intrusion into the increasingly profitable timber-market had disrupted the begams' activities there, and they welcomed the chance to do what Āṣaf would never have been able or willing to do, namely take the fight to the British themselves.

In 1779, Major (later Colonel) Alexander Hannay, an old up-country hand and favorite of Governor-General Warren Hastings, who had also been active in opening up Awadh to British influence, had received an illegal assignment from his patron. He was allowed to manage the large districts of Gorakhpur and Bahraich together as a revenue farm, one of eighteen such *ijāras* in *nawāb* Āṣaf al-Dawla's realm. In revenue, it was the fourth-largest *ijāra*, with a *jama'*, or revenue assessment, of Rs 220,000. Territorially, however, it was by far the largest in the entire state, being twice the extent of any other revenue unit. The *nawāb* had objected to this arrangement, to the point of sending his own agent to manage this forest tract, but Hastings forced the issue and had Hannay "reinstated."[11] This was so utterly contrary to Company policy—it was a double-edged fraud, in fact, of the Company as well as the *nawāb*—that Hastings enforced an official silence on all parties to the arrangement. The wording of the contract includes the sentence, "This is a private arrangement and must not in any case be referred to the Supreme Council [of Calcutta]."[12] Thus was a highly profitable and conveniently isolated post severed from the *nawāb*'s patronage network and placed under the Governor-General, who acknowledged the fact two years later when he dismissed Hannay

after the begams had rendered him unable to assist in quelling Chait Singh's revolt. Quoting a later communication from Hastings, who was by then beginning to have much to fear from a critical and financially pressed directorate:

> I was resolved to reform it [*i.e.*, the Company presence in Awadh]. I made no distinction for my own friends [in stopping the abuses]. Hannay was particularly mine. His recall was abrupt, and peculiarly marked with the Hardship of its being done at the point in which he was surrounded by Multitudes, and in danger of instant death."

One of our sources in the confrontation over what Hannay had been doing in Gorakhpur is an observant eyewitness named Abū Tālib Iṣfahānī, who was one of Hannay's chief agents.[14] Although a firm partisan of Hannay, he confirmed that his patron used the revenue farm to "amass money," largely by means of rapid escalation of harvesting practices, enforcing strict collection schedules, and monopolizing local trade networks through the command structure of his regiment in the second brigade of the Bengal Army.[15] We also have the Governor-General's own published defence of his response to the crisis, which contains many excerpts from letters written by the perpetrators and targets of the revolt, as well as his own rationale for making and executing policy on the spot.[16]

With his network of hired enforcers, both to protect his burgeoning logging camps and to intimidate ratepayers to be prompt and forthcoming, Hannay managed in less than two years to increase the value of his annual lease from RS 220,000 to RS 350,000, or by 59 percent. This figure should be understood as the amount he was willing to pay the *nawāb's* treasury in order to keep his revenue farm; his actual proceeds from such trade, as new colonial cities needed to be built down river, making heavy use of excellent hardwood timber, would have increased by much more.[17]

Let us be clear that the revolt against Hannay was part of a larger revolt against British interference in east Awadh, led by Mahārājā Chait Singh of Banaras, who was reacting with violence to the extortions of a cash-hungry Hastings. Rushing to support the Mahārājā were Āṣaf al-Dawla's estranged mother and grandmother in Faizābād. Under their direct influence, and assisted by surreptitious payments, *zāmīndārs*, village headmen, tribesmen, and cultivators alike rose up against the excesses of Hannay's timber-harvesting operation in Gorakhpur.

