ROBES OF HONOUR

Khil'at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India

EDITED BY

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
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São Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto

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Published in India
By Oxford University Press, New Delhi

First published 2003

ISBN 0 19 566322 5

Typeset by Jojy Philip
Printed at Roopak Printers, New Delhi 110 032
Published by Manzar Khan, Oxford University Press
YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001

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Acknowledgements

This book began as a panel at the 28th Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin (1999). We all benefited from the lively discussion. I wish to thank Rich Freeman, Richard Eaton, and Lee Schlessinger for insightful comment on early drafts. Several art historians have aided in my pursuit of visual evidence including Stephen Markel, Daniel Ehnbom, Sharon Littlefield, Robert Skelton, and Jerry Losty. I especially wish to thank the congenial and hard-working group of contributors.

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Introduction

Ibn Battuta and a Region of Robing

Stewart Gordon

INTRODUCTION

This volume analyses a ceremony, termed *khil'a* in Arabic and *khil'at* or *sar-u pa* in Persian, found in much of South Asia in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. In the ceremony's barest essentials, a ruler or one holding authority from a ruler presented luxurious garments (often silk) to a recipient. The outfit always included a robe—the most visible outer courtly garment—but might include items 'from head to foot' (*sar-u pa* in Persian) such as a turban, mid-section wrap, belt, pants, and shoes. The presentation often included other objects, such as gold, slaves, decorated weapons, horses, trappings, or a warrant of office. Sometimes a gift (*nazr*) was expected of the recipient. The ceremony took place in a public setting (court, battlefield) before an audience often attired in similar luxurious robes.

The following references suggest the historical depth, geographic spread, and general importance of the custom in South Asia. A well-known representation of Mahmud of Ghazna (999 CE) shows the invader of India proudly donning a silk robe of honour from the Caliph of Baghdad.[1] Chronicles of his court describe Mauhmud's occasions of honorific robing of his nobles.[2] The custom was in regular use in the Delhi sultanate (c. 1000 CE–c. 1500 CE), all of the Deccan kingdoms (c. 1300 CE–c. 1650 CE) and had spread into Hindu society. Elaborate robes were in use in Vijayanagara, specifically as a means of connecting the kingdom to the Islamicate world.[3] By the fifteenth century, a local Rajput chronicle records a father robing his sons as he sent them to seek their fortune.[4] Tens of thousands of

honorific robes were used by the Mughal Empire, but the Empire's rivals used them just as ubiquitously. An inventory of Shivaji's possessions prepared at his death included thousands of robes of honour.[5] Early European travellers to India proudly had their portraits painted in the robes they received.[6] By the eighteenth century, this system of honour was as common in Tipu's Mysore as it was in Mushidabad[7] or Gwalior. By the nineteenth century, the ceremony became a serious issue of legitimacy between the Mughal court and the emerging British colonial state. Honorific robing was regular feature of nineteenth and twentieth century princely states. Even today, an honoured guest, especially in an Islamic household, might receive a shawl or a scarf on arrival.

This *khil'at* custom was, however, neither exclusively Islamic nor South Asian. It was used in a manner comprehensible to participants in a far larger world that included Christian Byzantium and Eastern Europe, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Spain, the Middle East, Persia, Russia and the Caucasus, Central Asia, Tibet, and China. Its long connected history began on the western borders of China and reflects the production and distribution of silk.[8]

Notwithstanding the ceremony's centrality to South Asian kingship, *khil'at* has received relatively little scholarly attention. In the mid-1920s, F. W. Buckler delivered a paper on the subject at the International Congress of Oriental Studies, Brussels, but little has been written since.[9] Buckler correctly called for replacement of the prevalent Western idea of an 'oriental despot' with a more nuanced understanding of the indigenous theory of rule. He found the *khil'at* centrally concerned with incorporation; nobles and others were through the robing ceremony, subordinated and symbolically incorporated into the body of the ruler. *Nazr* (gift) to the ruler and joint banqueting of the nobility and the ruler reinforced this incorporation. Buckler's ideas of kingly 'incorporation', however, cannot explain many actual examples of the ceremony and, indeed, entire categories of *khil'at* presentation. We will return to Buckler in the concluding section of this essay.[10]

A useful alternate perspective comes from a rethinking of the term 'culture' in the scholarly literature of the last two decades. With the end of the idea of culture as something singular, bounded, sacred, timeless, and often expressed in text, we have arrived at a notion of culture as historically contingent, contested, and intertwined with politics and power.[11] As we shall see, this viewpoint seems to fit the *khil'at* ceremony well, with aspects of the sacred thoroughly mixed

with the political, spilling over obvious geographic barriers with local variants comprehensible to long-distance travellers. Like any royal honorific ceremony, *khil'at* used a consistent set of elements: giver, objects, receiver, and audience. Our task is to analyse the values, practice, and points of contestation that defined *khil'at* as a specific system of honour.

IBN BATTUTA

To explore the 'contours' of a broad world of ceremonial investiture, let us focus on the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta. His *'Rihla'* (Travels) (1356 CE) is important for three reasons. First, he stands at about the midpoint of the long documented history of the custom. The history before about 600 CE is interesting but speculative. The history after Ibn Battuta carries right to the present day. Second, Ibn Battuta covered much of the ceremony's geographic extent and knew when he was beyond the boundaries of this world. Third, he was a participant in and a perceptive observer of the ceremony and often drew judgements and moral conclusions from stories of robing and his own receipt of robes.

In 1325 CE, Ibn Battuta, probably the widest-travelled man of the Middle Ages, left his native Morocco on his first journey, a pilgrimage to Mecca. Born to a family of jurists, the young man had both the education and ambition to acquire education from jurists and saints in the far-flung cities of the Muslim world. As his self-revealing memoirs show, however, he was soon consumed by a desire to 'travel through the earth' and made it a point never to 'cover a second time any road'. Over nearly thirty years, Ibn Battuta travelled throughout North Africa and the Middle East including Constantinople, Spain, Persia, East and sub-Saharan West Africa, the Crimea, the Caucasus, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, India, the Maldive Islands, Ceylon, Sumatra, and China.[12]

On his first journey, Ibn Battuta entered the network of donation-supported hostels and colleges found in any Muslim city of the time. Not only did this system provide food and shelter to the 'learned', it gave a traveller like him access to local jurists and saints with whom he had conversations and from whom he heard lectures and stories. Early in the narrative, 'robes of honour' appear only in anecdotes Ibn Battuta tells of others: amirs rewarded for their loyalty, rulers receiving legitimating robes from the caliph of Baghdad, luxurious robes signalling accession to high office.

By 1330 CE (five years after leaving Morocco), Ibn Battuta was no longer just a young jurist like many of his peers moving among centres of learning. He had studied for two years at Mecca, but, more importantly, he had already travelled further and seen more than most of his contemporaries; he had become a 'notable'. For example, when he travelled in the great train (*mahalla*) of the ruler of Iraq, an amir introduced him and the ruler granted him robes, plus maintenance for some months of his subsequent journey, and letters of introduction to the governor of Baghdad and two other important cities.[13]

Still later, as leader of an entourage of nearly forty people, Ibn Battuta sought and received a high appointment from the Delhi sultan. As such, he was an active participant in robing as a royal honorific at that court. In the course of his life, he was thus positioned to experience investiture in many of its aspects.

In translation, Ibn Battuta's 900-page narrative recounts 90 incidents of ceremonial investiture. 'Robes of honour' appear every few pages throughout the *Rihla*. From this body of Ibn Battuta's experience and other writings of those who gave and received *khil'at*, I will draw out some of the characteristics, problems, and ambiguities of this system of honour. Let us first focus on the *giver*, then the *objects*, and finally on the *receiver*.

THE GIVER

Ibn Battuta's personal experience with robes began on his first journey. A Sufi teacher gave him his own 'patched' robe as a visible symbol of discipleship.[14] By the fourteenth century, robing had a long and complex tradition within the Sufi orders, a tradition that traced its genealogy from the presentation of the mantle of Muhammad.[15] A robe carried the *baraka* (essence) of its former possessor and influenced the behaviour of the receiver. Within the Sufi tradition, therefore, followers expected the robe of a great teacher or saint to deepen the piety and practice of the receiver. In some orders, presentation of the robe literally passed the mantle of authority to a successor.[16] As he travelled the *madrassa* circuit in these early years, Ibn Battuta received several additional robes from Sufi teachers.

In Ibn Battuta's narrative, however, most of the investiture anecdotes are secular, involving rulers, rather than shaikhs. The bedrock characteristic of the system was that *khil'at* established a client relationship between the giver and receiver. The first requirement for the

ceremony was, therefore, clearly to establish who was to give and who to receive. In virtually all Ibn Battuta's stories and experience, he knows and understands the relative political position of the players. To flaunt this basic grammar of ceremony meant to court execution. Early in the *Rihla*, for example, Ibn Battuta describes in some detail the accession of the Il-Khan Sa'id (1317–35), the sultan of much of the Middle East at the time. As a minor part of the story, the son of a failed usurper took refuge with the Mamluk sultan of Egypt who honoured him by sending him robes. To spite the sultan, the man gave even costlier robes to his messenger. This act signalled that he 'behaved in a manner which made it necessary to kill him'. The sultan did and sent his head to the young Il-Khan.[17] The point of the story is that in sheltering a pretender's son, the sultan assumed the role of patron; suitable behaviour required acceptance of the robe and its implied clientship. To presume equality or even superiority by more extravagantly robing the messenger was a transgression punishable by immediate execution. There were many situations, however, in which it was not obvious who would give and who receive, especially between representatives of heads of state. We can, thus, place Bernardo Michael's discussion (Chapter 4) of a problematic encounter between the East India Company and the Gorkha kingdom within a framework of centuries of similarly problematic encounters.

A second universal feature of the *khil'at* system was that initiating the ceremony rested with the giver. Only once in the entire narrative were robes requested of a ruler. The circumstances were so unusual and the ruler's response so unexpected that Ibn Battuta built a story around the incident. After completion of his Friday prayers, the sultan of Kulwa (in Tanzania; the standard spelling is Kilwa.) was approached by a Muslim religious mendicant who asked for the clothes he was wearing. The sultan promptly returned to the mosque, changed, and gave him his entire suit of clothes.

> The population were loud in their gratitude to the sultan for the humility and generosity that he had displayed, and his son, who was his designated heir, took the clothing from the poor brother and gave him ten slaves in exchange.[18]

It is understandable that the ruler's son would ransom the clothes for ten slaves. The mendicant was an 'unsuitable' owner and wearer of the sultan's robes. They were, after all, visible symbols of state authority and held some of the *baraka* of the sultan.

A third important feature of the giving of *khil'at* was that there were regular occasions on which the ruler expected to give robes to his nobles and the nobility expected to receive them. Our first example comes from Delhi, where Ibn Battuta lived for many years.

> It is the custom of the Ruler [i.e. sultan] of India to send to every amir in command of a city and to the principal officers of his troops two robes of honour every year, a winter robe and a summer robe. When the robes arrive the amir and the troops go out to receive them, and on reaching the person who has brought them they alight from their horses and each one takes his robe, lays it on his shoulder, and does homage in the direction of the Sultan.[19]

Ibn Battuta found a similar pattern of annual bestowal when he visited the encampment of the Golden Horde, located on the west bank of the lower Volga.[20]

In addition, a ruler gave out robes on various days special to him, such as his return from a long journey, his birthday, marriages, the birth of a son, a son's return from a campaign or his marriage. In Mughal practice, these occasions are the subject matter of some of the finest imperial paintings.[21] These regular robing occasions provided solidarity for the courtly elite: an inclusive, visible 'suitability' for presence at court. It was clear to one and all whose 'salt' the nobility ate and their separation from the common folk.

These regular robing occasions also reinforced the image of the ruler as a font of largesse.[22] The nobility followed a successful ruler capable of showering them with rich clothes and fine foods, proof of their collective prowess and his generosity. While there might be grumbling over one's rank or gossip about the ruler showing favour to one noble over another, these regular robing events on the whole celebrated the nobility and were not occasions for challenging the system or an individual's place in it. Periodic robing, after all, took place in a tightly controlled court setting that reinforced obligations of fealty and service.

A ruler also presented robes of honour to certain categories of travellers, particularly jurists, learned men, and ambassadors from other rulers. The normal procedure included presentation of robes on arrival, maintenance at court, and bestowal of robes and other objects on departure. This sort of ceremonial investiture did not entail entry into the service of the ruler and implied no specific fealty or employment. As one of the travelling 'learned', Ibn Battuta received robes from, for example, rulers and governors all across Anatolia and down the east coast of Africa.[23]

After our visit the governor [of Siwas] sent a horse, a set of robes, and some money, and wrote to his deputies in the [other] towns to give us hospitality and honourable treatment and to furnish us with provisions.[24]

Such anticipated and regularly occurring occasions were not, however, the only ones at which the ruler presented robes of honour. Rulers also invested at their pleasure an individual they wished to honour, for example, a poet for a witty couplet, a wrestler for a good match, a guide who successfully led the royal entourage through a forest, or a particularly brave soldier on the battlefield.[25] Stores of luxurious robes were kept at the ready for the ruler's spontaneous presentation. This sort of bestowal used the robe as an immediate and personal sign of favour, accompanied by neither formal warrant of office nor formal vow of fealty. Such a brush with a ruler and the resultant robe might enhance personal loyalty, something the ruler could always use.

To this point, the *khil'at* ceremony seems to have performed relatively simple functions: reinforcing the position of the ruler, inclusion of the nobility in a luxurious lifestyle, and at the ruler's pleasure giving others a taste of that lifestyle through honorific investiture. Four features of actual practice as described by Ibn Battuta make the presentation of *khil'at* far more complex.

First, it was by no means only rulers who gave out luxurious robes of honour. The giver could be a close relative of the ruler (uncle, brother, son, cousin), and also any of the high nobility. When Ibn Battuta left the Golden Horde to accompany one of the *khatuns* [wife of a khan] to Constantinople, 'each of the *khatuns* gave me ingots of silver .... The sultan's daughter gave me more than they did, along with a robe and a horse, and altogether I had a large collection of horses, robes, and furs of miniver and sable'.[26] The chief *khatun* handsomely rewarded Ibn Battuta when he left her in Constantinople.

She sent for me and gave me three hundred dinars in their gold coinage ... , two thousand Venetian dirhams, a length of woollen cloth of the work of the girls (this being the best kind of such cloth), ten robes of silk, linen, and wool, and two horses, this being the gift of her father.[27]

The practice of highly placed women both giving and receiving robes was also found, for example, in the courts of Delhi. Ibn Battuta received a robe from the sultan's mother. Two hundred years later in the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, it was his daughter, Jahanara, who all observers recognized as perhaps the most powerful individual in the empire. Independent states, such as Golconda,

routinely sent her robes of honour. On many occasions she returned robes as well.[28]

Ibn Battuta also received robes from local religious guilds especially in Turkey and Persia. The leader of such a guild was known as an Akhi.

> It is one of the customs in this land that in any part of it where there is no sultan, it is the Akhi who acts as governor: it is he who gives horses and robes to the visitor and shows hospitality to him in the measure of his means, and his manner of command and prohibition and riding out [with a retinue] is the same as that of the princes.[29]

The closer one looks at the system, the more givers there seem to be. Ibn Battuta himself gave ceremonial robes to a guide whom he took into his employment.

> When we met in with this pilgrim who knew Arabic, we besought him to travel with us to Qastamuniya [near the south central coast of the Black Sea], which is ten days' journey from this town. I presented him with an Egyptian robe, one of my own, gave him also ready money, which he left to meet the expenses of his family, assigned him an animal to ride, and promised him a good reward.[30]

Let us be clear that this custom was equally common in Christian Constantinople as in the Islamic world. Ibn Battuta was himself robed during an audience with the Byzantine emperor of Constantinople.

> He was pleased with my replies and said to his sons. 'Honour this man and ensure his safety'. He then bestowed on me a robe of honour and ordered for me a horse with saddle and bridle, and a parasol of the kind that the ruler has carried above his head, that being a sign of protection. ... it is one of the customs among them that anyone who wears the ruler's robe of honour and rides on his horse is paraded through the city bazaars with trumpets, fifes, and drums, so that people may see him.[31]

If we look beyond Ibn Battuta's narrative, the circle of givers becomes even wider. For example, the Geniza documents of the Jewish community in Egypt record that the elders gave out robes of honour to certain non-Jewish merchants.[32] In a fifteenth century Rajput chronicle, a father gave honorific robes to his sons when they left home to seek their fortune.[33] The clientship and personal bonds of loyalty that *khil'at* implied did not flow only to the ruler. Instead, we see a complex system of loyalties that cross-cut strong rule and tied the recipient to a variety of political actors. *Khil'at* could, thus, reinforce other tendencies that weakened centralized rule in South

Asia, including the tradition of the ruler as only first-among-equals found in the Central Asian nomad band, plus weak rules of succession throughout the Hindu and Muslim states of South Asia.[34]

A second feature complicating the giving of *khil'at* was that robes were also used diplomatically between rulers. Ibn Battuta names the seven great rulers of his time: the sultan of Morocco, the Mamluk sultan of Egypt and Syria, the Mongol Il-Khan of Iraq and Iran, the khan of the Golden Horde, Chaghatai Khan, the sultan of Delhi, and the ruler of China.[35] It was honourable and expected that these rulers exchange gifts that showed their wealth and access to rare and beautiful things: a 'circulation of fabulous objects', as the historian Oleg Graybar terms it.[36] The very finest and most extraordinary robes moved in these circles. Ibn Battuta claims both to have witnessed the arrival of an entourage from China bearing these gifts and that he was commissioned by the Delhi sultan to return equally fabulous objects to China. Scholars have questioned both the Chinese embassy and Ibn Battua's return visit, but it is clear that such embassies relatively frequently criss-crossed Egypt, Persia, Turkey, Central Asia, and India.[37] The only way that one ruler might establish some small measure of superiority over another ruler was to send gifts that were more fabulous than those he received.

Fabulous robes travelled quite far from the core of the robing world. Some of the finest extant robes of honour arrived in Europe as diplomatic robes, from one ruler to another. For example, an exquisite silk robe came to Queen Christina of Sweden from the czar of Russia in 1644.[38] More curious was the story of a robe sent to Queen Elizabeth I. Shortly before the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the English queen established diplomatic ties with Ottoman Turkey. Both had good reason to view Spain as a common enemy. On the advice of a young and ambitious ambassador, in 1594 Elizabeth promoted the connection by sending presents (including pieces of gold cloth and a jewelled miniature portrait) and a letter to the Safiye, queen-mother of Mehmed III (1593–1603) and one of the most powerful individuals in the Ottoman Empire.[39] Along with a reply to Elizabeth's letter, Safiye sent 'an upper gowne of cloth of gold very rich, and under gowne of cloth of silver, and a girdle of Turkie worke, rich and faire,' plus a crown studded with pearls and rubies. In hopes of strengthening the connection, Elizabeth eventually sent a second letter, accompanied by a decorated coach. Safiye, once again, sent robes, jewels, and assurances that she was promoting Elizabeth's interests with her son, the sultan.

Elizabeth apparently enjoyed wearing the luxurious Turkish robes. It could only have discomfited Spanish spies at her court to see her flaunting her Turkish connection. The robes, as they had in so many situations, had just the right degree of ambiguity. Perhaps they were a mere fashion, the splendour of luxury silks, but they might mean a new alliance and shifting power relationships. Master politician that she was, Elizabeth probably kept her court and the Spanish spies guessing.

A third feature of the giving of *khil'at* also added complications. Nothing intrinsic to the ceremony ranked in importance the various uses of *khil'at:* fealty, largesse of the ruler, diplomatic interchange, assumption of office, or recognition of a 'notable' traveller. Even in the later Mughal period when a written warrant might have separated office from fealty, in actuality it did not. For example, each noble on a military expedition received robes directly from the Mughal emperor and treasured his direct, personal tie. This structure wreaked havoc with a unified command structure. Each noble could, and did, appeal directly to the court over the head of the commander.[40] As Gail Minault's essay (Chapter 6) shows, these fealty aspects of the *khil'at* relationship continued well into the colonial period and were at the heart of the East India Company's refusal to receive robes from the Mughal emperor and the emperor's laments that the Company was slighting and ignoring him.

The fourth factor complicating the giving of *khil'at* was that rulers varied in their legitimacy and, therefore, the loyalty they could expect from honorific robing. In the best of times, the robe signified a personal bond with an adult ruler securely on the throne of a successful, solvent state. Such a ruler expected to employ the one he robed and the recipient expected to serve his ruler with his talents and his life, if necessary. Often, however, reign and rule were much less secure.[41] Many rulers were, in fact, usurpers or rebels with only as much loyalty as military success could provide. Many rulers were minors; loyalty was only to the faction that controlled the throne. Some rulers were women. Though a queen might offer robes of honour, loyalty often depended on the army's judgment of her personal ability to lead.[42] Rather than a simple ceremony of royal largesse, for these less legitimate rulers, presentation of robes of honour was probably a clarifying moment of support or non-support by a crucial noble. Every succession meant war, with both sides offering robes to crucial allies.

Overall, our analysis of the giver of robes of honour has moved

from the relatively simple appearances of the system to the complexities and ambiguities described and experienced by Ibn Battuta. We now turn to the *object*, the robes themselves.

THE OBJECT

For the editor of this volume, awareness of the power of a robe began with a personal incident over a quarter of a century ago. In the late fall and winter of 1973, my wife Sara and I travelled overland from Istanbul to Delhi. At Herat, just into Afghanistan, Sara met a group of 'tribal' women. They liked her and insisted that she purchase an old, black, full length, elaborately embroidered cloak. With no common language, Sara could not ask the women anything about the cloak. Nevertheless, the women showed her how to wear it, and the cloak was her outer garment all across Afghanistan. Unlike other Western women in our group, Sara was treated with the highest courtesy and respect in bazaars, shops, and all other public spaces. Weeks later in Kabul, someone explained that the cloak's embroidery pattern signalled that the wearer was under the protection of one of the most powerful border tribes of western Afghanistan; anything less than courtesy might provoke armed retaliation.