The cause they chose was widely accepted as just and necessary. News of Hannay's methods spread well beyond Awadh; as one Company employee wrote to his father, "...the cruelties acted in Gorakhpur will for ever be quoted to the dishonour of the British name."[18] Hannay's notoriety was such that it was given as a negative example of British interference in James Mill's *The History of British India*.[19] After the revolt, when the *nawāb* had been misinformed that Hannay was on his way back into Awadh, he cast aside his normal meek epistolary style to Hastings and wrote as follows: "If, by means, any matter of this country dependent on me should be entrusted to the Colonel, I swear by the Holy Prophet that I will not remain here, but will go from hence to you. From your kindness, let no concern dependent on me be entrusted to the Colonel."[20] At the time he wrote this, he had no idea that his female relatives had already underwritten Hannay's downfall.

As Nathaniel Middleton, Resident at Lucknow, observed when reporting the revolt to Hastings (then holed up in Chunar Fort, after barely escaping from Banaras itself), of all the British officers preying on the bounty of the *nawāb's* realm, as opposed to those in Banaras itself, it was Hannay whom the rebels attacked first, coming by tens of thousands against Hannay's beleaguered force as various parts of it retreated across the Ghāgara River to the safety of Tanda and thence to Faizābād.[21] Hannay himself, once there, found it not only impossible to send any military support to the beseiged Governor-General in Chunargarh, but impossible even to communicate with other parts of the entire southeastern half of Awadh. Those officers he did contact attempted to join him, but according to Abū Tālib, "each of these officers who crossed the river was plundered and killed," and, when Hannay attempted to rally his remaining forces for a relief of Chunar, his own non-commissioned officers had become so disaffected that Abū Tālib himself was cut off and surrounded for nineteen days by rebels whose numbers he estimated, probably with self-serving hyperbole, at 50,000.[22] Frantic and isolated in Faizābād, Hannay related how further rebel recruitment was going on in broad daylight, how Company employees were refused provisions in the marketplace, how the postal system was so compromised that multiple copies of all communications had to be sent by different routes, and how

> it is the general belief of every man in this part of the country, that the conduct I have related, is a concerted plan for the extirpation of the English. *The people who are daily sent to him* [Chait Singh], *horse and foot, from Fyzabad*, and the seat of rebellion I have before named [between the Ghagra and Gandak Rivers] is *very great*. The *Begums* have *almost themselves* recruited for him. The old Begum does, in the most open and violent manner, support Chait Singh's rebellion and the insurrection; and the Nabob's mother's accursed eunuchs, are not less industrious than those of the Burra [elder] Begum.[23]

In Gorakhpur district, at least, it seems to have been an uprising involving all ranks of society, and supported by the majority of the rural populace. Hannay had seemed bent on treating his *ijāra* or revenue farm as private property, as a source of maximum profit by any means necessary, not the least of which was an openly declared monopoly on timber, routine intimidation of village headmen, floggings, and even an occasional mutilation.[24] The rebels are referred to repeatedly in Company records as Gongwāllās—that is, *gaonwāllās* or villager cultivators—indicating that the rebellion had assumed overtones of a full-blown agrarian revolt against Hannay's and others' revenue-collecting and trading methods. An employee of the begams in Faizābād, while discounting the begams' obvious role as their co-sponsors, wrote derisively of the rebels: "a complete change came over the common folk, who are no better than cattle. Wherever the villagers saw a red-coated regular, they harried him."[25] The begams, it seems, were prefiguring in their own small way the events of 1857. Although their resources were severely limited, they were commiting their status and their treasure, mobilizing resistance to injustice across an impressively large communications-network almost the size of Scotland. Perhaps most importantly, these secluded women were exercising the power that many of their countrymen had long wished the *nawāb* would use.