What, then, can we say about the actual robe in Ibn Battuta's time? First, the outfit was never ordinary day clothes worn around the house. Even the simple, functional robe given to a travelling Muslim cleric as part of the obligation of 'hospitality' distinguished the wearer by cut and fabric as a 'poor brother'. Ibn Battuta received several of these in his early travels. The Sufi orders' commitment to poverty and austerity set up a hierarchy of 'simple' robes that mirrored the secular hierarchy of luxury robes. The truly austere made do with truly worn and tattered robes; the wearer had so little concern for the material world that he added any sort of fabric to repair his robe. Those who only wanted the appearance of austerity chose the artfully tattered 'patched robe' that was sewn to appear to be mended. Either type of robe benefited from patches of known provenance: bits of robes of famous saints or clerics. Ibn Battuta coveted and received several such 'patched robes' during his travels.[43]

Secular robes are, however, the predominant honorific in the *Rihla*. Both textile and decoration were always luxurious and 'suitable' for court. Actual fabrics and decoration varied less than we might expect, given the scope of the robing region. A strong ruler within this region of robing stockpiled luxury fabrics from many lands besides

producing them in his own workshops. After a few years on the road, Ibn Battuta recognized the cloth and named the origin of many of the robes he received. In Mogadishu, for example, the honorific robes consisted of 'a silk wrapper which one ties around his waist in place of drawers (for they have no acquaintance with these), a tunic of Egyptian linen with an embroidered border, a furred mantle of Jerusalem stuff, and an Egyptian turban with an embroidered edge.'[44] Later in the course of the same journey, a sultan sent Ibn Battuta 'a Greek slave, a dwarf named Niqula, and two robes of *kamkha*, which are silken fabrics manufactured at Baghdad, Tabriz, Naisabur [Nishapur], and in China.'[45]

Let us turn to a second feature of the robes themselves. In any local setting, robes were not only of recognized manufacture, they were graded in fineness, value, and, therefore, desirability. These gradations were part of the 'grammar' of the ceremony. Ibn Battuta observed periodic investiture ceremonies at the court of the Delhi sultan and frequently uses the term 'appropriate to their ranks.' The *khil'at* ceremony, thus, reinforced gradations of the nobility, equally visible, for example, in their ranked place in the hall of public audience. Implicitly, of course, each *khil'at* ceremony reinforced the authority of the ruler to set such rankings and his legitimacy to enforce them. In some robes, grading was so direct that the value of the gold thread was literally sewn into the robe as a label.

> He [the sultan of Delhi] also ordered him to be given 50,000 dinars forthwith and placed on him a silk robe of honour called *surat-al shir*, which means 'picture of a lion' because it had on its breast and its back the figure of a lion. Inside the robe there was sewn a tag showing the amount of gold used in the embroidering.[46]

Ibn Battuta observed these robes at Delhi, but never received one. Such commoditization made the robe a 'currency' besides signalling the degree of the sultan's favour.[47]

Such visible gradation of robes of honour opened the possibility of disparities between rank and robe. A ruler could subvert the expectations of his nobility. The sultan, for example, could signal to the whole court a rapidly rising favourite by the grant of a robe above the recipient's current rank. Displeasure might mean a meagre, less-adorned robe. Throughout, the favour of the ruler could cross-cut the nobility's expectations of the robing ceremony and subvert bureaucratic rankings and postings.

A third feature of robe itself was that it carried the essence (*baraka*)

of the giver, whether shaikh or ruler. Even when the ruler gave out large numbers of robes, they were at least brushed across his shoulder to infuse them with his essence. Ibn Battuta was fully aware of the added value of a robe that the ruler had actually worn.

I dispensed every day thirty-five maunds of flour and thirty-five of meat, together with the usual subsidies of candy [presumably gur], ghee, and betel in feeding not only the salaried employees but also visitors and travellers. The famine at that time was severe, but the population was relieved by this food, and the news of it spread far and wide The sultan was pleased at this and sent me a robe of honour from his own wardrobe.[48]

One of Ibn Battuta's most graphic stories of supernatural conversion concerns the accession of Il-Khan Uljaytu (1304–17), father of Abu Sa'id and ruler of much of the Middle East. When the ruler converted to Islam, he followed the Shia tradition and tried to enforce, even with troops, its doctrines throughout his new dominions. Baghdad, Shiraz, and Isfahan were bastions of Sunni opposition. The ruler brought the principal *qadis* of the three cities to his capital. The first to arrive, the *qadi* of Shiraz, he had thrown to his dogs that had been trained to eat humans. When the dogs approached the *qadi*, they 'fawned on him and wagged their tails before him without attacking him in any way.' What follows is Ibn Battuta's description of the highest honour that a ruler could pay.

On being informed of this, the sultan went out from his residence barefooted, prostrated himself at the *qadi's* feet, kissing them, took him by the hand, and placed upon him all of the garments that he was wearing. This is the highest mark of distinction which a sultan can confer in their usage. When he bestows his garments in this way upon some person, this action constitutes an honour for the latter and for his sons and his descendents, which they inherit generation after generation so long as these garments last or any part of them, the most honourable garment in this respect being the trousers.[49]

Il-Khan renounced Shi'ism, embraced the Sunni path, and granted the *qadi* the revenues of a hundred villages in the Shiraz region. We find complex values embedded in this incident. Clothes carried the essence (*baraka)* of the person; the more intimate the garment, the more of the essence. Here, Il-Khan offered the very essence of himself in honour of the *qadi*.[50] Ibn Battuta reassures us that this essence (and its attendant honour) would continue so long as even a shred of the original garments remained.

Another significant feature of the robe as an object was that it was

rarely granted alone. It was usually part of a constellation of honorific objects that could include gold (coins, bars, or jewellery), slaves, horses, decorated trappings, and decorated weapons. Possession of any of these was an indicator of higher than common status. Horses were absolutely central to this constellation. When, for example, Ibn Battuta was in the Maldives, he considered it beneath his dignity to walk even though the scarcity of horses precluded their use by anyone but the sultan. Reflective of this close association of horses and *khil'at* is the typical cut of the garment. Virtually all pictured examples are slit at the back or the sides for riding.

Ibn Battuta received a variety of constellations of these sorts of objects on his many travels.

> So I thanked him for his action and went out to welcome the sultan. After I had saluted him he sat down and asked me about myself and my journey, and whom I had met of sultans; I answered all of his questions and after a short stay he went away and sent a horse with a saddle and a robe.[51]

> 'Well' he said, 'the sultan sent to me to ask me what he should give you, so I said to him "He has at his disposal gold and silver and horses and slaves—let him give whatever of these he likes".' ... Next morning he sent a fine horse from his own stud ... [52]

Perhaps, variations indicate no more than supply and demand. Horses were scarcer and more highly valued in south India than in Afghanistan, Central Asia, or Morocco. Similarly, slaves were more numerous in Turkey and Central Asia than in south India, while jewels were mined and cut more in India than Central Asia.

THE RECEIVER

In the *khil'at* ceremony, once the ruler offered the robe and other honorific objects, the initiative shifted to the receiver. Every ruler hoped for the emotional reaction of Ibn Battuta when he was robed by Il-Khan Abu-Sa'id. 'I made a speech of thanks to the sultan and eulogized the doctor [who introduced him to the sultan], sparing no efforts in doing so, and this gave much pleasure and satisfaction to the sultan.'[53] Both sides expected that Ibn Battuta would praise the good name of this ruler in all the course of his subsequent travels.[54] The converse was also true. Throughout the *Rihla*, Ibn Battuta makes pejorative comments about rulers and governors who treated him in a miserly, inhospitable fashion, especially if they did not robe him.

As we might expect, however, the reality of the receiver's response

was often as complex as we have found for the giver and the object. Each robing ceremony took place in a space, which I describe as the 'negotiated space', the contours of which are defined by each participant. Think of the size of the 'negotiated space' as a measure of the unresolved differences in meaning that the two participants try to impose on the encounter, the object, and each other.

Let us start with a simple case. A powerful ruler surrounded by his symbols of authority, army, and nobility was capable of defining the meaning of the robing ceremony. The ruler made every effort to ban contrary meanings and resistance from the encounter. The result was intended to be a single narrative of the importance and significance of the ceremony. By 'narrative', I mean that in the presence of a largely homogeneous audience, a single story described the encounter. That story had a beginning, a middle, an end, and a point.[55] Following Hayden White, a narrative by its very structure implies a centre of legitimacy and authority, a morality and its contestation, and a closure to the contest.[56]

The normal course of the ceremony required the recipient to immediately don the robes and bow in fealty to the ruler. This aspect of *khil'at* allowed robes to become an instrument of assassination. The dilemma of the recipient was either to refuse the possibly poisoned robe thereby demonstrating disloyalty or to don the robe and quite possibly die. In their essay (Chapter Five), Michelle Maskiell and Adrienne Mayor explore stories of assassination by *khil'at* and consequent fears of bodily pollution engendered amongst British colonial administrators.

The most coercive enactment of fealty, the 'robe of dishonour', was usually reserved for a captured noble or royal rebel, for example 'Ain al-Mulk in Ibn Battuta's narrative.

> The sultan alighted at the crossing place and the vizier brought 'Ain al-Mulk, who was placed on the back of an ox, naked except for a rag over his loins tied with a rope, the end of which was around his neck ... . The 'sons of the rulers' came to 'Ain al-Mulk and set about reviling him and spitting in his face and slapping his companions ... . On the sultan's orders, he was dressed in a muleteer's cloak, had four chains attached to his feet and his hands manacled to his neck, and was delivered to the vizier to be kept under guard.[57]

This tradition of a 'robe of dishonour' continued into the Mughal period. Here, for example, is Aurangzeb's treatment of Dara Shikoh, his defeated rival for the throne in the succession war of 1657–8.

Dara was now seen seated on a miserable and worn-out animal, covered with filth: he no longer wore the necklace of large pearls which distinguish the princes of Hindoustan, nor the rich turban and embroidered coat; he and his son were now habited in dirty cloth of the coarsest texture, and his sorry turban was wrapt round with a Kachemire shawl or scarf, resembling that worn by meanest of the people.

Such was the appearance of Dara when led through the bazaars and every quarter of the city.[58] In similar fashion, defeated rulers or generals were forced to wear the *khil'at* of the winner.[59]

Even in the court of a powerful ruler, even in the most minimal 'negotiated space', there was the option of rejecting a robe of honour though the results could be dire. Let us consider an incident in Mughal history some three hundred years after Ibn Battuta's time. In 1666, Shivaji was a successful state-builder in Maharashtra. When surrounded by Mughal forces, he reluctantly agreed as part of the settlement to come to Delhi under the protection of a high Mughal noble. He was to accept the 'largesse' of the emperor, receive honorific robes, and become a ranked military leader in Mughal service.

After a leisurely progress of two months, Shivaji, elegantly attired and served by a retinue of several thousand men, arrived with much pomp at Agra, the Mughal capital. A few days later, a high noble conducted Shivaji into the Mughal court, then in full session in the hall of public audience; nobles—over a hundred—stood in rows, lower ranks further away, higher ranks within a silver railing, all attired in luxurious silk robes. On a jewelled throne in front sat the emperor receiving petitions and reports from officials. Nobles were required to stand quietly facing the emperor during the entire session. (Many Mughal court paintings portray just such scenes). Shivaji, who had just been coached in courtly etiquette, was announced by the court chamberlain and ushered forward; he offered his presents (1,000 gold coins and 2,000 silver coins) to the emperor who neither acknowledged them nor spoke. Then, robes were given to princes and high nobles but not to Shivaji who was conducted far back in the audience hall. Shivaji became so angry that he turned his back on the emperor and began to walk away. Some of the nobles asked what the matter was and Shivaji shouted insults; he refused to stand behind men whose backs he had already seen when they were fleeing from his army. Nearby nobles attempted to mollify him with a robe of honour, but he threw it on the floor of the audience hall. This was about as serious a breach of court etiquette as one could imagine. Both Shivaji and Emperor Aurangzeb knew precisely what the robe

of honour and its rejection meant. The chronicles report that Shivaji said, 'Kill me, imprison me if you like, but I will not wear the *khil'at*.' It is no wonder that chronicles of the day expected Shivaji and his entire entourage to be killed immediately. They were all imprisoned and survived only through the intercession of the high Mughal noble who had brought Shivaji to Agra. Months went by while the court speculated on Shivaji's fate. He pleaded for the life of his retainers, who were released. Possibly with the connivance of his patron, Shivaji finally escaped Agra—without elephants, jewels, or robes—and fled south to his home area. Here, indeed, all of the participants were fully aware of the nuances, the implications, and the sanctions for violating expectations (as discussed by Gavin Hambly in Chapter 2).[60]

Several factors could make rejection of the robe more attractive and less dangerous, in essence opening the 'negotiated space' as we have defined it. One might receive honorific robes from a weak ruler rather than a strong one. At the time of succession, for example, robes came only from a candidate for the throne, not the holder. Ibn Battuta tells the story of a powerful general's refusal of robes. A usurper, Khusru Shah, murdered the reigning sultan and dispatched edicts and robes to the generals. All but one, Tughluq Shah, donned them. 'On receiving the robe of honour from Khusru Khan he threw it on the ground and sat on it.'[61] Distance helped. Tughluq was stationed in Sind, not Delhi, which gave him some time to prepare his troops for the inevitable battle with Khusrau Shah's army.

When two distant empires courted a local ruler, he was able to open even more 'negotiated space'. In eighth and ninth century Armenia, for example, both the Islamic caliphate and Christian Constantinople courted ruling families with the offer of luxurious honorific robes. This situation allowed ruling families to interpret the robes in terms of local politics and factions, rather than only in reference to imperial issues. When, for example, Ashot I became ruler of Armenia in 824 CE, there were, in fact, three investitures. One used the luxurious robes and decorated horses sent by the caliph. The second was a strictly Armenian affair held in the central church of Armenia and presided over by the chief prelate. The third used luxurious robes sent from Constantinople.[62]

Consider another example from the century after this Armenian interchange. It also happens to involve the caliph. An eleventh century text describes Mahmud of Ghazna's receipt of a magnificent robe of honour from the caliph of Baghdad, as follows:

The sultan sat on his throne and robed himself in his new *Khil'at*, professing his allegiance to the successor of the prophet of God. The amirs of Khurasan stood before him in order, with respectful demeanour, and did not take their seats until they were directed. He then bestowed upon the nobles, his slaves, his confidential servants, and his chief friends, valuable robes and choice presents, beyond all calculation.[63]

It is precisely this scene that is depicted in a famous early painting, now held by Edinburgh University Library.[64] As Gavin Hambly's recent research shows, such marks of honour and legitimacy were sought by semi-autonomous rulers in the eastern provinces of the caliphate.[65] What is important, however, is that Mahmud could offer only very limited political or military help to the caliphs. In this situation, like that of Armenia, we must look to local politics for the local meaning and significance of the ceremony.

As a general phenomenon, the *khil'at* travelled. It specifically travelled from a venue in which the audience knew and shared its meaning to venues and audiences which might not share those meanings. For example, a ruler might send a robe to a 'barbarian' beyond his borders with all of the 'intentioned' meaning of subordination and loyalty. The 'barbarian' leader, might however, use the robe to demonstrate to his followers what an important personage he was, that this great ruler was afraid of him and had to buy him off with costly robes.[66]

At a substantial physical distance from the court, the space for alternate or contested meanings of the *khil'at* ceremony opened strikingly. When both giver and receiver were far from their court, meaning and negotiated space could shift quickly, as discussed by Bernardo Michael in Chapter 4. A kingly symbol from a court did not necessarily mean legitimacy in any specific local venue.

I do not view this ambiguity as a weakness of the ceremony, but rather as one of its great strengths. A ruler may well have known that the receiver would interpret the receipt of the robe differently. Nevertheless, at some later point, the donor might again negotiate with the receiver, remind him of his 'obligations' embodied in acceptance of the robe and, in favourable political or military circumstances, extract support. We may view the long relationship between the Mughal empire and Central Asia or between China and Tibet in this light, whereby neither metropolitan emperor nor distant local ruler had to declare whether or not the distant lands were 'part of' the empire or not.

To summarize the general flow of the argument, we began with

what seemed (pace Buckler) a relatively simple ceremony by which a ruler used luxurious robes to reinforce loyalty and inclusiveness among his nobility. In each part of the ceremony—giver, object, and receiver—we found considerable complexity and ambiguity. Before turning to our case studies of the *khil'at* ceremony, I would like to consider an example of just how ambiguous and complex the ceremony could get. Let us return to a Mughal and Maratha encounter, this one in the eighteenth century, over a century after Shivaji threw his robe on the floor of Aurangzeb's audience hall.

In 1791, a Maratha general, Mahadji Shinde was the most powerful man in northern India. His European-style troops under the Frenchman, De Boigne, defeated the major Rajput armies of Jaipur and Jodhpur. In December, he wrote to the peshwa at Poona, 'I have settled the affairs of Jaipur and having appointed Ambuji Ingle for the defense of the Rajput territories, I am going to reach Poona [Pune] quickly and offer my humble obeisance'.[67] In January 1792, Shinde embarked on a slow march to Pune, the Maratha capital, from which he had been absent for over a dozen years. He carried a *khil'at* from the Mughal emperor and a written grant of office (*sanad*) for the peshwa.

Shinde and his accompanying forces arrived in Pune in May. The investiture took place with great and solemn ceremony approximately a month later. Mahadji Shinde stayed in Pune for over two years, involved in complex political negotiations and actions. He died on the return journey to his possessions in north India.

Let us consider some of the complexities and ambiguities surrounding this event. As we have seen, a *khil'at* always came from a superior honouring a subordinate, yet the Mughal emperor was functionally a prisoner of Mahadji Shinde at the time. The robes had remained at Gwalior, Shinde's capital, for over seven years. Clearly, Shinde did not carry out his 'master's' bidding in any expeditious manner. The robes were accompanied by a *sanad* (warrant) of appointment not only for the peshwa, but for Shinde as the 'deputy' of the peshwa that gave him broad powers in north India.

Here are a few more of the ambiguities in the *khil'at* presentation. The southward progress of Shinde was slowed principally by complex negotiations between Shinde and factions of the Pune court about how many troops he would bring and whether they would be his crack European-trained ones. Eventually, a compromise allowed him some troops, but the remainder returned north.

The receipt of the *khil'at* was equally ambiguous. The robe of

honour was intended for the peshwa who was not an heir to Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha state. Rather, the peshwa was third in a line of Brahmins who had usurped all power from Shivaji's heirs. The reigning peshwa's position was also ambiguous. He was a teenager with no administrative experience; his position had been usurped by Nana Phadnavis, a much older and tougher Brahmin politician.

The ceremony itself had it share of ambiguities. The *khil'at* was laid on an empty throne that represented the absent Mughal emperor.[68] The peshwa, a Brahmin, donned the robe with great ceremony. There was no comment on the possible ritual pollution aspects of wearing garments explicitly worn by a Muslim. Shinde's actions were equally ambiguous. This most powerful of Maratha chiefs seated himself below the peshwa and put the peshwa's slippers on with his own hands, explaining that he, like his father, was but a servant of the peshwa. Nevertheless, Shinde's robing and grant followed that of the peshwa's by only one day.

The point of this excursion into late eighteenth-century Maratha politics is that observers *at the time* did not know what this *khil'at* ceremony 'meant'. The investiture was discussed by all agents and news writers at the Pune court. They wrote home to their various employers in Marathi, Rajasthani, English, and Persian. The meaning of the event was discussed in Hyderabad, Mysore, Jaipur, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. Some thought Shinde was coming south to take over the whole Maratha polity. Nana Phadnavis was concerned enough to ask for troops from Bombay. Others thought that Shinde would form an alliance with the nizam of Hyderabad or Tipu sultan of Mysore. Still others thought that the *khil'at* ceremony was a way of freeing the young peshwa from the control of Nana Phadnavis.[69] Meanings and motives were argued and contested right through the event and afterwards.[70] As Gail Minault shows in Chapter 6, when the Mughal emperor's power was gone, the negotiated space opened so wide that the British seized the initiative in coding the meaning of the encounter. Let us now turn to some larger issues raised by the analysis thus far.

KHIL'AT AND BUCKLER

Buckler's contribution to our understanding of *khil'at* consists of an alternate theory of Indian kingship; Indian kingship was neither 'oriental despotism' nor a pale reflection of European feudalism, but,

rather, 'integrative.' The Eastern ruler integrated receivers of robes into his body with their act of donning his clothes. This vision of 'integrative kingship' resonates well not only with Buckler's Biblical and Mughal sources, but Sanskrit ones as well. There are, however, problems, both theoretical and practical with Buckler's theory. We should remember that his motivation to study Indian kingship was a search for an alternate model for the kingship of Christ, an 'integrative' model that allowed worshippers to participate directly and equally in the kingdom of Christ.

At the theoretical level, I find several basic problems with Buckler's 'integrative' theory of kingship and *khil'at*. The first is the issue of agency. He grants agency to present robes only to the ruler. Others were receivers only and, thereby, 'integrated.' While this might be a comfortable formulation for the relation of worshippers to the kingdom of Christ, it is clear that in Ibn Battuta's world, many besides the ruler had both power and position to grant robes, down to a jurist like Ibn Battuta himself. We have also seen agency in the refusal to accept robes. The threat to a ruler from such a refusal was political and required a military response. Overall, I see agency within the *khil'at* system as partly resting with the ruler, but also spread rather broadly among his relatives, other nobles, clerics, and even merchants.

The second problem is that of hierarchy. Buckler sees no hierarchy within the *khil'at* system. All receivers were equally 'integrated' within the body of the ruler. Such a viewpoint, again, is an attractive description for the relation of worshippers to Christ. It is, however, a viewpoint that Ibn Battuta would find puzzling. He was acutely aware of gradations of fineness and value of robes. He was, likewise, aware that some nobles were more 'integrated' than others; this was reflected in the quality and cost of the robe they received, some so specific that the value of the gold was sewn into the garment. In his long experience, Ibn Battuta saw men rise to power and fall in disgrace, all reflected in the *khil'at* they received. One month it could be a jewelled silk, the next a coarse muleteer's cloak. Overall, contra Buckler, I see the *khil'at* system as inherently graded. Any theory must accommodate these gradations.

The third problem with Buckler is the diplomatic use of *khil'at*. Rulers routinely sent robes to other rulers, who sent equally fine robes in return. Neither was able to 'integrate' the other. Rather, this practice seems a straightforward gift-exchange competition to see who could send the most fabulous objects. This use of *khil'at* would

not be predicted by Buckler's formulation. It was nevertheless a most public and geographically widespread use of the ceremony.

At a lower level, there are also problems with Buckler's use of sources. On the basis of linguistic evidence, Buckler finds the origins of the ceremony in the Biblical Middle East. Elsewhere, I have sketched documentary and visual evidence for a very different origin for *khil'at* in the early relations of the Central Asian nomads with China.[71] In his careful analysis of the geography and long-term history of the inner-Asian region, David Christian found that the sheer size, flatness, cold winters, low rainfall, and dominance of nomadic pastoralism made mobilization and concentration of scarce human resources the core problem of every Central Asian polity.[72] The bestowal of silk robes from China from the 'hand' of a nomadic band leader followed by the donning of the robe before the other members of the band symbolically addressed precisely this problem. In the speculative period before documented use in the Byzantine empire (around 450 CE), I find it likely that the custom moved from the borders of China through steppe Asia and into the Sassanian empire.