The rebellion, after seven violent weeks, was crushed in October by relief detachments of Company troops, in keeping with the terms of the subsidiary alliance that had been negotiated with the *nawāb*. But even Hastings had thought, from time to time during his month cooped up in Chunar Fort, that he and his small force were doomed. One can now visit the rooms in which he stayed, which are marked by commemorative plaques, on a short day-trip from Banaras. Hannay eventually made his way to the relative safety of Lucknow,

once the road from Faizābād was secured.[26] But a furious Hastings not only recalled him and stripped him of all authority, but removed all British personnel and commercial influence from Gorakhpur and Bahraich. Hannay, utterly without patronage or further career prospects, despondently retired to Calcutta, where he soon hanged himself.[27]

BRITISH RETALIATION: THE 'PLUNDER' OF THE BEGAMS

The British response to the begams' massive show of resistance was the resumption of their tax-free grants of land, and the attempt to seize the sizeable assets, in cash and kind, that they had held for almost two decades. For his part, Āṣaf was by now quite ready to participate in this retribution, although he wished such a catharsis to be blamed on the Company. He agonized and prevaricated over every move in the direction of a direct takeover of the begams' holdings, limiting himself to threats while balking at his own minister's violent schemes. After months of delay, during which time the *nawāb's* hesitancy to achieve more than a paper transfer caused Hastings to send in another army to force Āṣaf's hand, both the Awadh and Company armies marched into Faizābād, dispersing its soldiery without firing a shot.

But all involved knew that the persons of the two women could not even be approached threateningly, much less confined. The targets were instead the two eunuchs, who were imprisoned, but not tortured. Their opium was withheld, however, and within a week the limited amounts they controlled—RS 550,000 or about £55,000—were in the *nawāb's* hands. They were then kept in confinement, although well treated, for an entire year of largely fruitless negotiations among the British military commander, the Resident, the *nawāb*, and of course the begams. In this prolongued period of testing and turmoil, even the British participants seem to have been cowed by the status these women enjoyed.

At last an agreement secured the eunuchs' freedom and the withdrawal of Faizābād's occupation forces, at the cost to the begams of RS 450,000, and to the eunuchs of another RS 50,000, or about £50,000 total.[28] This did not represent much of a hardship to anyone in Faizābād. In the words of an eyewitness, the money and valuables surrendered to the *nawāb* (and immediately turned over to the Company to pay arrears on the subsidy) did not even come from Awadh, but were some of the resources which Shujā' had confiscated

from the deposed *nawāb* of Bengal, Qāsim ʿAlī Khān, just prior to the battle of Baksar. Compared to what Hastings could have had, or to what he wanted, neither the begams nor the eunuchs were inconvenienced much at all:

> even during their imprisonment Jawāhir ʿAlī Khān had twelve elephants, thirty horses, and one hundred servants, and Bahār ʿAlī Khān [the other eunuch] had a like establishment. The only difference was that the sepoys [local troops] were scattered, and some ten or twenty friends were deprived of their monthly salaries, and received only their evening meals.[29]

The Resident, Nathaniel Middleton, an old India hand and Hastings's special envoy to Lucknow, explained to his furious patron that the *nawāb* seemed satisfied with the outcome of this confrontation, and wished no further harm to come to his highly respected female relatives. Greater violence was not at all likely to produce greater results, since to despoil the begams entirely would have destroyed their large role in the revenue-paying hierarchy, and furthermore would have alienated much of the political network in northeast Awadh that had already revolted once in favor of Chait Singh. In sum, he wrote, "No further rigor than that which I exerted could have been used against females in this country, to whom there can be no access."[30]

Indeed, the *nawāb* himself soon faced the annihilation of his remaining power in Awadh, as Hastings replaced Middleton with the truculent John Bristow, and tried through the latter to govern the realm for the Company's fiscal benefit. In a remarkable display of widespread passive resistance, launched soon after Āṣaf visited the begams and promised to restore their *jāgīrs* (since he now needed them as allies), all official functions came to a standstill the moment Bristow gained access to the state accounts and the state seal.[31] The *nawāb*, desparate for allies, visited Faizābād and promised to restore the begams' *jāgīrs*. After prolongued failure by the Company to squeeze more money and land out of the state of Awadh, not only was Bristow recalled, but Hastings went himself to Lucknow to re-negotiate the relationship between Awadh and the British, in terms highly favorable to the former. The begams had succeeded throughout in keeping their power and fortune intact.