Apparently unaware of the breadth of *khil'at* usage, Buckler conflates Indian practice with the general features of the *khil'at* system and, thereby, draws unwarranted conclusions. For example, Buckler finds *nazr* (a gift from the recipient of the *khil'at*) a necessary part of the ceremony. *Khil'at* occurred, however, without *nazr* throughout most of the robing world. Ibn Battuta, for example, never mentions *nazr* outside India. Similarly, Buckler attaches kingly dining and warrant of office closely to the *khil'at* ceremony. Recent research has shown, however, the Indian kingly common table as a carry-over from Central Asian practice and not a necessary part of *khil'at*.[73] Ibn Battuta, likewise, saw dozens of *khil'at* ceremonies without any warrant of office. He received many from rulers who had no expectations that he would serve them in any office whatsoever.

ALTERNATIVES TO BUCKLER

Given the problems with Buckler's theory, let us raise the possibility that the 'integrative' function of *khil'at* was not an expression of a stable 'culture'. Instead, consider the converse possibility, that polities throughout the robing world were inherently fissiparous along many fault lines: family, faction, religion, region, and linguistic, nomad/sedentary. Ceremonies of honour, especially *khil'at*, were essential for cobbling together a 'culture of governance' as a means of crossing

these fault lines.[74] This viewpoint is strongly supported in the research of André Wink[75] and Robbins Burling[76] on Mughals and Marathas, as well as my own research.[77] As David Curley shows in Chapter 3, such ceremonies were occasionally in competition, as when *khil'at* largely displaced *pān* as a ceremony of loyalty in late medieval Bengal.

We might view the ceremony as a 'meta-language', analogous to a family of languages that share elements of grammar and many root forms. In linguistics, the tools and methods for tracing similarities and roots are well developed. We can, for example, say with confidence that French and Spanish, have Latin roots. Root words and some grammatical rules moved from Latin into French and Spanish and are too obvious and direct to be random local developments. I believe that the same can be said for the *khil'at* ceremony.

There were obviously local variations. Ibn Battuta recognized these and pointed them out as a guide for future travellers. For example, Ibn Battuta later realized that he had not understood local custom in southern Turkey and, therefore, received a lesser robe than he might have.

> I saluted him while on horseback, and this act on my part displeased him and was the cause of depriving me of his generosity. For it is their custom when a visitor dismounts to them, to dismount (in turn) to him and be pleased with his action. He sent me nothing but a single robe of silk woven with gold thread [of the kind] that they call *nakh*.[78]

In spite of these variations, there seem to be common elements throughout the 'robing world'. These we might term the 'deep grammar' of *khil'at*. *Khil'at* was neither the feathered robing of Hawaii nor the Biblical robing of Levite priests. These ceremonies were different 'languages' with different grammar, purposes, root symbols, and history.

As emphasized in this Chapter and Chapter 2 by Gavin Hambly, *khil'at* was first a ceremony of *fealty*. In its Central Asian origins, a warrior did not negotiate to bring a certain quality of horse or armour, or negotiate payment of a certain number of ounces of silver or bushels of grain. Fealty was something quite different. A warrior offered to serve; the leader agreed to be his leader. In Central Asian practice, this interaction was virtually non-verbal. The warrior merely stood in his armour before the ruler and slightly bowed his head; the leader nodded agreement. Certainly, there were implicit expectations on both sides. The follower would fight and die for his leader.

The leader would fight by his side, eat and drink with him, and share whatever fortune might bring. The leader remained first among equals as long as the band was relatively successful. Everyone in the system recognized that if a leader could no longer maintain his followers, they could stay and suffer or without shame seek service with another leader.

In this system of fealty, the robe was not generally given upon entrance to service. In early use, the robe was a personal recognition by the leader of the follower's successful and loyal service; recognition of special status before the full band. It fell almost within the realm of booty, real wealth in luxury fabric, that the leader shared with his followers. Thus, it does not seem surprising that luxury robes became associated with other objects of war booty: gold, silver, jewels, decorated weapons, and slaves. We should recognize that the ceremony served not one purpose, but two. While it integrated a warrior with the band, it also clearly set apart the leader from his followers. As a receiver of robes, the new follower was publicly shown to be not himself a ruler. *Khil'at* both included the receiver into the nobility and excluded him from rule.

I believe that the following common elements in the *khil'at* ceremony were deep remnants from its Sino–Mongolian roots:

1) Presentation was highly personalized. In its earliest use, silk and robes came from the sedentary silk-producing states solely to the leader of the nomadic band. In these nomadic bands, the leader by custom provided food, clothing, and shelter; his followers literally ate his 'salt' at his table. Luxurious robing reinforced existing relations between a leader and his men.
2) The robe was granted 'from the hand of the leader' in the presence of the whole band. This public presentation and donning before the whole court represented a form of solidarity within the band, cross-cutting familial ties.
3) The robe was given in conjunction with the items used in war in Central Asia. As the ceremony developed over the next thousand years and across thousands of miles, we see rulers giving luxurious robes along with swords, daggers, quivers, and bows.
4) Along with the robe, a ruler commonly bestowed a horse and decorated trappings, and slaves.
5) The robe in Central Asian use was always a sewn garment, rather than a wrapped or draped one, and always compatible

with riding a horse. It was the outermost and most visible garment of courtly dress.

6) While the robe was itself a form of easily transportable wealth (silk, often embellished with gold thread), it was often accompanied by something of gold or silver.[79]

We should recall that other 'packets' of symbols and customs moved and spread in similar fashion over equally long distances. Buddhism, for example, was far more than beliefs set out in texts: a set of symbols and ceremonies that spread from India over the trade routes to Central Asia and China. Like *khil'at*, it had a core grammar and 'root' practices, but endless local variations and long-term changes that created differences as profound as Burmese *vipassana* and Tibetan tantrism. With this perspective on giver, object, receiver, and 'meta-languge', let us now turn to our cases and studies of *khil'at* in the South Asian setting.[80]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 'Mahmud of Ghazna donning a robe from the Caliph, 999 CE', Or. MS 20, fol. 121r. *Edinburgh University Library.*

2. Tarikh-i Yamini of al 'Utbi, trans. H. M. Eliot and D. J. Dowson, *History of India as Told by its Own Historians* II (Allahabad, rpt, 1969).

3. Philip P. Wagoner, 'Sultan among Hindu Kings: Dress, Titles, and Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (Nov. 1996), pp. 851–80.

4. Nainsi, *Marvar ra Parganam ri Vigat*, ed. N. S. Bhatt, II (Jodhpur, 1969), p. 37. My thanks to Richard Saran for bringing this passage to my attention and translating it.

5. V. S. Vakaskar, *Sabhasadaci Bahkar* (Poona, 1973).

6. See, for example, the frontispiece of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, trans. V. Ball (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, rpt, 1995).

7. See John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-Century Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 48–9, 108–9.

8. See the first five chapters in Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

9. *Legitimacy and Symbols: The South Asian Writings of F. W. Buckler*, ed. M. N. Pearson (Ann Arbor, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, c. 1985).

10. One might be tempted to use 'gift-exchange' theory to analyse the *khil'at* ceremony. Certainly, *khil'at* embodies the central insights of Marcel Mauss's *The Gift*: that every gift comes with obligations, that gift and obligation form part of a unified system, and that this gifting system affects many

other aspects of a culture. Nevertheless, the structure and dynamics of Mauss's theory cannot be applied to the *khil'at* ceremony. The scale of *khil'at*, spanning Asia and Africa, dwarfs that of the *kula* system. *Khil'at* was not the central organizing principle of the societies that used it. Unlike *kula*, *khil'at* was equally at home in pre-monetized and monetized economies, nomadic and sedentary societies, and a variety of ecologies, religions, and languages. *Khil'at* was used both for group solidarity within elites and at the margins of empires to integrate new groups. Nevertheless, our discussion of *khil'at* is 'situated' in much recent work on gifting and its material aspects. See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

11. The development of this perspective is summarized in John and Jean Comoroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992).

12. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325–1325*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 2nd trans.), 1958–94) [hereafter, Gibb].

13. Gibb, II, pp. 345–6.

14. Gibb, II, p. 297.

15. The transmission of Mohammed's mantle to Ali is a central feature of Shia belief, but is, of course, disputed by Sunnis.

16. Jamal Elias, 'The Sufi robe (*kirqa*) as a Vehicle of Spiritual Authority', in Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). See also Simon Digby, 'Tabarrukat and Succession among the Great Chisti Shaikhs of the Delhi Sultanate', in *Delhi Through the Ages*, ed. R. E. Frykenberg (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 63–103.

17. Gibb, II, p. 339.

18. Gibb, II, p. 381.

19. Gibb, III, p. 731.

20. Gibb, II, p. 493. The Golden Horde was the western portion of the Mongol Empire (the legacy of Ghengis Khan). It flourished from the mid-thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth century and at its peak ruled European Russia, much of Siberia, the Ural Mountains, and the Caucasus. Nomad-based, the empire traded broadly and extracted tribute from towns and sedentary agriculture throughout the region.

21. See, for example, 'Jahangir weighs Khurram against gold on his birthday in 1607' (*London, British Museum*). Note in the lower centre of the painting the folded robes of honour on trays ready for presentation. This painting has been widely published. See Milo C. Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, 1981).

22. Ibn Battuta devotes many pages discussing generosity as a desirable

kingly virtue and comparing the relative generosity of various rulers. See Gibb, II, pp. 312–13, 671–81.

23. Gibb, II, pp. 345–445.

24. Gibb, II, p. 436.

25. These occasions are well documented in the royal biographies of the Mughal period. See, for example, the *Akbarnama*, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, and the *Shahjahannama*,

26. Gibb, II, pp. 497–8.

27. Gibb, II, p. 514.

28. Gibb, II, pp. 736–7. See the years 1640–1660 in *The Shahjahannama of 'Inayat Khan*, ed. and trans. W. E. Begley and Z. A. Desai (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

29. Gibb, II, p. 434.

30. Gibb, II, p. 458.

31. Gibb, II, p. 506.

32. S. D. Goitien, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 5 vols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 88.

33. Nainsi, *Marvar ra Parganam ri Vigat*. Robes of honour were also widely used by the Maratha polity. Every deshmukh (local lead family of a pargana) received *khil'at* of less than courtly robes, when he settled taxes with the Maratha tax official at the beginning of the fiscal year. See, for example, *Pune Daftar*, Khandesh Rumal #198, in Marathi, Modi script, 'An account of the division of the Mughal collections of *parganas* Jalod and Chopde in the name of Trimbuk Rao Visthwanath, 1740'.

34. See Robbins Burling, *The Passage of Power: Studies in Political Succession* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

35. Gibb, II, p. 483.

36. Oleg Grabar, 'The Shared Culture of Objects', in Henry Mcguire, ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1997) pp. 115–30.

37. See, for example, such embassies in *The Shahjahannama of 'Inayat Khan*, ed. and trans. W. E. Begley and Z. A. Desai (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

38. *Livrustkammaren, Hallwylska Museet*, Stockholm (#3414). Published in Jennifer Harris, ed., *Textiles, 5000 Years* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), p. 82.

39. The letters are translated and the incident thoroughly discussed in S. A. Skilliter, 'Three letters from the Ottoman 'sultana' Safiye to Queen Elizabeth' in Samuel M. Stern, ed., *Documents from Islamic Chanceries* (Oxford: Bruno Cassier, Ltd., 1965), pp. 119–59. See also S. A. Skilliter, *William Harbonne and the Trade with Turkey*, pp. 1578–82 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Leslie P. Pierce, *The Imperial Harem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973). The garments appear in an inventory of Elizabeth's clothes. See Janet

Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd: The Inventories of the W Robes Prepared in July, 1600* (Leeds: Money, 1988).

40. See the autobiography of a fairly low-level mansabdar who Bengal in the early decades of the seventeenth century. *Baharistan* trans. M. I. Borah (Gauhati, Assam: Government of Assam, 1936 4, 110–12.

41. See the role of robes of honour in Ibn Battuta's descripti accession of Nasir al-Din as the sultan of Mutra on the Malabar co pp. 64–5.

42. Stewart Gordon, 'Legitimacy and Loyalty in Some Successo the Eighteenth Century', in Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, Formation in Eighteenth-Century India* (Delhi, Oxford University Pr pp. 64–82.

43. Elias, cited above. .

44. Gibb, II, p. 376.

45. Gibb, II, p. 446. We might note that during the same period, Il became something of a connoisseur of horses, having received and many.

> I visited him [a sultan] in his audience-hall, and he bade me sit beside him me about myself and my journey, and about the Holy sanctuaries, Egypt, When I answered his questions, he commanded me to be lodged near hi me a thoroughbred horse, parchment-coloured, and robe, besides assigning for my expenses and forage. [Gibb, II, p. 463.]

46. Gibb, III, p. 746.

47. In Ottoman Turkey, robes routinely had the value of their g sewn into the fabric. The robes were returnable to the treasury fo Such commoditization seems to belie the fealty aspects of robi personal relationship it signalled between giver and receiver. communication from Dr Cornell Fleischer, University of Chicag

48. Gibb, II, p. 761.

49. Gibb, II, p. 304.

50. Note that this spontaneous honorific robing was performe with only recent contact with Islam. I see this incident as furthe the custom was not 'Islamic' but was found in a larger 'robing' included Central Asia from which he came.

51. Gibb, II, p. 461.

52. Gibb, II, p. 441.

53. Gibb, II, pp. 442–3.

54. Later, during the Mughal period, the receipt of a ro emperor could evoke an emotional response from one in ser thousand miles from the capital. *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi*, pp. 75–1 rulers for over a hundred years resisted the elite becoming 'l method was to separate mansabdars from their estates by ser distant area. Another method was nominally to sequester esta

thereby making inheritance directly dependent on the emperor. These circumstances made fealty ceremonies and practices particularly critical.

55. Gerald Prince, *A Grammar of Stories: An Introduction* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 31. See also Patrick O'Neil, *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory* (Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1994) Ch. 1 and 2.

56. Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Presentation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 10–1.

57. Gibb, III, p. 725.

58. Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656–1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd edn revised by V. S. Smith (Delhi: Low Price Publications, reprinted edition, 1989), p. 98.

59. *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi*, pp. 136–7, 197, 250.

60. One newswriter's account is translated in full in J. N. Sarkar, *House of Shivaji* (New Delhi, rpt, 1978). A fuller treatment is given in Jadunath Sarker, *Shivaji and His Times* (Bombay, fifth reset edition, 1992), pp. 103–17.

61. Gibb, III, p. 648.

62. Antony Eastmond and Lynn Jones, 'Robing, Power, and Legitimacy in Armenia and Georgia', in Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 147–92.

63. Tarikh-i Yamini of al 'Utbi, p. 24.

64. 'Mahmud of Ghazna donning a robe from the Caliph, 999 CE'. Or. MS. 20, fol. 121r, *Edinburgh University Library*.

65. Gavin Hambly, ' From Baghdad to Bukhara, from Ghazna to Delhi: The *Khil'a* Ceremony in the Treatment of Kingly Pomp and Circumstance', in Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

66. There are such cases in the Mughal conquest of East Bengal and Assam. *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi*, cited above.

67. G. S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas* III (Bombay: Phoenix Publishers, 2nd imp., 1968), p. 222.

68. Shinde's hand, as conveyer of the robe, was inappropriate to the peshwa. We have seen the long tradition that the messenger did not 'stand in' for the sender of the robe. Six hundred years earlier, the delegate from the caliph did not robe Mahmud of Ghazna. Mahmud robed himself with the robe that the delegate had conveyed.

69. See, for example, *Poona Akhbars* III (Hyderabad: Central Records Office, 1965). Also, *Sindhia as Regent of Delhi* (1781 & 1789–91), trans. Jadunath Sarkar (Bombay: Director of Archives, 1954), pp. 32–50. Various interpretations are found in the *Calendar of Persian Correspondence* IX (New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1949) and in *Fort William–India House Correspondence* XVII (Delhi: National Archives of India,1955), pp. 220–2 and X., 111. Shinde's various motives for coming to Pune and the meaning of the *khil'at* ceremony are discussed in James Grant Duff, *History of the Marathas* II, ed. J. P. Guha (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1971), pp. 173–80 and

R. G. Pandey, *Mahadji Shinde and the Poona Durbar* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1990).

70. At the very time Shinde brought the *khil'at* to Pune, both Mysore and Hyderabad sought the Mughal khil'at for control of disputed territory. See Kate Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. 62–4.

71. See Gordon, *Robes and Honor*, Ch. 1.

72. David Christian, 'Inner Eurasia as a Unit of World History', *Journal of World History*, v, 2 (Fall, 1994), pp. 172–213.

73. Thomas Allen, 'Robing in the Mongolian Empire' in Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

74. I wish to thank Bernardo Michael for developing this argument.

75. André Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarjya* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

76. Robbins Burling, cited above.

77. Stewart Gordon, 'Legitimacy', cited above.

78. Gibb, II, p. 445.

79. See Xinru Liu, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 500–1200* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also, 'Silk, Robes, and Relations Between Early Chinese Dynasties and Nomads Beyond the Great Wall', in *Robes and Honor*, ed. Stewart Gordon.

80. Note also Jared Diamond's argument that nutritional breakthroughs such as the Middle Eastern domestication of wheat and cattle spread quickly through the Neolithic world because it was far easier to copy a successful 'packet' than invent new, efficient nutritional combinations. Jared M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

2

The Emperor's Clothes

Robing and 'Robes of Honour' in Mughal India[1]

Gavin R. G. Hambly

INTRODUCTION

Garment-giving as a ceremony binding donor and recipient can be documented across much of Eurasia, from the ancient Near East to China and as far west as medieval Iceland.[2] In traditional Islamic society, however, the ceremonial exchange of articles of clothing known as *khil'at* (plural, *khila'*) between a superior and an inferior, was virtually ubiquitous. Indeed, one scholar has written of medieval Islamic states operating an honours system through grants of clothing which may be compared to the various titles, honours, and distinctions conferred by modern governments.[3]

The practice was well established during the early 'Abbasid period in Baghdad and involved the caliph presenting a former article of his clothing to someone who thereby became, if he was not already, a dependant. The favoured recipient could be a kinsman, an administrator to be rewarded for his services, or a military leader of proven worth, a courtier, a religious leader, a poet, or a musician. Behind the transfer of this piece of property lay the notion that the article of clothing, which had formerly belonged to the caliph, carried in it some of the *baraka*, the inner radiance which attached itself to his person, he being a sacral figure, the *amir al-mu'minin*, leader of the Muslim community, and in the case of the 'Abbasids, part of the Prophet's own kin. In the words of one scholar,

> God can implant an emanation of *baraka* in the person of his prophets and saints: Muhammad and his descendants are especially endowed therewith.

These sacred personages, in their turn, may communicate the effluvia of their supernatural potential to ordinary men, either during their lifetime or after their death, the manner of transmission being greatly varied, sometimes strange.[4]

Baraka was possessed by the family of the Prophet, and for the Shi'i, most especially by the descendants of 'Ali; by those who claimed caliphal authority; and by those enjoying popular veneration as revered *shaykhs* and *pirs*. Their holiness encompassed personal possessions, such as robes and staffs, the latter sometimes serving as insignia to be bequeathed to their spiritual successors.[5] Inevitably, *baraka* was attached to their burial-places.

Writing of the Fatimid caliphate, Paula Sanders advances an argument in favour of the symbolic and legitimizing role of clothng:

> The ruler's clothing ... conveyed *baraka*. A man asked for a garment (*thawb*) of the caliph's to use as a funeral shroud, because of its *baraka*. Later, the caliphal *tiraz* factories mass-produced textiles, many inscribed with the caliph's name, to be given to officials at their investiture, as well as the costumes (*kiswa*) distributed on ceremonial occasions to the caliph's entourage, his family, the amirs, and the troops.
>
> The caliphs shared the general attitude of the population that clothes were a visible sign not only of wealth, but also of God's favour to human beings. ... The extravagant costumes of the caliphs and their entourages were a sign of the beneficence God bestowed upon them; through costumes, they asserted their rule and staked a claim to their legitimacy
>
> Clothing symbolized authority, conveyed information about rank at court, and could also be used to negotiate power.[6]

Over time, the frequency and scale of the robing-ceremony meant that far more garments were needed as gifts than could possibly have been worn by the caliph in person. It came to be, therefore, that it was enough that he had formally touched a garment or that his name was woven into its hem. As the practice spread beyond the immediate vicinity of the caliphal court or was delegated to the caliph's representatives in the provinces, and as autonomous or breakaway regimes established themselves, the practice grew under its own momentum as de facto rulers, while still acknowledging a titular caliphal suzerainty, distributed quantities of robes of honour on their own behalf to those whom they chose to reward or promote. In the eastern lands of the caliphate, this was markedly true of such dynasties as the Saffarids, Samanids, Buyids, Ghaznavids, and Seljuqs. By way of Samanid Bukhara, the Ghaznavids and Ghurids introduced ceremonial robing into northern India. Intermittently, from the time

of Shams al-Din Iltutmish (607/1211–633/1236) to that of Firuz Shah Tughluq (752/1351–790/1388), diplomatic exchanges between the sultans of Delhi and the 'Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad or, following the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 656/1258, in Cairo, were accompanied by caliphal gifts of robes of honour.[7]

Nor was the ceremony restricted to exchanges between Muslims. For example, following his victory at Tara'in in 588/1192 and the execution of Prthviraja, Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad Ghuri granted the latter's son a robe of honour when he confirmed him as governor of Ajmer.[8] A fifteenth-century account of the fall of the Rajput principalities of Siwana and Jalor to Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Muhammad Shah Khalji describes how the Brahmin Madhava, enraged by his Raja's treatment of his family, makes his way to Delhi to betray his homeland to 'Ala' al-Din, who rewards him with a five-piece robe of honour (in Persian *sar-u pa*, 'from head to foot'). When, subsequently, the sultan sends an intimidating message to Jalor, it too is accompanied by a robe of honour.[9]

By this time, it must have been exceptional for presentation robes to consist of the donor's personal apparel. Rather, they were mass-manufactured in the palace (as in the case of the *tiraz* workshops of the 'Abbasid and Fatimid caliphs or of the Mughal *karkhana*) or were acquired as tribute, plunder, or by purchase. In the early thirteenth century, for example, the governor of Gardiz, Taj al-Din Yaldiz, supplied Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad Ghuri with an annual tribute of one thousand tunics and head dresses, clearly destined for redistribution among Ghurid retainers.[10]

Although the ceremonial robing originated at the caliphal court, the ceremony itself never seems to have acquired a denominational character: robes were awarded to men of the most diverse backgrounds for all kinds of services, and were also presented to women and children, [11] to slaves and non-Muslims.[12] When the occasion was of great political significance, or when the donor sought to demonstrate the extent of his favour to a recipient, gifts of clothing were supplemented by other objects such as banners, horses and riding-accoutrements, swords, slave-girls, and slave-boys. Moreover, although the typical recipients of robes of honour tended to be government officials, military officers or, more rarely, the representatives of a foreign ruler, scholars, physicians, and poets were also honoured.

A characteristic example of a robing-ceremony was the occasion in 367/977, when the Buyid warlord, 'Adud al-Dawla Fana Khusrao,

who was then de facto ruler of much of Iraq and Iran, was formerly invested by the caliph al-Ta'i'. Surrounded by a hundred attendants in gorgeous apparel, the caliph sat upon his throne, wearing the Prophet's mantle, girded with the Prophet's sword, and grasping the Prophet's staff in his hand. Before him had been placed the Quran which had once belonged to caliph 'Uthman. At first, his person was screened from sight by a curtain, which was subsequently raised, following the entry of the high officials of the caliphal court and the unarmed Turkish and Daylami amirs.

'Adud al-Dawla now entered and prostrated himself seven times, kissing the ground. The caliph bade him approach and, 'Adud al-Dawla twice more kissed the ground before advancing to kiss the caliph's feet. The latter then invited him to be seated and after a brief exchange, declared that he had decided to delegate to 'Adud al-Dawla the management of his affairs and rule over his dominions, with the exception of the caliphal demesne, a declaration which was then formally repeated before witnesses.

'Adud al-Dawla was now arrayed in robes of honour. These proved to be so heavy that although he again attempted to kiss the ground, the weight of the garments prevented him. He was therefore excused from doing so and al-Ta'i' ordered him to be seated. The caliph now presented 'Adud al-Dawla with two banners, which the caliph himself furled: one, bedecked in silver, such as was customarily presented to great amirs; and one, bedecked in gold, which had hitherto been reserved for the heir-apparent alone. A further precedent was set when the caliph presented 'Adud al-Dawla with a diploma of investiture. This, in itself, was not an innovation. The innovation came when it was read publicly in the caliph's presence. 'Adud al-Dawla was now girded with a second sword, the first one having accompanied his robes. He was also presented with a saddled horse, upon which to leave the palace.

Three days later, the caliph sent him a tunic of gold thread, a golden tray, a crystal beaker and a diadem, with the title of *Taj al-Milla* ('Crown of the Faith'), and the privilege of having his name read in the *khutba* immediately following that of the caliph, as well as the right of having drums beaten at the entrance to his palace preceding the hours of prayer.[13]

A robing-ceremony on this spectacular scale of political theatre was no doubt exceptional, but three further examples involving 'professional people' illustrate the circumstances in which robes could be given. Thus, the Samanid amir of Bukhara, Nasr b. Ahmad,

gratified that a minor ruler in Sistan, Abu Ja'far Ahmad, had worsted a common foe, commissioned his court poet, Rudaki, to compose a panegyric to the latter, a copy of which was then sent to Sistan. It was accompanied by ten robes of honour, ten rubies, ten Turkish slave-girls and ten Turkish slave-boys, all attired, bejewelled, and suitably mounted, and finally, a sealed goblet of wine from the amir's own table. Delighted, Abu Ja'far Ahmad, in addition to sending back a gift of 10,000 dinars for Rudaki, rewarded Nasr b. Ahmad's cup-bearer, who had brought both the goblet of wine and the text of the poem, with a robe of honour and other valuable gifts.[14]

Similarly, Mansur b. Nuh b. Nasr the Samanid rewarded the famous physician, Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi, for curing him of an illness by presenting him with a robe of honour, together with acloak and turban, weapons, a horse, a male slave, and a concubine.[15] Finally, Mahmud of Ghazna, having quarrelled with al-Biruni over an astrological interpretation, sought to reconcile the offended scholar by sending him a robe of honour, together with a richly-caparisoned horse, a male slave, a concubine, and one thousand dinars. Obviously, the gift of a robe of honour could serve a multitude of purposes![16]

THE MUGHAL PERIOD

The Cairene line of 'Abbasid caliphs who had provided legitimation for the Tughluqid sultans of Delhi ended when al-Mutawakkil III was carried off to Istanbul by the Ottoman sultan Selim I Yavuz in 923/1517. Nine years later, the Turko–Mongol Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur overthrew Sultan Ibrahim Lodi of Delhi at Panipat in 932/1526 and established his Mughal dynasty in northern India. The Mughals, who remained at least titular sovereigns of Delhi until 1274/1858, maintained less formal ties with the heartland of the Dar al-Islam than previous Indo–Islamic dynasties had done. From time to time, however, they exchanged diplomatic missions with the Sharifs of Mecca, the Ottoman sultans, and the khans of Bukhara, Balkh, and Kashgar, and on a more frequent basis, with the Safavid shahs of Iran.

As direct descendants of both Chinghiz Khan and Timur, the Mughals brought with them into India indigenous Central Asian concepts of sovereignty and imperium, to which were assimilated elements of Irano–Islamic kingship and ceremonial reaching back to Sassanid Iran, as well as native Indian elements. Babur's Chaghtayid

and Timurid ancestors were well accustomed to robing ceremonies. When Timur returned to Samarqand after his triumph over the Ottoman sultan Bayazid Yilderim in 804/1402, he distributed robes of honour to all his kinsmen, the great amirs, men of learning, and foreign ambassadors.[17]

Predictably, therefore, Babur sought to reinforce his authority by frequent gifts of robes of honour. Thus, at the outset of over three centuries of Mughal rule, Babur's memoirs (*Tuzuk-i Baburi*) refer repeatedly to the centrality of the *khil'at* ceremony. Three examples will suffice to exemplify this ubiquity and the flexibility of its application.

First, an example between kinsmen: during Babur's early years, the support of his mother's brothers, Mahmud Khan of Tashkent and Ahmad Khan of Aqsu (referred to in the *Tuzuk* as Ulugh Khan and Kichik Khan respectively) was to prove of the greatest importance. In 908/1502–3, for example, when Babur's fortunes were at a particularly low ebb due to anticipation of an Uzbek attack, and when he was a dependant of Ulugh Khan in Tashkent, news arrived that Kichik Khan was approaching from his eastern stronghold in Mughulistan, where he had ruled for a quarter of a century, more or less cut off from intercourse with his sister's family. Babur had never met him but at the announcement of his coming, Babur rode out with his grandmother and his aunts to greet the khan. The welcoming party arrived too precipitately for his uncle to stage a ceremonial reception. Babur dismounted before the khan had time to, but Kichik Khan ordered two of his sons (one being Sultan Sa'id Khan, the future ruler of Kashgar) to dismount and approach Babur on foot. Then they all remounted and rode back to meet Kichik Khan's mother and sisters, who had not yet arrived. Despite this confused beginning, the following day Kichik Khan formally greeted Babur 'in accordance with Mughul custom' (*mugulca rasmlig*), presenting him with 'a robe, a quiver, his own horse and saddle' (*bas-ayaq va qorini va egärlig xassa atini 'inayat qildi*), as well as 'a Mughul hat of spun [wool] (*maftullug muguli börk*), together with 'an embroidered Chinese brocade tunic, a Chinese quiver with its stone and satchel in the old fashion' (*sancma tikkän Xata'i atlas ton va Xata'i qor burunqi rasmlig tasi cantiyi bilä*).[18] It will be noted that, according to this passage, Babur received a range of apparel equivalent to a complete set of honorific robes, namely: the *bas-ayaq* (equivalent to the Persian *sar-o pa*, the usual Turki term for a robe of honour of several pieces); a *börk* (Persian, *taqi*), a high crowned hat or mitre; and an *atlas ton* (Persian,

jama-ye atlas), a brocade or satin robe, usually an over-garment, or, less likely, material for such a robe but not yet made up.

The second example falls into the category of diplomatic usage and relates to the extravagant durbar held in Agra in 935/1528–29, following Babur's victories at Khanua, Chanderi, and Gwalior. At that durbar there were present envoys from the Shaybanid, Köchkünji Khan (Köchüm Khan), from the Safavid, Shah Tahmasb I, and from several unnamed Indian rajas or their agents (*vakil*), as well as many Chaghtayid and Timurid kinsmen and kinswomen, and other notables. Elaborate ceremonial marked the occasion as well as feasting, elephant-, camel-, and ram-fighting, wrestling, acrobatics, and dancing-girls. Predictably, among much gift-giving and receiving, robes of honour played a conspicuous part.[19]

This occasion marked the zenith of Babur's career, and at it he rewarded men of religious eminence, kinsmen, faithful followers and the representatives of potential rivals with robes of honour and other gifts. Khwaja 'Abd al-Shahid and Khwaja Kalan were descendants of Khwaja Ubayd Allah Ahrar Naqshbandi (d. 896/1490), the most prominent spiritual guide of the later Timurids. Köchüm Khan was uncle and successor to Babur's former scourge, Muhammad Shaybani Khan. Hasan Chalabi was the ambassador of Shah Tahmasb I Safavi. Abu Sa'id Sultan, ruler of Kashgar, was Babur's cousin and the son of his uncle Kichik Khan, previously mentioned. Mihrban Khanim, who may have been a daughter of 'Umar Shaykh and thus Babur's half-sister was Köchüm's wife, and Pulad Sultan was their son. Shah Hasan was the exiled son of the late ruler of Sind, Shah Beg Arghun. Babur's daughter, Ma'suma Begam was the wife of Muhammad Zaman Mirza, grandson of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the last Timurid ruler of Herat. Hindal was Babur's fourth and youngest son.

It would be difficult to find a better example of the way in which the *Khil'at* ceremony constituted the central act of public political bonding at a court in which old friends and adversaries or potential rivals were affirmed by ties which, for the moment, bound them to the principal actor of this theatre of kingship, Babur himself.

The quality and variety of garments mentioned in this passage also call for some comment. These events occurred only two years after Babur's overthrow of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat, before which he had been for over two decades ruler of the petty principality of Kabul. It is hardly conceivable that there existed in Kabul an establishment for the manufacture of large quantities of fine clothing (*karkhana*), or that the garments displayed at this durbar had formerly

been the property of Babur himself. The most likely source for this lavish gift giving was the plunder of the Lodi treasure at Agra, supplemented by the loot of subsequent campaigning.

A third example of robing in the *Tuzuk-i Baburi* relates to more routine matters. Following Babur's campaign in Bihar, he appointed Muhammad Zaman Mirza, his son-in-law, governor of the province, for which the Mirza had to take an oath of fealty, and in turn received 'a regal suit of clothing, a girth dagger, a fine horse and a parasol' (*xassa bas-ayag va kamar-samser va topcag vacatr*).[20] Around the same time, Babur made revenue-assignments to two of his kinsmen, Kichik Khan's sons, Esän Temür Sultan and Tokhta Buqa Sultan, whose oaths of fealty were also rewarded with gifts of 'girth swords, girth daggers, armour, robes of honour [*xil'atlar*] and fine horses'.[21] At the same time, several Afghans formerly in the Lodi service or in that of the sultans of Bengal, who had changed sides, were rewarded with revenue-assignments, weaponry, and robes of honour.[22]

Thus, from the onset of Mughal rule in India, ceremonial robing assumed a central significance as an act of political bonding, although inept supervision of the process could prove counter-productive. In 957/1550, Humayun sent an inopportune embassy to his Timurid kinsman, Sulayman Mirza of Badakhshan, requesting one of the Mirza's daughters for a bride. The mission was bungled from the outset and at the culmination of the negotiations, the Mirza's masterful wife, Haram Begam, bitterly denounced the customary gifts of clothing sent for her daughter, which she contemptuously described as bazaar-clothes, complaining that Humayun should have sent garments of his own or at least those of one of his close female relatives.[23] At the little court of Badakhshan, where *tiraz* robes and textile-manufacturing establishments (*karkhana*) were probably unknown, robes of honour still meant what they had originally meant, garments previously worn by a great man which it was an honour for the recipient to wear. The marriage never took place.

There were, in fact, several distinct categories of *Khil'at*. The typical gift was a three-piece set of garments issued by the general wardrobe (*khila' khana*), consisting of a turban (*dastar*), a long coat with a full skirt (*jama*), and a waist-scarf (*kamarband*). More elaborate was the five-piece set, issued by the storehouse (*tosha khana*) for presents, consisting, in addition to the three articles listed above, of a jewelled turban-ornament (*sarpech*) and a band (*balaband*) for decorating the turban. Even more elaborate was a seven-piece set consisting of headdress, long coat, close-fitting jacket, two pairs of trousers

(*shalva*), two pairs of shirts (*kamis*), two girdles and a scarf. Finally, and most valuable of all, was a garment, or set of garments, worn personally by the emperor (*malbus-i khas*).[24]

Once the Mughal empire was firmly consolidated, establishments were set up for the manufacture and storage of huge quantities of fine textiles destined for members of the imperial family and household, and as gifts for the servants of empire and to meet the need for diplomatic exchanges. The chronicles are replete with accounts of robings on almost every page, recording traditions of political theatre which would survive down to the time during the eighteenth century when the Mughal emperors were mere *rois fainéants*. Thus, Sir Thomas Roe, James I's ambassador to the court of Jahangir, witnessed in 1616 the reception of the envoy of the Safavid Shah 'Abbas I, to whom Jahangir presented `a handsom turbant, a vest of gould, and a girdle.'[25] Roe himself, upon leaving Agra, received one of Jahangir's own garments:

> a cloth of gould Cloake of his owne, once or twice worne, which hee Caused to bee putt on my back; and I made reuerence, vary vnwillingly. When his Ancester Tamerlane was represented at the Theatre the Garment would well haue become the Actor; but it is here reputed the highest of fauour to giue a garment warne by the Prince, or beeing New, once layd on his shoulder.[26]

Few Mughal sources provide a more revealing picture of the workings of ceremonial robing than the *Baharistan-i Ghayb* of 'Ala' al-Din Isfahani Mirza Nathan, a local chronicle chiefly concerned with Kuch Bihar and Assam, which begins with Jahangir's reorganization of the province of Bengal from 1016/1607 onwards. Among many instances of robing, one is especially interesting. This was the occasion when the new provincial governor, Islam Khan, soon after his arrival in Bengal, undertook several punitive expeditions against refractory chiefs and landholders (zamindars). Among the latter, he induced the hitherto independant Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore to submit to imperial authority. Mirza Nathan's words, describing the occasion, are highly significant:

> Islam Khan, for the sake of drawing the attention of other Zamindars and also in consideration of the high position held by the aforesaid Raja among the Zamindars of Bengal, bestowed honours upon him beyond measure, and consoled and comforted him. On the first day he was presented with a horse, a grand robe of honour and a bejewelled sword-belt, and thus he was converted into a loyal officer.[27]

Raja Pratapaditya was, of course, a Hindu.

Like other members of his family, Jahangir welcomed visiting scholars and celebrities to his court, the hospitality offered often including gifts of robes of honour. When Mutribi al-Asamm Samarqandi, a scholar and poet from Bukhara, visited his court, Jahangir ordered that he be appropriately honoured. 'A top-quality turban and Kashmiri shawl were given to me; and a gold-embroidered robe, a sash with good golden thread and decorated skirt to my son ... .'[28] Later, the padshah offered him the choice of either an Iraqi or a Turani horse, to which his guest replied, 'Whichever is most expensive!' and he gave the same answer when offered the choice between a velvet or a broadcloth saddle, indicating that the recipients of gifts were not exclusively concerned with the honour they conferred, but also with their market-value.[29] On another occasion, the padshah was so pleased with a storyteller from Thatta, a one-time servant of the former ruler of Sind, that he granted him a sonorous title, a robe of honour, a horse, an elephant and a palanquin, together with a thousand rupees.[30]

At the other extreme, when an abortive coup on behalf of the heir-apparent failed, Jahangir forced the wretched Prince Khusrao to parade between the ranks of his impaled supporters, while he had the coup's leaders sewn up in animal-skins, which then contracted in the heat causing agonizing suffering to those inside them. Perhaps Jahangir regarded these grotesque costumes as 'robes of dishonour.'[31]

Among the surviving Mughal miniatures of durbar scenes, a number include elements of the *Khil'at* ceremony. At least three probable examples are to be found in the sumptuous manuscript of 'Abd al-Hamid Lahawri's *Padshah Nama*, now in Windsor Castle Library. In 'Jahangir receives Prince Khurram [the future Shah Jahan] on his return from the Mewar campaign', the prince is shown wearing a close-fitting jacket of gold brocade (*nim-astin*) as he prostrates himself before his father. The assumption that the jacket, perhaps a former possession of his father, has just been given to him as a *khil'at* is reinforced by the figure on the left, holding out a bejewelled scimitar, which also appears to be a gift.[32]

In 'Jahangir presents Prince Khurram with a turban ornament', the prince, again wearing a *nim-astin*, receives a turban ornament (*sarpech*), which had formerly been worn by the emperor Akbar and was held to be propitious for the dynasty.[33]

In 'Shah-Jahan honouring Prince Aurangzeb at his wedding', this prince too is wearing a *nim-astin*, and commenting upon this particular occasion, another chronicler, 'Inayat Khan, in his *Shah Jahan Nama*,

records that Aurangzeb received from his father 'a handsome robe of honour, a gold-threaded vest (*charqub*) [perhaps the one shown in the miniature], and two rosaries of pearls; a gold dagger with incised ornament and a sword and belt both studded with gems; two splendid horses, an Iraqi and an Arab, one with jewelled, the other with enamelled saddle; and a superb elephant with silver housings, accompanied by a female one. With his own hand too, His Majesty fastened a tiara of pearls, strung with rubies and emeralds on the brow of that noble youth.'[34]

It is no less interesting to note the part played by the *Khil'at* ceremony in the course of routine administration. The following examples are taken from surviving documents—diary of events (*siyaha huzur*)—relating to Prince Auranzeb's first viceroyalty of the Deccan provinces between 1046/1636 and 1054/1644.

1. On 5th Rajab 1047/13th November 1637, news reached Aurangzeb's camp that his uncle 'Umdat al-Mulk Shayista Khan [brother to his mother, Arjumand Banu Begam] was encamped nearby. Shayista Khan was invited into Aurangzeb's private quarters (*ghusl khana*), where he received a *sar-u pa*, a *charqub* (a Turkish-style tunic emboidered with cloth of gold),[35] two Iraqi horses, and a bejewelled dagger. Here is an example of a very senior official (and a kinsmen) receiving acknowledgement of his illustrious status.[36]

2. A few days later, on 9th Rajab 1047/17 November 1637, a formal durbar was held to celebrate Aurangzeb's twentieth birthday. The prince was weighed in coins and received gifts of money (*nazar*). He in turn distributed robes of honour among twenty to thirty service nobles (*mansabdars*). The list is interesting, including Shayista Khan, Yusuf b. Malik Ambar [son of the Mughals' great foe in Ahmadnagar], a steward of Aurangzeb's elder sister Jahanara Begam, and several Hindu *mansabdars*: Prithi Raj, Bhimsen Rathore, Rustam Rai, Bhagwandas Bundela and Shivaji Hanmant.[37]

3. On 19th Rajab 1047/27 November 1637, robes of honour were distributed to some men from Bijapur, perhaps envoys of the sultan of Bijapur, Muhammad 'Adil Shah, and to five eunuchs of the imperial household.[38]

4. On 13th Dhu'al-Hija 1053/12 February 1644, Muhammad 'Adil Shah, sultan of Bijapur, sent gifts to Aurangzeb. Robes of honour were conferred upon the envoys who had brought them.[39]

Such examples of robing in the course of routine public appearances are further confirmed in the chronicle-literature. The instances given below are taken from Saqi Must'ad Khan's *M'aathir-i 'Alamgiri*,

an abbreviated history of the reign of Aurangzeb (1068/1658–1118/1707).

1. On 21st Shawwal 1069/2 July 1659, at a durbar celebrating the birthday of Aurangzeb's third son, Muhammad 'Azam, the prince received a *sarpech*, a jewelled dagger, and five horses. On this occasion, a robe of honour, an honorific title, and promotion were conferred upon Malik Jiwan, zamindar of Dadar, who had taken prisoner Dara Shukoh and his son Sipihr Shukoh.[40]

2. Also in 1070/1660, an envoy from Subhan Quli Khan, the Uzbek ruler of Balkh, arrived at court, dying shortly afterwards. His companions were given robes of honour and 20,000 rupees, and sent away.[41]

3. Meanwhile, there arrived in Surat one Qasim Aqa, envoy of Husayn Pasha, Ottoman governor of Basra. Like the other embassies, the purpose of this mission was to congratulate Aurangzeb upon his accession, and the pasha's gifts included both Arab and Persian horses, as well as Georgian slaves. On his reception by the emperor, the envoy received a robe of honour and 5,000 rupees. At his congé, he was given another robe of honour and 12,000 rupees; his attendants received 1,000 rupees each; and a bejewelled sword was sent to the pasha.[42]

4. Budaq Beg, the envoy of 'Abbas II, was received in Delhi on 3rd Shawwal 1071/22 or 23 May 1661, and after presenting to Aurangzeb the shah's letter of congratulation upon his accession he received a robe of honour, a turban-jewel, a bejewelled dagger, special perfume (*argaja*) in a gold cup and saucer, and betel-nut in a golden casket on a golden tray. At his congé on 10th Dhu al-Hijja/27 July 1661, Budaq Beg received a robe of honour, a bejewelled dagger and a lakh [100,000] of rupees, although this may have been partly to cover the expenses of transporting gifts to the shah. These included a horse with a gold saddle and bridle, two elephants, a howdah and an elephant-litter with gold and silver decoration, and a palanquin with similar trappings.[43]

5. On 4th Rabi' II 1071/17 November 1661, an envoy arrived from 'Abd al-'Aziz, the Uzbek ruler of Bukhara. He received a robe of honour, a dagger with a pearl-encrusted strap and 20,000 rupees, and was provided with a house in which to stay. At his congé, he received a robe of honour, a bejewelled dagger, and 30,000 rupees.[44]

6. Finally, before the year ended, Aurangzeb learnt of the victorious campaigns of his general, Mir Jumla, in Kuch Bihar and Assam. To Mir Jumla's son, Muhammad Amin Khan, he gave a robe of

honour, while sending to Mir Jumla himself a congratulatory farman, a special robe of honour, a standard of yaks' tails signifying the rank of 10,000 [*tuman-tuqh*], and a crore [10,000,000 or 100 lakhs] of rupees. This sum, however, may not have been a gift per se, but reimbursement for military expenses.[45]

One further instance: Aurangzeb sent Sir George Oxenden, the East India Company's president in Surat, who had successfully defended the English factory there from a Maratha attack in 1664, 'a *Collat* or *Serpaw*, a Robe of Honour from Head to Foot,' with an abatement of customs tolls.[46]

The instances given above exemplify the many ways in which robes of honour and the *Khil'at* ceremony served the political objective of rewarding, honouring, and bonding servants of the state, personnel of the imperial bureaucracy, and the representatives of foreign rulers. Significantly, during the decades of Mughal military, political, and economic decline that followed the death of Aurangzeb in 1118/1707, the ceremonial granting of robes of honour continued to carry great weight. Throughout the eighteenth century, those Mughal governors who converted themselves into de facto independant rulers (e.g., in Awadh, Bengal, and Hyderabad), invaders from outside the sub-continent, and military adventurers of all kinds from within all maintained a ceremony which constituted the quintessential act of public bonding between a superior and an inferior.