Āṣaf died in 1797, after naming his adopted son, Wazīr ʿAlī, as heir. Wazīr ʿAlī, who had been purchased before birth from a Muslim

family of carpet-spreaders,[32] was the highly bellicose and outspoken focus of an anti-British coalition, including both begams, until four months later when Āṣaf's brother, Saʿādat ʿAlī, was led out of confinement in Banaras and forcibly installed as *nawāb* by the Governor-General, Sir John Shore.[33] The terms dictated to poor Saʿādat ʿAlī at this juncture were the basis for the annexation of half of Awadh in 1801 by Wellesley.[34]

There remains the issue of the disposition of the begams' holdings during their senior years, and at their deaths. The older begam, Ṣadr al-Nisāʾ Begam, died in 1796 at the age of about seventy, whereupon her chief eunuch, Matbūʾ ʿAlī Khān, immediately distributed her entire moveable wealth among her mourners and friends, leaving nothing for the British or the Lucknow court to take or tax.[35] Bahū Begam continued at the center of a vast patronage network, employing more than ten thousand people. When Āṣaf died the following year, her sincere lamentations at his bedside and graveside were followed by her swift seizure of most of his animals and moveable property, which she took back with her to Faizābād in the confusion of Wazīr ʿAlī's reign. Having failed to ensure the continued rule of Āṣaf's adopted son, she then waited for Saʿādat ʿAlī to make his peace with her. But he insolently snubbed her requests for more tax-free revenues, and showed nothing but disrespect. She declared to the Resident, John Lumsden, in a highly unusual personal interview that was a major departure from the etiquette observed by *nawābī* widows, that her property should be put in the form of a Company-guaranteed will. This would include endowments for her tomb, provisions for her closest dependents, and a large gift to the holy *Shīʿī* shrine at Karbala, in Irāq.[36]

The Company thus fortuitously received cash and redeemable goods worth Rs 71,00,000—about £710,000—when she eventually died in 1816, at the age of eighty-eight. Her Faizābād power-network vanished utterly, but without ever having succumbed to the demands from Lucknow for any share of Shujāʿ's treasure.[37] Indeed, Saʿādat ʿAlī's successor, Ghāzī al-Dīn, vigorously asserted his right to the treasure, but the Company was not about to surrender it.[38] On the face of it, this transaction might seem gratuitous, eccentric, or senile. But she had seen how easily her mother-in-law's, and then her late husband's, treasures had been carried off, and knew that a will under English law was the only way to secure a competency for her

dependents, a fund to build her tomb, and a *Shī'ī* religious endowment at Karbala. It would also prevent the dissipation of her life's main claim to fame among those elements of Awadh's polity which had tried to make her widowhood so miserable, and which would have met none of the will's conditions. Illiterate old lady that she was, she still had the clarity and foresight to approach even her former enemies if they could preserve her legacy.

CONCLUSION: VEILED POWER IN AWADH

A few generalizations emerge from our brief narrative of these two women. First, they definitely transcended the prescribed boundaries of gender in pre-colonial Indo-Islamic society, with a degree of creativity and elegance that their male chroniclers could report only in amazement. Operating both in concert with powerful male relatives—as was the case when Shujā', even in defeat, was still in control of his realm—and in the vacuum left by the incompetence and powerlessness of his successors, they continually were able to act in not only their own best interests, but in what seemed reasonably to them to be the interests of the state. Their power was outside both the *sharī'a* and the customary law of Indo-Muslim political culture. Although their most constant nemesis was the British beyond the Karamnasa river to the east, the very presence of Company power added to theirs, by virtue of the *nawāb's* sullen realization that most of what he could take from them would end up in British pockets anyway.