An interesting example of the ubiquity of robing is provided by Ahmad Shah Abdali, founder of the Durrani Afghan monarchy, who arrived in Delhi in Jumada II 1170/January 1757 on one of his several visitations to the Mughal capital. On this occasion, among those he honoured was Mughalani Begam, the widow of Mu'in al-Mulk, the late governor of Panjab, who, since her husband's death in 1167/1753, had become a prominent political figure in north-western India. At the time of granting her the government of Jalindhar *duab*, Jammu and Kashmir, he conferred upon her some of his own clothing (*malbus-i khas*), the highest possible honour, together with a *sarpech*.[47] Although Mughalani Begam herself was not a sovereign princess but merely an agent of the Durrani padshah, she herself conferred robes of honour upon her dependants, including, on one occasion, the *kotwal* of Jammu.[48] A somewhat parallel case to Ahmad Shah Abdali's recognition of Mughalani Begam was the occasion when the Mughal padshah, Shah 'Alam, granted what was described as a magnificent robe of honour to Zeb-un-Nisa Begam (better known

as the Begam Samru) for her spirited rallying of Mughal troops on the battlefield.[49]

In all likelihood, women gave to and received from each other robes of honour, but by the eighteenth century it seems to have become accepted practice for some at least to award them to men. After the death of Shah 'Alam's minister, Mirza Najaf Khan, in Jomada I 1197/April 1782, his sister, Khadija Sultan Begam, threw herself into the maelstrom of court intrigue as a major power broker. As part of the struggle to control the outcome of events, she sent robes of honour on various occasions to her nephew, Mirza Shafi Khan, to 'Abd al-Ahd Khan Majid al-Dawla, the diwan of the khalsa, to several other imperial officers, and to the East India Company's agent in Delhi, Major James Browne.[50] Political fiction represented these robes as a mother's gift 'to her children,' although in reality they were unambiguous evidence of the begam's political patronage.[51]

By this time, it had long become normative in India for non-Muslims to be recipients of robing honours. In 1736, for example, the nawab of Arcot, Dost Ali Khan, dispatched to Pondicherry a long-sought farman granting the Compagnie des Indes Orientales minting rights. It was accompanied by a robe of honour for the governor, Benoit Dumas.[52] In 1743, the nizam Asaf Jah entered the Carnatic to regulate its affairs and to expel the Marathas from Trinchinopoly. The East India Company's governor of Fort St. George, Richard Benson, prudently sent an embassy with gifts to the nizam, who received them in Trinchinopoly. Each of the individual members of the Company's mission received a *sar-u pa*, and later that same day, the nizam's representative handed over a *sar-u pa* wrapped in a white cloth, accompanied by several horses with their accoutrements, for presentation to Governor Benson.[53] In 1794, the British mercenary, George Thomas, then in the service of Apa Khande Rao, one of Shinde's commanders in northern India, found himself accompanying Apa Khande Rao and his fellow Maratha officers into the presence of Shah 'Alam to affirm to the padshah the loyalty of Shinde's successor, Daulat Rao.[54] They all received robes of honour, probably similar to those which Lieutenant William Francklin received from Shah 'Alam in the following year, described as consisting of a light Indian dress, 'a turban, jammah [*jama*, i.e. surcoat] and kummerband, all cotton, with small gold sprigs.'[55]

Perhaps, in eighteenth-century India, the venerable custom of awarding robes of honour for service was becoming trivialized into something little better than a pourboire. The raffish nawab of Awadh,

Asaf al-Dawla, would as casually bestow a robe of honour upon his engraver for carving an unusually attractive signet ring as he would upon the superintendent of his arsenal for casting a fine cannon.[56]

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, it may be said of Mughal robing customs that, while they conformed to practices established throughout the Islamic world centuries earlier, they had long since lost any religious significance if indeed they ever had any. Naturally, 'ulama', *fuqaha'* and Sufi shaykhs continued to be among the recipients of honours, but the ceremony had acquired such an unambiguously non-denominational character that it now permitted rulers and notables of impeccable religious credentials to use it to honour and reward women and children as well as men; slaves and eunuchs as well as the freeborn; and non-Muslims as well as believers.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Parts of this chapter were read at panel entitled 'The Politics of Ceremonial in Mughal and Post-Mughal India,' 28th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin at Madison, 16 October 1999.

2. For further information, see *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, edited by Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

Robing in medieval Iceland might not have been anticipated. See, for example, the saga of Egil Skallagrimsson. The English king, Aethelstan (924–939) rewarded Egil for his poetry with two gold arm-rings and a fine cloak that the king himself had worn. Later in the saga, the Norwegian noble, Arinbjorn, gave Egil for Yuletide 'a robe made of silk, thickly embroidered with gold, and with gold clasps all the way down ... [and] ... a full set of garments newly made ... cut from English cloth in many colours.' *Egil's Saga*, trans. Christine Fell (London: J. M. Dent), 1975, pp. 86, 125.

3. J. M. Rogers, *The Uses of Anachronism: Cultural and Methodological Diversity in Islamic Art*, an inaugural lecture delivered on 17 October 1991 by J. M. Rogers, Nasser David Khalili, Professor of Islamic Art and Archaeology in the University of London (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1994), p. 30.

4. G. S. Colin, 'BARAKA,' *Encyclopaedia of Islam* [hereinafter, *EI*], 2nd edn, vol. 1, p. 1032.

5. See, for example, Simon Digby, *'Tabarrukat* and Succession among the Great Chishti Shaykhs of the Delhi Sultanate,' in *Delhi through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*, ed. R. E. Frykenberg (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 63–103. [Note that this chapter is omitted

from the 1993 paperback edition!] See also R. Basset, 'BURDA,' *EI* (2), vol. I, p. 1314.

6. Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 29.

7. This is the central thesis of my chapter, 'From Baghdad to Bukhara, from Ghazna to Delhi: The *Khil'at* ceremony in the transmission of kingly pomp and circumstance', in *Robes and Honor*.

8. Taj al-Din Hasan-i Nizami, *Taj al-Ma'athir*, trans. Bhagwat Saroop (Delhi: Saud Ahmad Dehlavi, 1998), p. 110. See also A. B. M. Habibullah, *The Founda-tion of Muslim Rule in India* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1961), pp. 61–2; Muhammad Aziz Ahmad, *Political History and Institutions of the Early Turkish Empire of Delhi* (New Delhi: Orient Books Reprint Corporation, 1972), p. 79; and Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 10.

9. V. S. Bhatnagar, *Kanhadade Prabandha* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1991), p. 3.

10. Minhaj-i Siraj Juzjani, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, ed. A. H. Habibi I (Kabul: The Historical Society of Afghanistan, 1963–4), pp. 411–2.

11. At the birth of a nephew, Mahmud of Ghazna is said to have sent both mother and child robes of honour. See H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians* V (London: Trubner and Co., 1869), p. 318.

12. The slaves, naturally, tended to be *mamluks* or eunuchs. Non-Muslims also gave robes of honour to Muslims. The twelfth-century Syrian notable, Usama b. Munqid, mentions how during a truce in 1108 his uncle sent a horse to Tancred, count of Antioch. The Kurdish groom who accompanied the animal so impressed the Norman with his horsemanship that the latter invested him with a robe of honour, guaranteeing his freedom, should he be taken prisoner in the future. Philip K. Hitti (trans.), *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usamah Ibn-Munqidh* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), p. 94. This recalls L.A. Mayer's comment that the robe of honour was 'originally more a promise of personal security (*aman*), than a token of distinction ... ' L. A. Mayer, *Mamluk Costume, A Survey* (Geneva: Albert Kundig, 1952), p. 56.

13. Several contemporary accounts of this episode survive. The description here is taken from Mafizullah Kabir, *The Buwayhid Dynasty of Baghdad* (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1964), pp. 56–7, and Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), pp. 46, 274–5. It is also discussed by Harold Bowen, 'ADUD AL-DAWLA' in *EI* (2), vol. I, p. 212, and by Herbert Busse, 'Iran under the Buyids,' in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. R. N. Frye, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 275–6.

14. *Tarikh-i Sistan*, ed. Malik as-Shu'ara Bahar (Tehran, 1314/1935), pp. 316–7, and *The Tarikh-e Sistan*, trans. Milton Gold (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente), 1976, pp. 258–64. See also C. E. Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz (247/861 to 949/1542–3)* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1994), pp. 287–91; E. Denison Ross, 'A

Qasida by Rudaki', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1926), 213–37; and E. Yarshater, 'The Theme of Wine-Drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry,' *Studia Islamica* 13 (1960): 43–7.

15. Nizami 'Arudi Samarqandi, *Chahar Maqala*, ed. M. Qazvini (London: Luzac and Co., 1927), pp. 82–5; trans. E. G. Browne (London: Luzac and Co., 1921), pp. 115–8.

16. Ibid. (Qazvini), pp. 64–5; ibid. (Browne), pp. 92–5.

17. 'Account of the Grand Festival by the Amir Timur on the Plains of Kaneh Gul, or Mine of Roses ... trans. from the Mulfuzat Timuri ... by Colonel [William] Francklin,' *Miscellaneous Translations from Oriental Languages* (London) 2 (1834), p. 7.

18. Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur Mirza, *Baburnama*, ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston, I (Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1993), p. 207 (para. 102b). In a subsequent version, Thackston suggests that *maftullug* qualifying *börk* might mean 'the high-peaked Mongolian hat decorated with a twisted appliqué or braid ... ' W.M. Thackston, *The Baburnama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 140. He takes the stone (*tas*) accompanying the quiver to refer to a thumb-ring, perhaps of jade. Ibid., p. 140.

19. *Baburnama*, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 747–9 (paras 351b–353a).

20. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 777–9 (para. 367b).

21. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 795 (para. 376a).

22. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 796–7 (para. 377a).

23. Bayazid Biyat, *Tadhkira-ye Humayun wa Akbar*, ed. M. Hidayat Hosain (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1941), pp. 141–2.

24. The subject of exactly what *Khil'at* consisted of deserves further study, but see William Irvine, 'The Army of the Indian Moghuls: Its Organization and Administration', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, new series (July 1896), 509–70 (p. 533); idem., *The Army of the Indian Moghuls*, (London: Luzac & Co., 1903), p. 29.

25. William Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615-1619*, II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1899), p. 296.

26. Ibid., vol. II, p. 334. Roe would have been familiar with stage performances of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, first performed in 1587 and thereafter frequently revived in the following decades.

27. Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i Ghaybi*, trans. M. I. Borah, I (Gauhati: Government of Assam Press, 1936), p. 27.

28. 'Mutribi' al-Asamm Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*, trans. Richard C. Foltz (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers 1998), p. 24.

29. Ibid., p. 37.

30. Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, trans. Alexander Rogers and Henry Beveridge, I (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909–14), pp. 68–9.

31. Ibid., See also , Fernao Guerreiro, Relaçam, trans. C. H. Payne, *Jahangir and the Jesuits* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1930), pp. 8–11.

32. M. C. Beach, et al., *King of the World* (London: Azimuth Editions, 1997), pp. 94–5.

33. Ibid., pp. 96–7.

34. Ibid., pp. 108–9. W. E. Begley and Z. A. Desai, *The Shahjahannama of 'Inayat Khan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 208.

35. A. J. B. Pavet de Courteille, *Dictionnaire Turk-Oriental* (Paris, 1870), p. 274.

36. M. Naseer al-Din Khan, *Selected Documents of Shah Jahan's Reign* (Hyderabad: Daftar-i Diwani, 1950), pp. 27–9.

37. Ibid., pp. 33–43.

38. Ibid., pp. 50–6.

39. Ibid., pp. 115–6.

40. Saqi Must'ad Khan, *Maasir-i-'Alamgiri*, trans. Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1947), p. 15.

41. Ibid., p. 20.

42. Ibid., pp. 20–2.

43. Ibid., pp. 21–2.

44. Ibid., pp. 22–3. For further information on these diplomatic missions at the beginning of Aurangzeb's reign, see G. Z. Refai, 'Foreign Embassies to Aurangzeb's Court at Delhi, 1661–65, *in* R. E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Delhi Through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 192–204. [Omitted in the 1993 paperback edition!]

45. Ibid., p. 24. For the phrase *tüman-tügh*, see Pavet de Courteille, op. cit., pp. 236, 246. In the *A'in-i Akbari*, Abu'l Fadl remarks:

> 'The *chatrtugh*, a kind of *'alam* [standard], but smaller than it, is adorned with the tails of Tibetan yaks. The *tümantugh* is like the *chatrtugh*, but longer. Both insignia are flags of the highest dignity, and the latter is bestowed upon great nobles only.' [Transliteration modified.]

(Abu'l Fadl 'Allami, *A'in-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann and H. S. Jarrett, I (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927–48), p. 52.)

46. William Crooke, ed., *A New Account of East India and Persia* ... by John Fryer, I (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1909–15), p. 223.

47. Tahmas Beg Khan, *Tahmas Nama*, trans. P. Setu Madhava Rao, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1967), pp. 46–7.

48. Ibid., p. 74.

49. J. Baillie Fraser, *Military Memoir of Lieu.-Col. James Skinner, C.B.*, I (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1851), pp. 287–8.

50. Sir Jadunath Sarkar. *Persian Records of Maratha History, vol. 1, Delhi Affairs (1761–1788) (News-letters from Parasnis Collection)* (Bombay: Government of Bombay Press, 1953), and Krishna Dayal Bhargava, *Indian Records Series: Browne Correspondence* (Delhi: National Archives of India, 1960).

51. Bhargava, op. cit., pp. 35–6.

52. J. Frederick Price and K. Rangachari, eds, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Dupleix, Governor of Pondicherry*, I

(Madras: Government of Madras Press, 1904–28), p. 3. The Compagnie des Indes Orientales seems to have developed a modified version of robe-giving to its servants. See, e.g., ibid, I: 56–7.

53. J. Talboys Wheeler, *Annals of the Madras Presidency*, 1861–62, III (rpt by Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1990), pp. 242–3.

54. William Francklin, *Military Memoirs of Mr. George Thomas; ... a general in the service of the native powers in the north-west of India* (London: John Stockdale, 1805), pp. 23–4.

55. William Francklin, 'An Account of the Present State of Delhi,' *Asiatick Researches* 4 (1795): 426.

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3

'Voluntary' Relationships and Royal Gifts of Pān *in Mughal Bengal* [1]

David L. Curley

This chapter explores 'giving' and 'taking up' *pān* as an ambiguous and changing system of signs through which a ruler and his subjects could enact political relations in the somewhat public space of a South Asian court. It focuses on the Mughal period in Bengal, and on the first half of the eighteenth century, when governors (nawābs) of Bengal became virtually independent of control from the Delhi court.

This chapter is based upon four premises that apply equally to royal gifts of *pān*, and to *khil'at*, or robes of honour, and to many other royal gifts of honour during the Mughal period. The first premise is that despite the development of some bureaucratic systems to enable rule over a vast territory, courtly politics in the Mughal empire continued to be based upon personal relations with the emperor, and this 'patrimonial' dimension of the empire was repeated at lower levels of courtly politics within it.[2] The second is that to the extent that relations in the Mughal polity were personal relations, they could be both represented by and constituted through royal gift-giving, because in general gifts from rulers 'embody every bit as much the persons as their relations.'[3] The third is that it is important to explore the rational, self-interested, 'calculative dimension' of gifts which so represented and constituted personal political relations;[4] and that this 'calculative dimension' can be found in the two, potentially different perspectives of the donor and the recipient. Therefore, the public meaning of an act of gift-giving is subject to negotiation and may remain ambiguous. The final premise is that to understand

gift-giving in a particular context requires, as Stewart Gordon argues, analysis of the changing relationship of the two participants, analysis of a mediating artifact which they share through the public encounter of giving and receiving, and analysis of the audience for this encounter.[5]

Royal gifts of *pān* were both like and unlike other Mughal royal gifts. Like many other gifts of honour in South Asia, royal gifts of *pān* participated in an asymmetrical symbolic process by which a ruler 'marked' the bodies of his subjects, thus both subordinating them and honouring them in his polity. In some gifts of *pān*, however, there also was a special reciprocal gesture, 'taking up' *pān*, to indicate the acceptance of a particular command (or, possibly, of a new relation between subject and ruler). An expectation that 'taking up' *pān* was to be voluntary implied limits to the ruler's authority, through the possibility, however remote, that *pān* might not be 'taken up' and the command thereby might be declined. This chapter examines both historical accounts and Bengali literary narratives to attempt to trace changing uses of royal gifts of *pān*. It suggests trends in the Mughal period to give greater emphasis to more finely graded, elaborate and expensive gifts of honour, and to impose new courtly ceremonies expressing a Mughal ruler's more absolute and bureaucratic authority. I will argue that the ceremony of giving and 'taking up' *pān* remained only marginally useful to the Mughals because, more than other gifting ceremonies, it signified personal choice on the part of the recipient. By attending closely to the politics of changing, ambiguous, and contested meanings, this chapter also shows where royal gifts of *pān* and the ceremony of 'taking up' *pān* were modified to express a more absolute authority, or were displaced towards peripheral, ephemeral, or ambiguous relationships. It suggests a persistent thematic contrast between voluntarily 'taking up' *pān* in unofficial or improvised ceremonies, and the less conditional and sometimes coerced obeisance dramatized in official, imperial Mughal ceremonies.

GIFTS OF *PĀN* AS ROYAL HONOURS

In travellers' reports, histories, chronicles and literature from late medieval and early modern India there are references to royal ceremonies of giving *tāmbūla*, that is, *pān* leaves ('betel leaves') prepared with lime, shaved areca nuts ('betel-nuts'), and spices. Like gifts of robes of honour, gifts of *tāmbūla* were used as signs of royal favour to

constitute political relationships. Such gifts can be documented in South and South-East Asia, and in both Muslim and Hindu courts.[6]

For example, gifts of *pān* and areca nuts concluded feasts arranged by Sultan Muhammad Tughluq for his nobles and for foreign visitors, and were received with expressions of homage.[7] Ibn Battuta records the ceremony for this occasion:

> It is their custom that the person to whom this [platter containing 'betel'] is brought out takes the platter in his hand, places it upon his shoulder and then does homage with his other hand touching the ground.[8]

Similarly, gifts of *pān* and areca nuts were part of the 'hospitality gifts' of Sultan Muhammad Tughluq when he arranged to supply food in kind, and cash maintenance allowances to favoured foreign guests upon their arrival at his court. Ibn Battuta's 'hospitality gift' was fixed at 1,000 pounds of flour, 1,000 pounds of 'flesh-meat', and 1,000 'betel leaves', together with sugar, tubers and areca nuts.[9] Hospitality gifts of *pān* and camphor also are described at the court of Vijayanagar,[10] and in a variety of Mughal courtly settings.

Both in courts and in wealthy homes gifts of *tāmbūla* also were customary to honour guests at their departure. A Sanskrit witticism states, 'Oh friend, there are a hundred-thousand good qualities of a *tāmbūla*. It has, however, one great fault (*mahāndoṣo*), viz. the sending away [of guests] after its bestowal.'[11] At Gandikota Jean Baptiste Tavernier received such a gift from Nawāb Mīr Jumla of Golkonda, after showing Mīr Jumla jewels which he hoped would be purchased by the king of Golkonda.[12] Peter Mundy, in India from 1628–34, briefly mentioned gifts of *pān* to guests at parting, 'soe that when they send for Paane, it is a sign of dispeedinge, or that it is tyme to be gon.'[13] Nicolo Manucci (1653–1708) clearly described the etiquette of this practice:

> It is an exceedingly common practice in India to offer *betel* leaf by way of politeness, chiefly among the great men, who, when anyone pays them a visit, offer *betel* at the time of leaving as a mark of good will, and of the estimation in which they hold the person who is visiting them. It would be a great piece of rudeness to refuse it.[14]

Like robes of honour, gifts of *tāmbūla* differed in value, and thus they could indicate how much the recipient was favoured by the donor. Gifts of *pān* could differ by the number of *pān* leaves included. A text of Dharmashastra suggests that 32 leaves were appropriate for a king, 24 for a tributary prince, 6 for an enemy, and 4 for a common person.[15] *Pān* leaves themselves were also graded by colour, taste,

smell, and tenderness to the tongue.[16] Moreover, *tāmbūla* could include, in addition to the necessary ingredients of *pān* leaf, finely sliced areca nut, and lime made of oyster shells, a variety of very costly imported flavourings and 'medicines', among which we may list catechu, powder of lign-aloes, ambergris, cloves, and rarest of all, camphor. Only 'the rich' used *tāmbūla* prepared with these costly, additional ingredients.[17]

Courts distributed and consumed large quantities of *pān* leaves. In marginal notes to the travel account of John Huyghen van Linschoten, Bernard ten Broecke appends the following comment about use of *pān* by Nizām Shāh of Ahmadnagar:

> It is said that [Nizām Shāh] ... spendeth yearly thereof, to the valew of above thirtie thousand Milreyes. This is their banquetting stuffe, and this they make a present of it to travellers, and the Kings give it to their subjects. To the rich mixed with their own hands, and to others by their Servants. When they send any man of Ambassage, or when anybody will travel; there are certain Silke Purses full of prepared Bettele delivered unto him, and no man may depart before it be delivered him, for it is a token of his passe port.[18]

The *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* mentions bundles of *pān* of truly imperial dimensions: 'A bundle of 11,000 leaves was formerly called a 'Lahāsa' which name is now given to a bundle of 14,000'.[19] Associated with using *tāmbūla* and giving it to others were costly implements: jewelled boxes in which the *pān* leaves were stored, trays with compartments for lime, areca-nuts, spices, camphor, or other substances applied to the leaves, elaborately decorated tools to cut areca nuts into small pieces, and, of course, spittoons. Sets of these implements are also found throughout South and South-East Asia.[20] Like gifts of robes of honour, royal gifts of *pān* must have required economic organization to ensure supply of the necessary ingredients for *tāmbūla*, and supply of the implements with which they were prepared and presented. Nevertheless, one *tāmbūla* looks rather like another, and I assume that for the same expense a ruler could have given them to a much larger number of people than he could have given robes of honour.