Second, whereas the begams did cross gender boundaries in the exercise of their power, they utilized their status as women as a powerful resource. They never violated *parda* until the very end of the century, preferring to stay hidden in the zenana, behind closed doors and drawn curtains. No unrelated intact male saw their faces; descriptions of their appearances are utterly absent from the chronicles; no painter ever captured them in the thousands of art works commisioned in Awadh by Indians and Europeans alike during this period.[39] The *adab*, or etiquette, of society demanded that they remain confined, and in their confinement they ruled a state within a state, their rampart consisting of an unquestioned moral code rather than brick and stone. *Parda* was a political resource during Hastings's invasion of Faizābād to seize their assets; the price either the *nawāb* or the British commander would have had to pay

for violating it was too horrible to contemplate. When Bahū Begam finally did come out from behind the veil, it was to negotiate her will with the British Resident, which because it represented her entering another moral universe had to involve, however temporarily, the symbolic abandonment of the old.

Third, their actions as power-brokers sent definite signals to other political and social players, both Indian and foreign. They resisted the foolhardy and heedless doings of Āṣaf, thus helping to check and even tutor him. They resisted, with much violence, the British attempt to inject a rapacious capitalist ethos into the Gorakhpur area. They helped expel the British Resident who tried to take the reins of power into his own hands. They preserved for a long time, and with a high level of managerial skill, their own segment of the segmentary Awadh polity. All these episodes of their 'standing forth' as power-brokers not only postponed the British takeover of north India's richest realm, but convinced the Company that a more successful form of colonial rule would be an indirect one, utilizing what Company officials came to call India's "natural leaders" and based on more accurate information than had at first been available. After their experience in Awadh, the British approached other targeted regional states much more circumspectly.

Finally, how are the begams treated in the history and literature of the period? In virtually all the Persian and Urdū sources, they are depicted matter-of-factly as rational actors responding to challenges. There is very little male shame involved, no Jeremiads about gender boundaries, no rhetoric about a crisis of masculinity. It seems that the writers of an India in crisis coolly accepted *heroinism* as a welcome complement to heroism, even though both were seen to be in short supply when faced with the overwhelming power of the encroaching *farangī*. The Urdū poetic genre of the *shāhr-i āshob*, or 'ruined city,' is not totally free from accusations that men, as humans in great distress, are weak, but gender guilt as such is absent from the contemporary source materials.[40]

NOTES

1. Examples: K. Sangari and S. Vaid, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989); K. Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed, 1986),

'Introduction,' pp. 1–24; Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993); Rehana Ghadially, *Women in Indian Society: A Reader* (New Delhi: Sage, 1988); see also the journals *Manushi* and *The Journal of South Asian Women's Studies*.

2. One major exception is Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India: 600 BC to the Present*, vol. 1: *600 BC to the early Twentieth Century* (New York: Feminist Press, CUNY, 1991), pp. 1–64. See also Anju Kapur, "Theorizing Women Writing in India," *South Asia Bulletin* 16 (1994): 114–21; Barbara Ramusack, "From Symbol to Diversity: The Historical Literature on Women in India," *South Asia Research* 10.2 (Nov. 1990): 139–57.

3. A.L. Srivastava, *Shūja-al-Dawla*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Delhi: Shiva Lal Agarwala, 1961), vol. 1, p. 6.

4. Muḥammad Faiz Bakhsh, *Tārīkh-i Farahbakhsh* 1818, trans. William Hoey as *Memoirs of Delhi and Faizabad* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1889), vol. 2, pp. 123ff.

5. Bakhsh, p. 19.

6. Harcharan Dās, *Chahār Gulzār-i Shujā'i 1786–87*, British Library, Or 1732, fol 199B.

7. Bristow to Council 2 March 1775, *Foreign Department Secret Consultations* [hereafter FDSC] 3, 20 April 1775.

8. Tasadduq Husain, *Begumāt-i Awadh* (Lucknow: Kitab Nagar, 1956), 35; here I accept the eighteenth-century convention that £1.00=RS 10.

9. Abstract Revenue Account, 1780, and Jagir List, 1780, in Purling to Council 30–4–80, FDSC(A), 22–6–80, reprinted as Bengal Secret Consultations, 22–6–80, appendix 23, India Office Records, Parliamentary Branch Collection, no. 16.

10. Bakhsh, pp. 18–24.

11. National Archives of India [NAI], Select Committee Letter Received [SCLR], 1771–72 (165); Secret Department Records [SDR], 9 May 1774, 7(b); SDR, 3 Feb. 1777 (7); SDR, 16 Jan. 1781 (4,5); Rājā Gobind Rām to Āsaf ud-daula, 11 Aug. 1779, received at Fort William 3 Dec. 1779, *Calendar of Persian Correspondence* [CPC], vol. 5, p. 391, no. 1692(1); Hastings to Āṣaf, 26 Apr. 1780, CPC, vol. 5, p. 439, no. 1846.

12. "Copy of an agreement between the Nawab and Major Hannay," CPC, vol. 5, p. 377, no. 1641, received at Fort William 13 Oct. 1779.

13. Hastings to Macpherson, 12 Dec. 1781, quoted in *Warren Hastings' Letters to Sir Henry Macpherson*, ed. Henry Dodwell (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1927), p. 106.

14. His 1797 memoir is *Tafzīh ul ghāfilīn*[*The Disgrace of the Negligent*—he was virulently opposed to the *nawāb* and his court), ed. 'Ābid Rezā Bīdar (Rampur: Institute of Historical Studies, 1965). Trans. W. Hoey as *History of Asafu'ddaulah* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1885; rpt., Lucknow: Pustak Kendra, 1971). References

are to the Hoey translation. Abū Tālib is more notorious for his subsidized trip to Europe and London, about which he wrote in *Ma'sir-i Tālibī*, trans. Charles Stewart as *Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan* (London: 1810; rpt. New Delhi: Sona, 1972). For the revolt of Chait Singh generally, see K.K. Datta, *Anti-British Plots and Movements Before 1857* (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1970), chapter 1.

15. Hannay's subordinate officers are named on p. 44 of Abū Tālib's memoir; they were all British, and virtually all of them were killed in the ensuing revolt.

16. Warren Hastings, *A Narrative of the Late Transactions at Benares* (London: J. Debrett, 1782), reprinted in *India Tracts, 1772–1872* (Calcutta: Bangabasi Office, 1905), 106 pp. and 45 pp. of appendices.

17. Abū Tālib, pp. 43–44.

18. H.T. Colebrooke to his father, 28 July 1788, in T.E. Colebrooke, *The Life of H.T. Colebrooke* (1873), p. 30, quoted in Marshall, p. 119.

19. London, 1818, vol. 4, pp. 313–15.

20. Quoted in H.C. Irwin, *The Garden of India* (London: W.H. Allen, 1880), p. 90.

21. Middleton to Calcutta Council, FDSC 2, 9 October 1781.

22. Abū Tālib, 45–46.

23. Italics in original. Hannay to Middleton, 8, 13, and 20 September 1781, quoted extensively in Middleton to Hastings, 17 October 1781, appended to Hastings, *Narrative of the Transactions in Benares*, pp. 95–101.

24. See Major John Macpherson's journal in *Soldiering in India 1764–1787*, ed. William Charles Macpherson (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1928), pp. 401–02.

25. Bakhsh, p. 107.

27. Abū Tālib, p. 46.

27. Abū Tālib, p. 46.

28. Bakhsh, p. 207.

29. Bakhsh, p. 198.

30. Middleton to Hastings, 5 Feb. 1782, FDSC, 40A, 12 June 1783.

31. See my "Political Problems of the Early Lucknow Residency," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Hyderabad Session (1978), fall 1979, pp. 187–203, for a full account of this crisis, which forced Hastings to redefine the British relationship with Awadh during a visit to the *nawāb* in 1784, his last official act before going home.