Like gifts of robes of honour, royal gifts of *tāmbūla* could change the bodies of subjects who received them by leaving a trace of the ruler's own body; for the gift which carried the most honour was a *tāmbūla* prepared for the ruler's use, and better, given by the ruler's own hand,[21] and it was to be taken into the subject's mouth. We recognize an asymmetrical symbolic process usual to royal gifts of food, of perfumes and unguents, of robes of honour,[22] and of *tāmbūla*:

'marking' the subject's body with that of the king, and thereby both including the subject with other subjects also so marked, and subordinating him to the king, whose body, on the contrary, usually remains 'unmarked' by the body of the recipient.[23]

Royal gifts of *pān* may have differed from other gifts of honour in one way. Ordinarily *tāmbūla* were valuable only when the *pān* leaves were fresh.[24] One cannot imagine that they were displayed as enduring signs of royal honours, as were robes of honour and the writs (*farmān*) which robes of honour often accompanied. Can we assume that the ceremonial experience of 'taking up' *pān* included its consumption, and the bodily and mental effects of that consumption, as the *tāmbūla* was 'enjoyed'?

'ENJOYMENT' (*BHOG*) AND THE THIRTEEN PROPERTIES OF *TĀMBŪLA*

Dharmashastra describes thirteen qualities of *tāmbūla*, 'unobtainable even in heaven.' *Tāmbūla* is:

> ... pungent, bitter, hot, sweet, salty, and astringent; it counteracts wind and is a vermicide; it removes phlegm and destroys ill smells, is an ornament to, and purifies the mouth; and it makes the fire of desire burn brightly.[25]

We may analyse this list of qualities as follows. A *tāmbūla* contains each one of the six flavours. Their balance gives it medicinal properties which act upon the three humours as follows: counteracting 'wind', removing 'phlegm', and stimulating the elemental 'fire of desire' and, we may presume, the humoral 'bile' associated with 'fire'.[26] Consumption of *tāmbūla* therefore has specific benefits which the verse lists: good breath and intestinal health, for example. More important, consumption of *tāmbūla* also has a general effect upon the humours and elements of the body. By counteracting 'wind' it shifts the balance of the humours away from the 'incoherent states', 'unrestrainable motions' and 'ignorance' associated with an excess of this most problematic of the bodily humours.[27] By removing 'phlegm' and increasing 'fire', *tāmbūla* produces the benefits of 'dry heat'. Among these benefits Arabic and European observers widely reported (or alleged) the effects of a digestive and aphrodisiac.[28] Indeed, *tāmbūla* was forbidden to classes of people whose 'fires of desire' should not be increased: ascetics (*yatī*), celibate students, people observing funeral obsequies, widows and others who were engaged in vows requiring chastity, and menstruating women, for example.[29]

There also were mental consequences of consuming *tāmbūla*, for understanding and intelligence also were thought to be more acute if one was in the condition of 'dry' rather than 'wet' heat. An Arabic medical treatise lists among the benefits Indians experienced from the dry heat of *tāmbūla*, that it 'raises the intelligence.' This text continues:

> The Indians use it instead of wine after meals, which brightens their minds and drives away their cares ... . Whoever uses it becomes joyful, he has a perfumed breath, perfect sleep by reason of its aromatic, the pleasure which it brings, and its moderate odour.[30]

An early European traveller also reported both mental and physical benefits: 'In this way [by chewing areca nuts and *pān* leaves] the head and stomach are cleared, and the gums and teeth strengthened ... '.[31] Finally, there were social benefits of having good breath. This same traveller, Garcia da Orta wrote:

> Chiefly when men go to have an interview with some person of quality, they approach chewing [*pān*] in their mouths, so as to give out a pleasant smell. Among these people it is so detested to smell bad or musty that common people put their hands before their mouths so as not to give out an unpleasant smell when in presence of a person in authority.[32]

Because it causes 'fire' to burn more brightly, while removing 'wind' and counteracting 'phlegm', *tāmbūla* might have been both given and 'taken up' in order to produce the kind of person who could undertake a difficult mission, someone with the mental and moral qualities of intelligence and fortitude, besides the physical ones of good health and a capacity for passionate and energetic action, and someone who could be introduced with pleasure to courtly society because of his sweet smelling breath. I have found no Bengali text which explicitly provides this instrumental explanation for royal gifts of *pān* as a 'tonic and prophylactic', but such explanations are given for robing in a variety of contexts, because the donor's 'spiritual state' was transferred by a garment he had worn or touched.[33] Perhaps the idea needed no emphasis.

'TAKING UP' *PĀN*

Whereas making gifts of *pān* to show honour—to Hindus, Muslims and Europeans alike, and to both subjects and visitors from abroad—was a custom widely practised by South Asian Muslim rulers, an apparently specialized ceremony associated with some royal gifts of *pān* seems to have been regarded as an expedient for rallying non-

Muslims, at least in the period of the Delhi Sultanate. This was the gesture of 'taking up' *pān* in order to symbolize acceptance of a particular command or assignment from the ruler. For example, Baranī reports that in 1290 rebellious Hindu warriors, the 'rawats and pāiks' of Hindusthan, 'flocked around [Balaban's nephew Malik Chhajū], and the most noted of them received *betel* from him, and promised to fight against the standards of the Sultan [Jalāl al-Dīn].'[34] Other authors emphasize the action of 'taking up' the *tāmbūla*, not just passively receiving it from the ruler's hands, as the gesture signifying acceptance of responsibility for carrying out a particular, and often dangerous command.[35] We will see that references to 'taking *pān*' can be found in middle Bengali narrative literature from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, and the idiom 'taking up *pān*' to mean 'accepting a command' also exists in Hindi.[36] Of course, a latent possibility of the latter ceremony was its opposite: occasionally the subject properly might decline the ruler's command, by declining to 'take up' the gift of *pān*.[37] In this way, 'taking up' *pān* recognizes a more limited authority than that of 'fealty', where the obligation to serve in theory was conditional (the ruler had to meet his obligations to provide a livelihood) but unspecific.[38] The voluntary dimension of 'taking up' *pān*, albeit limited in practice—opens more space for negotiation between a ruler and his nobles, and the ceremony in court might have sealed a bargain the two already had reached. In the next section I will describe the way one Bengali text from the latter half of the sixteenth century extends the ceremony of 'taking' *pān*, by developing a potential for gifts of *pān* to be distributed to a large number of people.

GIFTS OF *PĀN* IN MUKUNDA'S *CAṆḌĪMAṄGAL*

This section will examine royal gifts of *pān* in the long Bengali narrative poem, *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* by Mukunda Cakrabartī,[39] a man widely acknowledged to have been the best author of all *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, if not of all *maṅgal-kābya*.[40] Mukunda's *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* was written in the second half of the sixteenth century.[41] During the period of Mughal rule in the following century and a half, it became well known and widely copied throughout Bengal. Although new *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* continued to be composed in this period, most later poets closely followed Mukunda's model, at least in the region of Rāṛh, the deltaic plains south of the Ganga and west of the Bhāgīrathī rivers.[42] One episode of this poem describes how Kālketu, an untouchable hunter dwelling

on the agrarian frontier between the Bengal delta and the Chota Nagpur plateau, cleared the forest and established and settled a kingdom with the help of goddess Caṇḍī. Mukunda's version is unique in narrating that while founding his kingdom Kālketu distributed *pān* to all subjects who came to settle.

I agree with Sukumar Sen that Mukunda Cakrabartī probably wrote his *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* before the first Mughal conquest of Bengal, which began in 1574, and ended with the Bengal army's rebellion against Akbar in 1580.[43] True, an account of the poem's composition, found in some manuscripts, mentions the Hindu general and governor responsible for later conquests, 'Raja Mān Singh, ruler (*mahīp*) of Gauṛ, Baṅga and Utkal' (north Bengal, east Bengal, and Orissa), and his departure from Bengal 'as the fruit of sins of his subjects.'[44] Mān Singh became *sipāh-sālār* (commander in chief) of Bihar late in 1587, and campaigned in Bihar between 1588 and 1590, and in Orissa between 1590 and 1594. He was appointed *ṣūbadār* (governor) of Bengal in 1594, and campaigned in east Bengal between 1594 and 1598; in 1598 he received permission to return to Ajmer and to govern by deputy.[45] The verse in which Raja Mān Singh is mentioned describes how and why, after the Raja's departure, Mukunda also fled from his home village in what now is Burdwan district, West Bengal, to the small Hindu kingdom of Brāhmaṇbhūm (probably somewhere in upland Midnapur district, and then at the border between Bengal and Orissa) where he received the patronage that allowed him to compose his poem.[46] However unlike Mukunda's near contemporary Dvija Mādhab, who composed his version of *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* in 1579, just prior to the Mughal rebellion against Akbar,[47] Mukunda does not mention Akbar. Nor does he mention any other Mughal noble, or describe Raja Mān Singh's campaigns against the Afghans in Orissa, 1590–4, or the renewal of worship of Jagannātha at the Puri temple, which Mān Singh's Orissan victories permitted.[48] Presumably Mukunda would have heard of those recent events from eyewitnesses, if indeed he had moved to and composed his narrative in Brāhmaṇbhūm only some time after 1598. Sukumar Sen has questioned the authenticity of this verse, and he has proposed a period of composition ending in 1555/56.[49] In any case, I think that if the important role this text gives to royal gifts of *pān* reflects Bengali practice, it must reflect pre-Mughal, not Mughal practice.

In his narrative of the founding of Kālketu's kingdom, Mukunda outlines the problems of village headmen and rulers on the frontier of agrarian settlement in the Chota Nagpur peneplain. In a situation

of labour scarcity, village headmen, who themselves were labour controllers, used their mobility to negotiate for better terms from alternative rulers. Crucial to their interests were: an initial period of tax free possession to allow development of cultivation, security of title to the land they would cultivate, permanency of settlement of the land revenue demand, absence of labour taxes or additional cesses or taxes in kind, and their own control of agency for tax collection from sub-leasors (rather than tax collection by the ruler's officials).[50] Village headmen also considered the procedure for assessing the land revenue demand (more strictly, by measurement of the land, or more loosely, per plough), its remission for harvest failures, the schedule of its instalments, and the security held for and the rate of interest assessed on unpaid instalments of the land revenue due before harvesting.[51] On the other hand, a ruler's problems were how to satisfy the demands of various labour controllers coming to his territory with their dependants, given competition for scarce labour on the agrarian frontier, and at the same time how to establish direct and permanent relationships with those dependants (circumventing the mediation of village headmen). In Mukunda's narrative, Kālketu gives *pān* to show honour to all his subjects. I suggest that an expanded ceremony presenting royal gifts of *pān* to all subjects, rather than only to those receiving special honour or accepting a specific command, was recommended in this text in order to create direct links between a ruler and his subjects.

In this text, 'taking' a gift of *pān* always symbolizes a willingness to obey the superior who gives. Several instances of gifts of *pān* help us to see the ceremony in different contexts. Caṇḍī commanded Biśvakarma, artisan of the gods, to build Kālketu's city, and with the command, also gave him *pān*. Biśvakarma 'held Caṇḍī's directives upon his head' (*śire dhare ādeś*). Her 'directives' were of course oral. I assume this idiom indicates the *añjali* gesture of settling a burden upon the head to indicate acceptance of a command. We are also told that Biśvakarma 'held Caṇḍī's *pān* upon his head'.[52]

Gifts of *pān* could be made in the context of a particular command, or of an enduring relationship of fealty. When Biśvakarma had built Kālketu's city, Caṇḍī turned to the problem of providing it with settlers, and eventually asked Indra for assistance. Indra in turn commanded Droṇa to help Caṇḍī: 'Take my *pān*, Droṇa. You will repay my salt. Quickly go with Caṇḍikā.'[53] Salt was of course one of the wages of military service. To be 'true to ones salt' meant to be loyal,

and to 'repay ones salt' meant to perform the duties or to fulfill the responsibilities for which one had been engaged as a military retainer, in a relationship where a general fealty was expected of the inferior, and where continued fealty depended on the superior's ability to provide the 'salt' of remuneration.[54]

Pān seems not to have been 'given' or 'taken' in relations of equality.[55] Mukunda's text however suggests that the ceremony might be used beyond the context of a particular command, wherever a relationship allowed for the subject's choice, and combined aspects both of fealty and of redistribution. Thus, we are told of Muslims, the first group of settlers in Kālketu's kingdom, 'Having taken the hero's *pān*, all the Muslims settled; he gave them the western quarter.'[56] Royal gifts of *pān* could serve as the reciprocal of gifts of *bheṭ* given by potential subjects, gifts which in this text always precede a petition requesting the superior for particular assistance or for a new relationship. Thus, in Mukunda's narrative when kayasthas came to settle Kālketu's kingdom, they brought ordinary gifts of *bheṭ*—curds, fish, and ghee in clay pots—to initiate a relationship. They promised to settle their dependants (*prājagaṇ*), and requested that Kālketu give them and their dependants *pān*, along with good lands well delimited, houses, paddy seed, and money to buy bullocks; and that he delay requiring them to repay loans.[57] Here the gifts of *pān* to kayasthas closed the preceding bargaining between them and Kālketu, reciprocated their gifts of *bheṭ* to him, and initiated a series of much more valuable gifts from him to these honourable, literate, and well-spoken subjects, the ornaments of his city,[58] and to their dependants, gifts upon which their settlement in his kingdom had been conditioned.

In the case of brahman settlers, Kālketu provided gifts of *pān* without receiving from them any initiatory gifts of *bheṭ* which might have indicated their inferiority to him. Kālketu's gifts of *pān* to brahmans also initiated a series of much more valuable gifts, for he had promised to give brahmans houses and lands free of all revenue demands in perpetuity,[59] and conveyed these gifts to them after purifying his own hands with mantras, *kuś* grass, sesame seeds and water.[60] In the relationship thus initiated, Kālketu did not expect to command these brahmans, even at some future date; instead he had promised to 'be the servant of brahmans, to fulfill the hopes of all and to accomplish the honour of each one.'[61] Nevertheless, the gifts of *pān* from the king to brahmans also instituted a redistributive economy. He gave them

rent-free land and houses, and from the brahmans Kālketu received not the tangible gifts of *bheṭ*, nor the promise of future taxes, but their 'judgment' of Shastras, and the intangible gifts of their blessings.[62]

Mukunda's narrative suggests that Kālketu gave *pān* to all his subjects, both Muslim and Hindu, and both high-born and low. Gifts of *pān* were socially and religiously neutral symbols of inclusion in a kingdom which contained very different kinds of subjects.[63] In one other place the text mentions gifts apparently distributed to all: 'Dependants of various *jāti* received houses as gifts (*iman*), settled, and were happy in the hero's city. Kālketu honoured them and gave them beautiful clothes. Singing and dancing filled every house.'[64] Gifts of *pān* mark out the autarkic boundaries of Kālketu's royal redistribution. Finally, in his city *pān* growers (*bārui*, 'who continually gave the hero *pān*') could also count on a special relationship with him. He promised them that no one would take goods from them by force without their being able to call upon the king's intervention, and that he would impose no unjust regulation upon them.[65] By synecdoche gifts of *pān* suggest the whole redistributive economy of a little kingdom in both directions of redistribution, to and from the king; and they properly precede the more valuable royal gifts of rent-free land and houses, and the interest-free seeds and capital necessary to transform uncultivated land into productive fields.

I find only one mention of something like robes of honour and the gifts associated with them, and they were given only to a very specific set of recipients. To each of his panegyrists (*bhāṭ*), who of course would be responsible for keeping records of his own honourable deeds, Kālketu gave 'a pair of fine cloths (*khāsā joṛā*) and a horse to mount.' They in turn 'thought continually of the hero's well-being.'[66]

Unlike the Mughals' imperial gifts of turbans, sets of courtly clothing, robes of honour, jewels, swords, and horses and elephants, gifts of *pān* were imagined in this text as being given to all subjects, rather than being reserved for a nobility. They suggest a direct relationship between king and subjects, even though the text also specifies a mediatory role for kayastha headmen over their dependants. If however, Mukunda's recommendation were put into practice, and gifts of *pān* had become commonplace, the value of receiving them also would have decreased. Furthermore, as gifts they both sealed and veiled bargaining about the specific terms offered to settlers, a process which must have been intensely competitive, given the general conditions of labour scarcity on the agrarian frontier. Therefore, behind the gifts of *pān* we may discern a price, or a series of prices, as

the king divided his lands among subjects who were valuable to him in different ways and in different degrees; and as they in turn came to terms with him about the taxes he eventually had to collect, and computed both the economic value of his terms of settlement, and the degree of honour he would show them.

ALTERNATIVES TO 'TAKING UP' *PĀN* IN MUGHAL CEREMONY

Among the European travellers who describe the uses of *pān*, Bernard ten Broecke (a contemporary of John Huyghen van Linschoten who was in India in the years 1583–89) seems to have been the last to notice its use in royal ceremony other than as a simple gift of honour, and his probably mistaken account of its use as a 'passe port' does not unambiguously refer to 'taking up' *pān* to indicate acceptance of a command.[67] Later European travellers described gifts of *pān* as tokens of honour but not 'taking up' *pān* as a ceremony to signify acceptance of a royal command.

One reason may be that although the Mughals gave *pān* as signs of honour,[68] they apparently did not include 'taking up' *pān* among their imperial ceremonies. Abū'l Faẓl, in a well known passage, describes 'regulations for the manner in which people are to show their obedience.' Akbar himself had introduced two new forms of salutation: the *kornish* and the *taslīm*. In the former, the implied limit to royal authority in the gesture of 'taking up' *pān*—the possibility that the command might be refused and *pān* might not be 'taken up'—was replaced by an unconditional submission to imperial authority, made as soon as the subject entered the presence of the emperor, and before any specific commands could have been given.

The second ceremony of salutation, the *taslīm*, is described as follows:

> [It] consists in placing the back of the right hand on the ground, and then raising it gently till the person stands erect, when he puts the palm of his hand upon the crown of his head, which pleasing manner of saluting signifies that he is ready to give himself as an offering.[69]

As this was a ceremony to be performed upon receipt of a new command and upon taking leave, it can be compared to the gift of *pān* as a token of honour upon a subject's dismissal from court. Finally, for 'disciples' who would 'look upon a prostration before his Majesty as a prostration before God', Akbar allowed an optional form, *sijda* or full prostration, touching the forehead to the ground as in daily prayer.[70]

Mīrzā Nāthan's seventeenth-century diary records how he used a combination of *taslīm*, 'obeisance', and *sijda*, full prostration, to receive *farmān*, imperial writs, when they were conveyed by a messenger from Prince Khurram. Mīrzā Nāthan sent boats to convey the imperial messenger in state to the place where he was to be met, having erected velvet canopies there for a 'ceremony of obeisance' to be performed by himself and his subordinate Khans and Rajas. Mīrzā Nāthan continues:

> At the aforesaid place where Yakka Bahādur [the messenger] was sitting under the *shāmiyānas* (canopies) he [Nāthan] and all others, high and low, dismounted from their horses and elephants and began to observe the rites of obeisance from a distance of one arrow-shot. Reaching near Yakka Bahādur, Shitāb Khan, the author of this book [Nāthan], made three obeisances and prostrations of gratitude (*taslīm wa sijda*) and then he placed the Farmans respectfully with his two hands over his head and again performed the rites of obeisance and prostrations of gratitude, and put on the robe of honour. After offering royal salute for the third time, he took the Farman for Mīrzā Bahrām [who had not willingly accepted the authority of Prince Khurram] and thrust it on the head of the aforesaid Mīrzā, and he was made to perform his obeisance with his face turned toward Jahangirnagar [where Prince Khurram was residing]. Then Raja Lakshmī Narayan and after him Raja Satrajit were made to observe the rites of obeisance.[71]

Imperial *farmān* embodied the presence of the emperor or princes of the Mughal lineage, and were received with *taslīm*, the obeisance which was reserved for the emperor; optionally, they might be received with the full prostration of daily prayer. Mīrzā Nāthan's diary also describes a Mughal noble taking the imperial *farmān* 'by both his hands, and plac[ing] it on his head with great respect.' Others honoured *farmān* by 'placing them on their heads and eyes', before performing 'the necessary formalities of obeisance.'[72] In comparison to 'taking up' *pān*, Mughal imperial ceremonies for the receipt of *farmān* reveal the dynasty's aspirations to display a more centralized and bureaucratic authority, by the honour given to accompanying writs. In this passage Mīrzā Nāthan also vividly confirms evidence from Mughal paintings that coercion was used in courtly ceremonies to compel proper obeisance from refractory subjects.[73] The more absolute authority apparent in being 'made to perform obeisance' should be contrasted with the voluntary acceptance of a new command or a relationship which we often have seen in the ceremony of 'taking up' *pān*.

Equally important to Mughal courtly ceremony were a rich array

of expensive gifts, including robes of honour, horses, riding elephants, jewelled swords, standards, kettledrums, turbans, and jewellery; gifts which conveyed new honours accompanying new titles and responsibilities.[74] Expensive and finely graded gifts of honour, presented to selected nobles who had displayed conspicuous loyalty and ability in their service, reveal the dynasty's concern to display more exactly hierchical relations of honour, but to do so only among their noble subjects.

REPLACEMENTS FOR THE CEREMONY OF 'TAKING' *PĀN* IN BENGALI LITERATURE

The following remarks are based on an initial sampling of Bengali verse narratives from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I argue that during these centuries Bengali literature closely followed Mughal courtly ceremony and emphasized royal gifts of clothing, jewellery and horses to accompany royal commands, rather than royal gifts of *pān*.