32. Bakhsh, p. 255.

33. Shore's official account appears as "Narrative of the Revolution in Oudh," 14 Jan. 1798, FDSC 30 Jan. 1798, pp. 53–126. Reproduced in *The Private Record of an Indian Governor-Generalship, 1793–98*, ed. Holden Furber (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933), appendix C, pp. 159–82.

34. For Wellesley's harsh terms and imperious schoolmaster's language, see Wellesley Papers, British Library, Add. 13526–27.

35. Bakhsh, pp. 249–51.

36. Bakhsh, pp. 261–64, 290–304.

37. A.F.M. Abdul Ali, "The Last Will and Testament of Bahu Begam," *Indian Historical Records Commission, Proceedings* 6 (Jan. 1924): 149–56.

38. Richard Strachey's correspondence as Resident of Lucknow, 3 Nov. 1815–24 Jan. 1816, India Office Library and Records, MSS Eur. D5143.

39. Two recent studies of this extensive patronage are Pheroza Godrej and Pauline Rohatgi, *Scenic Splendours: India Through the Printed Image* (London: The British Library, Arnold Publishers, 1989), and Mildred Archer and T.P. Bruhn, *A Journey to Hindoostan: Graphic Art of British India, 1780–1860* (Storrs, Conn.: William Benton Museum of Art, 1987).

40. For this genre, see Carla R. Petievich, "Poetry of the Declining Mughals: The Shahr Ashob," *Journal of South Asian Literature* 25.1 (1990): 99–110; Kumkum Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society in Early Modern India: Bihar, 1733–1820* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), chapter 9; Fritz Lehmann, "The Eighteenth-Century Transition in India: Responses of Some Bihar Intellectuals," Ph.D. dissertation in history, University of Wisconsin, 1967; Fritz Lehmann, "Shah Ayat Allah 'Jauhri' and his Shahr Ashob," *Abdul Karim Sahitya-Visarad Commemoration Volume* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1971), pp. 73–82.

SITT NAṢRA BINT 'ADLĀN: A SUDANESE NOBLEWOMAN IN HISTORY AND TRADITION

Idris Salim al-Hasan and Neil McHugh

The Sudanese nolewoman Sitt Naṣra bint 'Adlān (fl. c. 1800–c. 1860) has not received scholarly attention commensurate with her social, economic, and political prominence.

> Dr. Reitz took me one day to visit the celebrated Sitteh (Lady) Nasra, the daughter of the last king of Sennaar and brother of the present shekh of that province. She is a woman of almost masculine talent and energy, and may be said to govern Sennaar at present [1852]. All the Arab shekhs, as well as the population at large, have the greatest respect for her, and invariably seek her advice, in any crisis of affairs. Her brother, Idrīs wed Adlān, notwithstanding his nominal subjection to Egypt, still possesses absolute sway over several hundred villages, and is called king of Kulle [Ghule]. The Lady Nasra retains the title of Sultana, on account of her descent from the ancient royal house of Sennaar. She has a palace at Soriba, on the Blue Nile, which, according to Lepsius, exhibits a degree of wealth and state very rare in Sudan. She was then in Khartoum on a visit, with her husband, Mohammed Defalleh, the son of a former Vizier of her father, King Adlan.[1]

With these words the United States tourist Bayard Taylor introduces the Sudanese noblewoman whom he met during a sojourn in Khartoum in 1852. Despite hyperbole and some factual errors, this passage describes one of the most prominent and influential figures of nineteenth-century Nilotic Sudan—and one of the most ignored on the part of professional historians. Sitt Naṣra bint 'Adlān was perhaps the highest-ranking survivor of the aristocracy of the Funj kingdom after its conquest by Egypt (1820–21), was a major actor in the political economy of the Turko-Egyptian