'Taking' *pān* to signify acceptance of a command does not continue to have the same emphasis in *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* texts later than Mukunda's. Mukunda, for example, gives a precise account of how the merchant Dhanapati first declined *pān*, and then accepted it under duress, when commanded by his king to journey to Simhal.[75] Neither Dvija Mādhab (1579) nor Rāmānanda Yati (1766) mention the merchant's 'taking *pān*' on this occasion. Dvija Mādhab does write that Dhanapati 'took the command upon his head', suggesting only the *añjali* gesture.[76] In the description of Dvija Rām'deb (1649) we see both 'receiving' *pān*, and 'binding a favour' to the head, but does 'receiving' *pān* still indicate acceptance of a command? Certainly *pān* is only the first of two 'honours' accorded to the merchant by the king.

> [The merchant] gave presents and honoured the jewel of kings. He bent his knee to the ground and pressed his palms together. First, the merchant received a *tāmbūla* made with camphor. Then his heart's worries were greatly relieved.[77]

No command to journey to Simhal had so far been given. When it was, Dhanapati objected at some length, until the king himself reiterated his command and further 'favoured' (*prasād karila*) the merchant with a jewelled ring. Then the merchant 'could not remain.' Apparently in a ceremony of taking leave, 'the merchant bound the

favour (*prasād*, apparently the ring just given) of the king tightly to his head' and then departed.[78] If the gesture of 'binding the favour' to the head still indicates acceptance of a command, the 'favour' itself no longer is *pān*, but the much more valuable present of a jewelled ring.

Very often in later texts gifts of turbans or robes of honour, together with other costly royal gifts, are described instead of gifts of *pān* to convey new honours that accompany new commands, or new relations or responsibilities. I have found no *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* written after Mukunda's in which Kālketu distributes gifts of *pān* to his new subjects. Mukunda's near contemporary, Dvija Mādhab (1579), however, does also emphasize gifts of clothing which establish direct relations between Kālketu and all his dependants:

> The headman went with all his dependants, and with his officers, advisors and brahmans; they went to meet the hero [Kālketu] and he saw them. The hero gave the headman a horse and palanquin, and wrapped the heads of all his dependants with silk scarves (*pāṭer pāchaṛā*).[79]

In contrast, Dvija Rām'deb (1649) restricts gifts of royal honours to the headman alone:

> They arrived at the court [of the hero] in Gujarat. They offered presents [*bheṭila*] before the hero, and bowed to him. The dependants looked on the hero with delight. He gave the headman a royal turban (*rāj'pāg'śir*) for his head. The headman received horses and a palanquin, and departed.[80]

The late eighteenth-century author Rāmānanda Yati (1766) suggested the importance of written records by his mention of a royal clerk. Otherwise, he elaborated upon the works of authors later than Mukunda by replacing *pān* with lavish royal gifts:

> The hero spent money and established homes and homesteads, and people came, and became his followers. The clerk wrote on papers, the treasurer examined everything; maidservants and menservants ceaselessly came and went.
>
> Everyone tied his horse with a tether, and wore a turban and pair of cloths, and had a mace-bearer to run before him. They had companions to flatter them and hold umbrellas over their heads, and their watchmen carefully stayed awake.
>
> In plaster-walled houses, learned brahmans recited *Purānas*; they had beds and bedsteads, palanquins and litters, cloths and ornaments beyond counting, and hundreds of embroidered carpets.
>
> Qāḍis recited in Persian, while cavalry soldiers paraded Arabian horses, and Turkish ponies[81] galloped by. Their old men and womenfolk recognized Iraqi [and?] ... horses, while army officers sat ... .[82]

In the new city imagined by this author, everyone apparently received some extravagant honours, though learned religious élites, Hindu and Muslim, and cavalry soldiers are singled out by special favours.

When *pān* is mentioned, often the one who gives *pān* is less than a king. A seventeenth-century author, Kabi Kṛṣṇarām Dās, describes 'taking' *pān* in a context which is clearly not royal. In his *Rāy'maṅgal* (written sometime after 1677) a merchant wished to build ships, but could not arrange it by himself. His navigator (*karṇadhār*) therefore gave *pān* to two shipwrights, Biśvakarma and Hanumān in human disguise, and took them to the merchant, who in turn 'satisfied' them with unspecified 'favours'. Later, we are told, the merchant gave the navigator a set of clothing (*śiropā*) as a sign of his favour when the ships had been completed.[83] Here, not even the merchant, but only the merchant's navigator gives *pān* to initiate a relationship of employment.

We may conclude with a few brief examples from Ghanarām's *Dharmamaṅgal*, an early eighteenth-century text (1711).[84] *Pān*, in this text, is used to accompany commands and to honour relatively lowly people. For example, a minor local king gives hunters *pān* with the command to trap a man-eating tiger.[85] In perhaps the most important case of its use, Lausen's mother gives wrestlers *pān* with the command that they break her son's limbs in the ruse of teaching him wrestling, so that he will be unable to leave home to prove his masculinity and to win his fortune as a warrior. 'Having tied the *pān* securely, the wrestlers did obeisance' and went to find Lausen.[86] In this last case we are far indeed from gifts of *pān* in a public, courtly ceremony.

In Ghanarām's text, in general, kings give much more valuable honours to more important subjects. It will take us too far afield to trace in this text all the gifts kings distribute to subjects who have accepted new responsibilities, but gifts of clothing are conspicuous. For example, the 'lord of Gauṛ' sent Som Ghoṣ to collect taxes from the locality ruled by Karṇa Sen, who had failed to send regular remittances of his taxes. 'He gave Ghoṣ two shawls and a pair of turbans. As a present (*bakshish*) he again gave him a horse to mount, and a trumpet, a banner, and a written command. Ghoṣ did obeisance and departed.'[87] Similarly, the king's minister, sending spies against his enemies, gave them 'a pair of shawls, a turban (*sarband*), and a set of clothing (*śiropā*).'[88]

In eighteenth-century Bengali literature, sets of clothing, turbans,

shawls, cloths embroidered with golden threads, rings, and other jewellery, horses, palanquins, banners and trumpets all appear in various combinations as royal gifts which show royal 'favour' to subjects who have accepted royal commands and new responsibilities. Exactly as with Mughal gifts of honour, this rich array of literary gifts makes it possible for authors to reflect the exact degree of honour being shown their recipients. Only Rāmānanda Yati maintains Mukunda's dream that all subjects would be bound by gifts to their common king, but his text emphasizes expensive and luxurious goods as signs of the king's favour. Royal gifts of *pān* to all subjects might have been possible, as Mukunda had described them, but in eighteenth-century Bengali literature they usually suggest a small honour, because the degree of honour a gift carried depended upon its rarity and value. In Rāmānanda Yati's narrative, royal gifts were oxymorons, extremely valuable and conveying great honour, and yet given to all and so commonplace, and his description of them was therefore utopian.

MUGHAL AND POST-MUGHAL GIFTS OF *PĀN* IN BENGAL

Turning from literature to narratives which at least claim to have a more direct relationship with contemporary events, one finds abundant references to 'gifts of *pān*' to show honour, but very few to 'taking up' *pān* to indicate acceptance of a command. Still, occasionally, gifts of *pān* continued to be 'taken up' to mark the affirmation of relationships and the acceptance of commands, despite the apparent absence of this gesture from official, imperial Mughal ceremony. In this section, I explore a few cases of 'taking up' *pān*, most of which occurred in Bengal. I will argue that the ceremony of 'taking up' royal gifts of *pān* often seems to have been either modified, or displaced towards more peripheral, ephemeral or ambiguous relationships.

It is not surprising to find mention of giving *pān* to relatively peripheral people in the context of giving a directive which might have been declined, exactly as contemporary Bengali literature suggests. The *Malda Diary and Consultations* of the English East India Company, for example, records an instance of giving *pān* to Indian merchants in the context of such a directive. In 1681, when the English finally had paid bribes sufficient to receive permission to collect cloth from Indian merchants at their new factory at 'Englezavad', Jam Sher Beg, the Mughal *krori*, the officer in charge of collecting provincial

taxes, 'called our Picars giveing them Bettle and good words and bid them goe to us at our new Factory and prize their goods to us &ca'.[89] The word 'bid' and the gifts of 'Bettle and good words' suggest persuasion rather than or as well as command, and some choice on the part of the Indian merchants.

On the other hand an interesting example of modifying the ceremony of 'taking up' *pān* appears in Mīrzā Nāthan's diary, where the modification signified that the recipient of *pān* had no choice. The incident happened early in his career. Mūsa Khān, Masnad-i-'Alā, was the son of 'Isā Khān, who in turn was the leader of twelve, mostly Afghan, 'lords of the soil' of Bengal, with whom the Mughals contested for sovereignty early in the seventeenth century. Initially both son and father appeared to submit to the Mughals, and were treated with leniency by the governor, Islām Khān. Shortly thereafter Mūsa Khān, the son, apparently gave secret support to a conspiracy against the Mughals among his own men. The leader of these rebels was Ḥusayn Khān, who defeated a Mughal army sent by the governor himself. Nāthan relates how the governor, Islām Khān, reacted when he heard news of his army's defeat:

> When this news reached Islām Khān, he sent for Mūsa Khān, Masnad-i-'Alā, and administered a sharp rebuke to him which was in fact more painful than a wound inflicted by a sword, and said,—'This is a rose sprung from your garden. Ḥusayn Khān is your product and now you must exert yourself to dispose of him.' Mūsa Khān, greatly perturbed by these words, took a *dao* (big knife) and a piece of pan (betel leaf) from Islām Khān and sent 200 war boats belonging to himself and his own brothers, under the command of one of his tribesman [sic] named Ālū Khān Afghan, a trustworthy officer of Mūsa Khān.

Explaining the situation in turn to Ālū Khān, Mūsa Khān made clear what the governor had meant by adding the 'big knife' to the roll of *pān*: 'There is no way out of it except victory or death'. Thereafter, Ālū Khān defeated and captured Ḥusayn Khān, and Nāthan concludes that as a reward for this service, 'Islām Khān paid many tributes to Mūsa Khān and comforted him'.[90] One senses that this was an embarrassing and perhaps a threatening episode for the governor. After all, his own leniency might have been blamed for his army's loss. No *farmān* is mentioned; the order to Mūsa Khān seems to have been oral. Perhaps 'taking up' *pān* was used in this case to signify acceptance of an oral command given in a situation where neither the superior nor the inferior could have desired a written record and official scrutiny of what he had done, at least until after suppression

of the rebellion. Nonetheless, the brilliant improvisation of adding a 'big knife' to the roll of *pān* clearly indicated the Mughals' claim to unquestioned authority.

However, as Mughal power declined during the eighteenth century, precisely that aspect of the gesture of 'taking up' *pān* which had made it undesirable for Mughal imperial ceremony—the implicit recognition of the subject's choice and agency—sometimes again seemed important to chroniclers. Tod's summary of the *Annals of Marwar* gives a vivid example from the decision forcibly to expel and replace Sarbuland Khān as Governor of Gujarat in 1730, after he had both used force to collect a variety of additional taxes from the merchants of Surat, and had concluded an unauthorized treaty with the *peshwa* Bāji Rāo.[91] To find a noble willing to undertake this task, according to the chronicler, the emperor [Muhammad Shāh] had a *beera* (roll) of *pān* placed upon a golden salver, which a court official 'bore in his extended arms, slowly passing in front of the nobles ranged on either side of the throne ... .' At first, 'no hand was stretched forth' because courtiers feared they would be defeated by Sarbuland Khān. However, after a long moment of imperial distress, Mahārāja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur finally 'stretched forth his hand, and placed the *beera* in his turban ... .'[92] However, was this scene of a subordinate noble's sudden, heroic, and honourable response only a literary device of the chronicler? It tells us nothing of the complex factional rivalries in Delhi and Gujarat, rivalries that pitted Sarbuland Khān against his Mughal opponents at the court (and the *peshwa* against Maratha war bands he had agreed to help suppress).[93] The chronicler does immediately add a list of imperial honours and payments made to Abhay Singh, prior to his setting out.[94] It is hard to believe that they had not been the subject of intense and prior negotiations.[95]

In another incident giving and 'taking up' *pān* was transformed to mitigate the dishonor of having to relinquish an office. In 1748, after his decisive victory over a combined Afghan and Maratha force at Rāṇīsarāi, Nawāb Alivardi Khān decided to give his nephew Sirāj-ud-daulah the office of governor of Azimabad [Bihar], and to make a Bengali kayastha, Jānkīrām, deputy governor, the person who would actually bear the responsibilities of this office locally in Azimabad.[96] Another of Alivardi's nephews, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, however, already held the office of deputy governor. Therefore, after Sirāj-ud-daulah and Jānkīrām had been invested and given suitable robes of honour and other presents, the nawāb improvised a

ceremony at which Sayyid Aḥmad Khān would semi-publicly and voluntarily relinquish his office to Jānkīrām:

> to regain Sáyd-ahmed-qhan's good will to this arrangement, as well as to soften his mind, Djankiram received orders [from Alivardi] to wait upon him, and to ask his consent in a respectful manner. Sáyd-ahmed-qhan graciously granted it, although highly humbled by a transaction that exposed his character; and he gave him a *Biry of Paan*, according to the custom of India, in token of that consent; his intention being to avoid everything that might disoblige his uncle; and it is remarkable that Djankiram went by the Viceroy's [Alivardi's] order, in company with Sadr-el-hac-qhan, to give more weight to his submission.[97]

This improvised ceremony seems to have been useful precisely because Jānkīrām's symbolic 'submission' to Sayyid Aḥmad Khan, enacted by taking *pān* from him, partially veiled the latter's loss of office, and public exposure of his loss of favour with the nawāb. This veiling was possible because the ceremony's expected dramatization of a choice was displaced from the recipient of *pān* to the giver.

In the ambiguous and ambivalent relations of courtly politics at the end of Mughal rule, the meaning of gifts of *pān* could become problematic, even when they were ostensibly given to show honour or favour, without any context of command. During Sirāj-ud-daula's final months as nawāb of Bengal and Bihar in the spring of 1757, he was confronted with Clive's victories at Calcutta and Chandernagore, with the increasing support for the British among members of his court, and with the demand by the British that he deliver agents of the French East India Company to them. Hoping to retain a relationship at a distance, in a ceremony of departure he gave the Frenchman Monsieur Jean Law *pān* from his own hand, before requesting him to depart from Murshidabad to the north-west to escape the British. Nawāb Sirāj-ud-daulah suggested that he would send for Law 'if there should happen anything new'; but Law told him plainly 'that this is the last time we shall see each other.'[98] A few days later, in a fit of rage Sirāj-ud-daulah threatened the *vākil* of the British that he would extirpate their race from his kingdom, but later that day he repented this rashness, and summoned the same *vākil* and gave him *pān*, apparently in the vain hope of veiling his own enmity and allaying theirs.[99] No command accompanied either gift; although both were ostensibly gifts of honour, the contexts were friendship in the former case and enmity in the latter; but both suggest Sirāj-ud-daulah's ambivalent desire for relationships which he also thought had become impossible.

Still more ambiguous is the following incident recorded by Ghulām Husain Khān. In 1763 he began to believe that Nawāb Mīr Qāsim was holding him 'as a kind of pledge for [his] father's good behaviour, and as an hostage for that of [his] brother', both of whom had absented themselves from the nawāb's camp. Too ill to move himself, and under suspicion for his extensive contacts with the British, Ghulām Husain Khān reports that he 'was very near despairing of [his] life and honour.' Secretly he arranged that his one remaining brother also should depart the nawāb's camp. Later, when he had recovered his health, Ghulām Husain Khān seized an opportunity to bow to the nawāb before Mīr Qāsim entered his private chambers. Nawāb Mīr Qāsim gave him two rolls of *pān* from the nawāb's own supply, and suggested ominously that it was a good thing he the nawāb had done to allow *both* of Ghulām Husain Khān's brothers 'to take some rest and enjoy themselves for a while.' Terror-stricken, Ghulām Husain Khān in turn feigned applause for the nawāb's kindness and generosity, along with thanks for the great honour shown him by the gift of *pān*.[100] Here the excessive favour shown by a gift of *pān* from his own hand veils the nawāb's profound distrust, which is only hinted at verbally, and Ghulām Husain Khān's expressions of gratitude similarly veil his sudden terror.

I have found no evidence from Bengal that *pān* was given or 'taken up' in order to constitute relations of fealty among rebels against Mughal rule. Although negative evidence is never conclusive, perhaps the late seventeenth-century zamindari rebellion of Sobhā Singh on the western frontier of Mughal Bengal can serve as an example. The most nearly contemporary Mughal history of the rebellion is silent about the procedures used to recruit followers.[101] Gautam Bhadra's analysis of origins of the rebellion emphasizes the ways the zamindar may have found a core of support among poor people from the caste of Bāgdis in his zamindari in western Midnapur, to which caste his lineage apparently retained special ritual ties, and to which it may once have belonged.[102] In contrast, Aniruddha Ray emphasizes the ways leaders of the rebellion attempted to project themselves as kings, and failed nevertheless to control looting of merchants by their peasant followers. About recruitment of peasants to the rebellion, Ray astutely comments: 'Peasants after the fall of a rebel would always point to the fact that they had paid [taxes] only to a king—and had, in effect, only approved the transfer of power that had effectively changed hands.'[103] Perhaps their participation in a ceremony of voluntarily 'taking up' *pān* to join a rebellion

would not have served peasants' interests of self-protection in the event of the rebellion failing.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the ambiguous, changing, and contested meanings in royal gifts of *pān*. Throughout South Asia, *pān* was given both in courts and in wealthy families to show honour to a great variety of recipients. Like gifts of robes of honour, some royal gifts of *pān* constituted relationships by changing the bodies of subjects who received them, leaving a trace of the ruler's body in the subject's. The gift which carried the most honour was a *tāmbūla* prepared for the ruler's use, and better, given by the ruler's own hand, and expected to be taken into the subject's mouth. By asymmetrically 'marking' subjects, royal gifts of *pān* from the ruler's hand constituted them as inferiors in their relationship to him, while transferring to them some of the ruler's virtue and authority. On the other hand, an apparently specialized ceremony associated with some royal gifts of *pān* seems to have emphasized the recipient's independent agency. This was his 'voluntary' gesture of 'taking up' *pān* in order to symbolize acceptance of a particular command or assignment from the ruler. Finally, because they were thought to cause 'fire' to burn more brightly, while removing 'wind' and counteracting 'phlegm', *tāmbūla* might have been both given and 'taken up' as a tonic and prophylactic, in order to produce the kind of person who could undertake a difficult mission, someone with the mental and moral qualities of intelligence and fortitude besides the physical ones of good health and a capacity for passionate and energetic action, and one who could be introduced with pleasure to courtly society because of his sweet smelling breath.

In Mukunda's sixteenth-century *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* we saw that by metonymy the acceptance of a gift of *pān* could acknowledge entering into an enduring and generalized relationship between subject and ruler. In this narrative gifts of *pān* marked out the autarkic boundaries of royal redistribution. However, behind the royal gifts of *pān* to all Kālketu's subjects, we discerned a series of prices, as subjects and the king negotiated terms of settlement on the agrarian frontier. Further, if gifts of *pān* could have become so commonplace as to be given to all subjects, the value of receiving them would also have decreased.

Mukunda mentions 'taking' *pān* in a variety of other courtly settings,

human and divine, to indicate acceptance of a royal command. In Bengali literature written after Mukunda's poem, 'taking *pān*' is mentioned less frequently, and tends to be displaced to relationships more peripheral and ephemeral than those of a court. Besides, in this later literature kings use a rich array of gifts, including clothing, weapons, jewels, horses, palanquins, banners, and trumpets, to show royal favour. This rich array of gifts is usually given to a few subjects who have accepted royal commands and new responsibilities, not to subjects in general. Because giving and 'taking' *pān* in general are not motifs necessary to the stories being told, variations in how and where these motifs are used are more likely to reflect changing customs than to have been made for literary or rhetorical purposes.

Evidence from texts more closely linked to historical events also suggests that royal gifts of *pān* probably became less important in the course of Mughal rule in Bengal. One reason seems to have been that, as Bengali literature suggests, gifts of *pān* were displaced by more elaborate, finely graded, and expensive gifts of honour, gifts which better conveyed the promised advantages of obedience to a few favoured subjects. However, another reason seems to have been that the ceremony of 'taking up' *pān*, and its implicit recognition of a subject's 'voluntary' agency, often may not have served the interests of Mughal rulers, who organized courtly ceremonies to express a more absolute authority.

Mughal ceremonies for receipt of new offices or responsibilities privileged written *farmān*, the writs of office which provided a permanent record of new responsibilities; whereas in the few records I have found of the ceremony in Mughal Bengal, *pān* appears to have been 'taken up' in the context of accepting oral directives. When 'taking up' *pān* was used in Mughal ceremony, sometimes the ceremony was modified to express a more absolute authority, as when the governor of Bengal Islām Khān gave his refractory Afghan subject both *pān* and a big knife to indicate the choice of obedience or death. 'Taking up' *pān* to indicate voluntary acceptance of a directive seems to have been displaced towards more peripheral or ephemeral relationships, as when the *krorī* Jam Sher Beg gave *pān* to silk *pāikārs* while bidding them to supply the English East India Company at a new factory. Giving and 'taking up' *pān* were sometimes used in order to produce ambiguity in a relationship; as when Nawāb Alivardi devised a ceremonial gift of *pān* for one of his nephews, to indicate the nephew's 'voluntary' relinquishment of an office from which he had in fact been removed.

Even without the context of a directive, the meaning of a gift of *pān* depended on the relations which were its context, and on the motives of giver and recipient, as in the very different meanings of Sirāj-ud-daulah's almost simultaneous gifts of *pān* to the Frenchman Monsieur Law and to the *vākil* of the English. This was true also with 'taking up' *pān* in the context of a directive. In that context, however, we have persistently noted some degree of choice to accept or decline to 'take up' both *pān* and directive. An expectation of choice on the part of the recipient remains, at least in the background, even when that choice was explicitly denied by a modification to the ceremony, or when it was explicitly displaced from the recipient to the giver. I do not argue that personal choice—and its concomitant negotiation of the price for obedience—was an essential and unchanging part of the ceremony of 'taking up' *pān*. I do suggest however, that the ceremony of 'taking up' *pān* remained marginally useful, because it usually signified personal choice on the part of the recipient, and that it remained marginally useful even though rulers in Mughal courts placed much greater emphasis on ceremonies that stressed a less conditional obedience to a more absolute authority.

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15. Gode, 'Studies in the History of Tāmbūla: Some Beliefs about the Number of Ingredients in a Tāmbūla', in *Studies in Cultural History* 1:140–1. Gode translates from the *Jotirnibandha* by Śivarāja or Śivadāsa.

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17. Penzer, pp. 196, 202.

18. Penzer, pp. 223–4, quoting from *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, 2 vols (1885) 2:62 ff. I have used Penzer's corrections to the English translation. Was Bernard ten Broecke simply confused about the use of *pān* as a passport? It appears more likely that the gifts he noted were also part of a ceremony of departure.

19. Abū'l Faẓl, 1:78.

20. Penzer, pp. 203–9; Rooney, p. 11; Henry Brownrigg, *Betel Cutters from the Samuel Eilenberg Collection* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1992), p. 28.

21. See Ibn Battuta 3:680, the account of Sultan Muhammad Tughluq's reception of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muhammad, a descendent of the 'Abbāsid caliph: 'He took betel-nut with his own hand and offered it to him; this was the highest mark of the Sultan's consideration for him, for he never does that with anyone.' See also Penzer, p. 223, quoting van Linschoten: '... & this [the king's chewing *pān* while giving an audience] is a great honour to the Ambassadour, specially if he profereth him of the same Bettele that he himself doeth eate.'

22. Ibn Battuta, 3:669, describes gifts of bread in 'private meals' from Sultan Muhammad Tughluq's own hand, and reception of such gifts with the same ceremony used for reception of gifts of *tāmbūla* at a 'public meal'. For

unguents, see Philip B. Wagoner, '"Lord of the Eastern and Western Oceans": Unguents, Politics, and the Indian Ocean Trade in Medieval South India', (MS of paper prepared for delivery at the 50th Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Washington, DC, 26–9 March 1998).

23. I take the term 'marking' from McKim Marriott, 'Constructing an Indian Ethnosociology', *India Through Hindu Categories*, ed. McKim Marriott (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 19–20. Reciprocal gifts were possible; for an example see Gavin R. G. Hambly, 'From Baghdad to Bukhara, from Ghazna to Delhi: the *Khil'at* Ceremony in the Transmission of Kingly Pomp and Circumstance', in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 212–13, describing Muhammad Tughluq's receipt of a robe from and gifts of robes to a descendant of the last caliph in Baghdad.

24. Penzer, p. 211, quoting Ibn al-Baiṭār: 'the leaves once dried go to dust for lack of moisture'; see also p. 219, quoting Tomé Pires: 'Dry, it is good for nothing, for its virtue is so subtle that, when dry, it has neither flavour nor taste.'

25. Gode, 'Studies in the History of Tāmbūla: History of the Verse about the Thirteen Qualities of Tāmbūla', in *Studies in Cultural History*, 1:145. The source is Jalhaṇa, *Sūktimuktāvalī* (1258); I have slightly changed Gode's translation. A variant of the verse too is quoted by P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmashastra*, 2nd edn, 5 vols (rpt Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1990), 3, pt 2, p. 735, fn. 1751.

26. Marriott, p. 12.

27. Marriott, pp. 12, 15–16.

28. Penzer, p. 210, quoting Ibn al-Baiṭār, who in turn quotes Idrāsī; p. 216, quoting 'Abdu-r Razzāq; p. 217, quoting Ludovico di Varthema; pp. 217–18, quoting Duarte Barbosa.

29. Gode, 'The Attitude of Hindu Dharmashastra towards Tāmbūla-Bhoga (Enjoyment of Betel)', in *Studies in Cultural History* 1:134–35.

30. Penzer, pp. 210–11, translating Ibn al-Baiṭār or 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad, *Traité des Simples par Ibn El-Beithar*, trans. L. Leclerc (Paris, 1877–83).

31. Penzer, pp. 192, quoting Garcia da Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples & Drugs of India*, trans. Sir Clements Markhan (London, 1913).

32. Quoted by Penzer, p. 197.

33. Jamal J. Elias, 'The Sufi Robe (*Khirqa*) as a Vehicle of Spiritual Authority', in *Robes of Honor*, pp. 275–89. See also *Legitimacy and Symbols: The South Asian Writings of F. W. Buckler*, ed. M. N. Pearson (Ann Arbor, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1985); Bernard S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, 2nd imp. with corrections (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 632–82.

34. Zīā-ud-Dīn Baranī, *Ta'rīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī*, trans. H. M. Elliot, in *The History of India as Told by Its own Historians*, ed. John Dowson (London: Trübner

and Co., 1871), vol. 3, p. 138; Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 125.

35. Shāhpūrshāh Hormasji Hodīvālā, *Studies in Indo-Muslim History*: A Critical Commentary on Elliot and Dowson's *History of India as Told by its own Historians* (Bombay: [Bombay Book Depot?] 1939), p. 265.

36. Brownrigg, p. 28: 'The betel quid became the symbol of a particular task or charge. "Who will take this up?" the ruler would ask, and the courtier who accepted the betel quid thereby committed himself to undertake the task in question. This practice still survives in the expression "pan ka birha uthana" ("taking up the betel") which means the acceptance of responsibility.'

37. For a literary account of an initial refusal to 'take up' *pān* during the rebellion of Sarbuland Khān in 1718, see James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han*, 2 vols (Delhi: K. M. N. Publishers, 1971; 1st publ. 1829–32) 1:78–9.

38. Gordon, 'Ibn Battuta and a Region of Robing'.

39. I have cited throughout as CM the following edition: Kabikaṅkaṇ Mukunda-biracita, *Caṇḍīmaṅgala*, Sukumār Sen *sampādita* (Nayā Dillī: Sāhitya Akademi, 1975).

40. J. C. Ghosh, *Bengali Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press at the University of Oxford, 1948), pp. 69–74.

41. Sukh'mayā Mukhopādhyāy summarizes the controversies about Mukunda's dates; see *Madhyayuger Bāṁlā Sāhityer Tathya o Kāl'kram* (Kalikātā: Bhāratī Buk Stal, 1993), pp. 121–35.

42. Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee, *Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts*, pt 1 (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1978), pp. 60–2 lists over 60 dated and complete manuscripts, and over two hundred undated and/or partial manuscripts. For a discussion of Mukunda's influence on later authors of *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, see Aśutoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya, *Bāṁlā Maṅgal'kābyer Itihās*, saṣṭha saṁskaraṇ (Kalikātā: E. Mukhārjī ayāṇḍ Koṃ. Prāibheṭ Limited, 1975), p. 540.

43. For a summary of the Mughals' first campaign in Bengal, see *The History of Bengal*, vol. 2, ed. Jadunath Sarkar (2nd imp., Dacca: University of Dacca, 1972; 1st pub. 1948), pp. 185–207.

44. CM, *pad* 6, p. 3.

45. *History of Bengal*, vol. 2, pp. 206–13.

46. The locations of both places are discussed by Sen, 'Bhūmikā', CM, pp. 19–24.

47. Sudhībhūṣaṇ Bhaṭṭācāryya, 'Bhumikā', Dvija Mādhab *racita, Maṅgal'caṇḍīr Gīt*, Sudhībhūṣaṇ Bhaṭṭācāryya *sampādita* (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Biśvabidyālaẏ, 1952), p. 52; and for the reference to Akbar, text, p. 7.

48. Herman Kulke, 'The Struggle Between the Rājās of Khurda and the Muslim Sūbahdārs of Cuttack for Dominance of the Jagannātha Temple', in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, ed. Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi (Delhi: Manohar, for the

South Asia Institute, New Delhi Branch, Heidelberg University, 1978), pp. 324–9.

49. Sen, 'Bhūmikā', CM, pp. 28–9. Most other scholars favour a date towards the end of the century.

50. CM, *pad* 127, p. 75: the terms Kālketu proposes to the headman Bulan Maṇḍal.

51. CM, *pad* 126, p. 75: the complaints of Bulan Maṇḍal against the king of Kaliṅga. See also *pad* 129, p. 76: the harsher treatment of subjects proposed by Bhāṛudatta, a rival headman.

52. CM, *pad* 117, p. 70; *pad* 118, p. 71.

53. CM, *pad* 122, p. 73.

54. Dirk H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput & Sepoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 19–20; Stewart Gordon, 'Robes, Kings and Semiotic Ambiguity', in *Robes and Honor*, pp. 380–83.

55. Caṇḍī, for example, did not attempt to offer her rival and co-wife Gaṅgā *pān* when she attempted, without success, to secure the latter's assistance in settling Kālketu's kingdom. See CM, *pad* 120, p. 72.

56. CM, *pad* 130, p. 77.

57. CM, *pad* 134, pp. 79–80.

58. CM, *pad* 134, pp. 79–80.

59. A promise made to the headman Bulan Maṇḍal; see CM, *pad* 127, p. 75.

60. CM, *pad* 132, p. 78.

61. CM, *pad* 127, p. 75.

62. CM, *pad* 132, pp. 77, 78.

63. 'All the Musalmans' (CM, *pad* 130, p. 77) include 'ten or twenty lineages' (*birādari*) of men who 'continually read the Qur'an', and various jāti of Muslim artisans who 'know neither the fast nor daily prayer.' 'All the brahmans' who received *pān* (*pad* 132, p. 77) similarly include both *kulin* lineages and lowly genealogists, astrologers, and various renunciate beggars. 'All the dependants' of *kayasthas*, to whom Kālketu was requested to give *pān* (*pad* 134, p. 80), apparently include several untouchable jāti and his town's prostitutes (*pad* 136, p. 81).

64. CM, *pad* 136, p. 81.

65. CM, *pad* 135, p. 80: *bārui nibase pure, baroj nirmāṇ kare, mahābīre nitya dei pān/ bale yadi keha nei, bīrer dohāi dei, anucit nā dei bidhān* / / Is it odd that in the same *pad*, *tāmbūligan*, who assembled *tāmbūla* from *pān* and areca nuts and who 'continually give the hero rolls [of *pān*]', were not given a similar promise? But we are told that they 'receive no royal oppression (*rāj' pīṛā*).'

66. CM, *pad* 133, p. 79.

67. Penzer, p. 223–4, quoting an interpolation of 'the learned Bernard ten Broecke' in *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten* 2:62 ff.

68. For example, François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire ad 1656–1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd. ed. revised by V. A. Smith (New

Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1983; 1st pub. 1934), p. 364. Bernier describes in the imperial camp a separate tent for *'betlé'* which Aurangzeb distributed 'as a mark of royal favour.'

69. Abū'l Faẓl 1:167.

70. Abū'l Faẓl 1:167.

71. Mīrzā Nāthan 2:706.

72. Mīrzā Nāthan, 1:215–16; 297.

73. Milo Cleveland Beach and Ebba Koch, *King of the World: The Padshahnama*, with translations by Wheeler Thackston (London: Azimuth Editions, Sackler Gallery, 1997), Pl. 6–7, 'The Submission of Rana Amar Singh of Merwar to Prince Khurram', commentary, pp. 31, 34, and Fig. 17, p. 120.

74. Mīrzā Nāthan, 1:263, describing conveyance of the office of governor of Bihar upon Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Beg.

75. CM, *pad* 331, p. 188: 'Feeling oppressed at heart, the merchant does not take the roll [of *pān*], and the king's eyes become red with anger. So, understanding what was expected [*kāryyer gati*], the merchant Dhanapati takes the *pān* and, with the *añjali* gesture, touches his head.'

76. Dvija Mādhab *racita*, *Maṅgal'caṇḍīr Gīt*, p. 196. Compare Rāmānanda Yati *biracita*, *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, Anil'baraṇ Gaṅgopādhyāẏ *sampādita* (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Biśvabidyālaẏ, 1969), p. 249.

77. Dvija Rām'deb *biracita*, *Abhaẏāmaṅgal*, Āśutoṣ Dās *sampādita* (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Biśvabidyālaẏ, 1957), p. 259.

78. Dvija Rām'deb, p. 261.

79. Dvija Mādhab, p. 64.

80. Dvija Rām'deb, p. 76.

81. Reading *ṭāṅgan* in place of *ṭāīn*

82. Ramānānda Yati, pp. 177–8. I cannot understand two words in the last half of the last *tripadi* verse: *irākhī eẏabuseẏa* [?], *ghoṛa cine buṛo meẏā*, *jamādhār basiẏā haīn* [? This final word should be amended to rhyme with *ṭāṅgan* if my emendation of *ṭāīn* in the previous footnote is correct.]

83. Kṛṣṇarām Dās, *Rāẏ'maṅgal*, in *Kabi Kṛṣṇarām Dāser Granthābalī*, Satyanārāẏaṇ Bhaṭṭācārya *sampādita* (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Biśvabidyālaẏ, 1958), pp. 172–3, 175, 176. 1676/77 is the date of composition of his first work, *Kālikāmaṅgal*; see Satyanārāẏaṇ Bhaṭṭācārya, 'Bhūmikā', pp. 20–1.

84. Piyūṣ Kānti Mahāpātra, 'Bhūmikā', Ghanarām Cakrabarṭṭī-*biracita*, *Śrīdharmamaṅgal*, Piyūṣ Kānti Mahāpātra *sampādita* (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Biśvabidyālaẏ, 1962), p. 9.

85. Ghanarām Cakrabarṭṭī, p. 216.

86. Ghanarām Cakrabarṭṭī, p. 185.

87. Ghanarām Cakrabarṭṭī, p. 30: *ghoṣer dośālā dila sar'bandh joṛā / bak'śiś karen puna caṛaner goṛā. Nāg'rā niśān dila likhan par'ẏāna, bidāẏ haila gop kariẏā bandanā.*

88. Ghanarām Cakrabarṭṭī, p. 132.

89. 'The Malda Diary and Consultations (1680–82)', ed. Walter K. Firminger, in *Journal and Proceedings, Asiatic Society of Bengal* (New Series), vol. 14

(1918), nos 1 & 2, p. 140, Englezavad Diary, entry for 12 Oct. 1681. The *paikars* were middlemen who distributed advances to weavers and collected cloth from them.

90. Mīrzā Nāthan 1:142, and for the complicity of Mūsa Khān in the attack of Ḥusayn Khān against the Mughal force, pp. 107, 121, 128, 132.

91. For summaries of this event see: Andrea Hintze, *The Mughal Empire and its Decline* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1997), pp. 237–8; William Irvine, *The Later Mughals*, ed. Jadunath Sarkar, 2 vols bound in one (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1971; 1st pub. 1921–2) 2:197–206.

92. Tod 1:78–9.

93. Irvine, 2:205; Stewart Gordon, *The New Cambridge History of India II.4, The Marathas 1600–1818* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 121–2.

94. '18 lacs of Rupees from the Treasury and fifty cannon of various sizes', according to Irvine 2:205.

95. Cf. Hintze, p. 271: 'Only the promise of lucrative posts or the prospect of immediate enrichment could act as incentives for nobles to obey transfer or campaign orders from Delhi.'

96. Kalikinkar Datta, *Alivardi and his Times* (Calcutta: The World Press Private Ltd., 1963), pp. 84, 43 fn. 251.

97. Ghulām Husain Khān, Ṭabāṭab'aī, *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*: a history of the Mohammedan power in India during the last century, trans. Hāji Mustafā [pseud.], 3 vols (Lahore: Oriental Publishers & Booksellers, 1975; first pub. 1789–90) 2:68.

98. Rajat'kānta Rāy, *Palāśir ṣaṛayantra o sekāler samāj* [The Plassey Conspiracy and Contemporary Society] (Kalkātā: Ānanda Pāb'liśārs Praibheṭ Limited, 1994), p. 210; Ghulām Husain Khān 2:227.

99. Rajat'kānta Rāy, p. 212; letter from Scrafton to Walsh, 21 April 1757, in *Bengal in 1756–1757*, 3 vols, ed. S. C. Hill (reprint ed., Delhi: Manas Publications, 1985) 2:351.

100. Ghulām Husain Khān 2:451–2.

101. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyazu-s-Salatin (A History of Bengal)*, trans. Abdus Salam (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyati-i Delli, 1975; first pub. 1903), pp. 231–43.

102. Gautam Bhadra, *Mughal yuge Kṛṣi-arthanīti o Kṛṣak-bidroha* [Agrarian economics and peasant rebellions in the Mughal period], *dvitīya saṃskaraṇ* (Kalikātā: Subarnarekha, 1991), pp. 158–61.

103. Aniruddha Ray, 'Revolt of Shobha Singh: A Case Study, *Bengal Past and Present*, pt 1, July 1969, pp. 220–1; pt 2, June 1970, pp. 58–72; for the quote, pt 2, p. 65.

4

When Soldiers and Statesmen Meet
'Ethnographic Moments' on the Frontiers of Empire, 1800–15[1]

Bernardo A. Michael

I would say that every day we are confronted by some otherness that teases us to interpretation. When that otherness is outside our cultural system, we call those moments of interpretation 'ethnographic moments'. But we have those moments within culture as well. In times of conflict or social ambiguity, we make a ritual of interpretation.

Greg Dening [2]

After 1765, following the acquisition of the *subas* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the frontiers of the English East India Company extended right alongside that of the expanding Himalayan kingdom of Gorkha (present-day Nepal).[3] Since then, both the British and Gorkhali came into increasing contact with each other. These early meetings were not unproblematic. Separated by an otherness that revealed itself in unfamiliar language, ideas, institutions, and practices, each came to represent different cultural worlds, and perform actions whose encoded meanings were as much open to understanding as to misunderstanding. Thus, these early encounters often register the many fumbling attempts of these (largely) men to communicate the meanings and practices of their worlds to one other.

One issue that often vexed Company officers was the question of accepting *nazrs* from their Gorkhali counterparts. *Nazrs* were presents or gifts usually from an inferior to a superior, symbolizing the

former's submission to the latter. They also could be a ceremonial exchange of gifts between two leaders of equal standing. In short, *nazr*s became forms of exchange that conferred honour on the recipient. They could also symbolize the forging of loyalties, friendships, and ties of dependency, and subordination between the participants. The items of exchange could range from amounts as small as one rupee to expensive items such as gold coins, cloth, robes, exotic birds, elephants, horses, weapons, and the like. British and Gorkhali officers often encountered mutual embarrassments when they engaged each other on these terms, and numerous instances illustrate this.

Some time in December 1813 *budakaji* Amvar Simha Thapa,[4] commander of the Gorkhali forces on the western front (Gorkha's Kumaon–Garhwal frontier) met Colonel David Ochterlony, assistant to the governor-general and commander of the Company's forces in the Punjab, at a place near Pinjore (in the present day state of Punjab).[5] At this meeting, both soldiers were accompanied by their respective sons, Ramdas Thapa and Ochterlony Jr.[6] When both soldiers met, the customary exchange of presents did not occur.[7] The Gorkhali commander then commenced (in Ochterlony's words) 'a long and laboured speech' on the illustrious history of Anglo–Gorkhali friendship.

Next, the Gorkhali commander initiated a ceremony which would seal the friendship between the two officers, by binding their sons in a special relationship called *mityari*. *Mityari* or *miteri* is a form of fictive kinship practiced widely in the Himalayan region. Despite the many variations in the form of this kinship bond, the one facet that it does seem to emphasize is the permanence of the bond that is established, and its potential extension outwards to embrace the extended families, clan, lineage or moiety of the concerned *mit*.[8] In this manner Ramdas Thapa and Ochterlony Jr. would become *mit*s and their respective fathers would become *mitbaba*s (father of the *mit*). David Ochterlony reported on this part of the meeting with Amvar Simha Thapa thus:

> After many inquiries respecting Mr. Hastings and different gentlemen who had been on the missions to Nepaul, he [Amvar Simha Thapa] expressed himself very anxious that my assistant Mr. Ochterlony and his second son who was present at the meeting should exchange Turbands. To this unexpected request I was at a loss at first what to reply but at last told him, that I should be glad of any circumstance which could mark our personal cordiality; but as his request might be made under erroneous impressions, it was necessary to inform him that our usages were essentially different, and though his son might succeed to a share of the power and command which

he himself enjoyed, Mr. Ochterlony was not even a military man, but attached personally to me, who might be removed soon to another command. His answer was, that he did not wish it on such an account, but to prove our personal friendship, *and the ceremony was generally adjusted by himself*, except that, as Mr. Ochterlony did not possess a Turband, I desired that he might present his new brother with a Khillaut, in which there should be a Turband and receive one in return (emphasis mine).[9]

It would appear from this letter that Ochterlony was not aware of the full symbolic significance of the exchanges made; of the ties of *mityari* that were being established between the two sons, and probably by extension to their fathers as well. His reference to the presentation of a *khil'at* by his son also seems to be out of place, for reasons that should become evident in a moment. Ochterlony also seems to have rationalized that Amvar Simha Thapa was making a long term investment in his son (that is, Ochterlony Jr.), who the *budakaji* seems to have erroneously concluded would be a natural successor to his (David Ochterlony's) office. That the move was initiated and executed by the *kaji* himself, makes it evident that Ochterlony had little idea of what was transpiring, or sought to distance himself from the proceedings, so that he would not get tainted by its semantic implications. The exchange of turbans between the two boys, not only sealed the personal friendship between these two military officers, but also between the two states they represented. This seems to emerge from the tenor of the *budakaji*'s letters to his superiors. Intriguingly, while Ochterlony (in his correspondence with secretary Adams), does mention the exchange of *khil'ats* and *turbands* (sic) between the two young men, he omits any reference to the new *mityari* relationship established between them.[10]

The reason for Ochterlony's suggestion that his son present a *khil'at* to his 'new brother' requires further clarification. David Ochterlony did not give the *khil'at* as a *khil'at*. Realizing that the Gorkhali commander was determined to go ahead with an exchange of turbans (for reasons that were not entirely clear to Ochterlony) between their sons, Ochterlony pointed out that his son would not be able to reciprocate Ramdas Thapa's gift of a turban as the young Englishman did not possess one. Ochterlony saw a way out of this impasse if Ochterlony Jr. were to present a *khil'at* to Ramdas Thapa, since the *khil'ats*, the robes of honour, in their possession were accompanied by turbans. Thus, while the British commander was probably aware of the symbolic significance of a *khil'at*, in this case he was offering a *khil'at* only because his son did not have the required

turban for the performance of the *mityari* ceremony! It seems clear that the exchange of turbans and presents between the two young men constituted an integral part of the Gorkhali *mityari* ceremony. It is not known whether this ceremony possessed its own 'grammar', expressed in this, or if the exchange of turbans was an innovation on the part of the Gorkhali commander. A *khil'at*, it might be added, had no place in this ceremony. There is no mention in Amvar Simha Thapa's letter that the exchange of turbans and gifts between Ramdas Thapa and Ochterlony Jr. constituted a *khil'at*.[11] In the ultimate analysis, it could be suggested that the *mityari* ceremony (set in motion through the mutual exchange of turbans between their sons) might have been semantically short-circuited by Ochterlony's presentation of a *'khil'at'*. In the end, both leaders fumbled and stumbled through this ceremony. The meanings of their actions, and of the objects embedded in the ceremony, eluded them, rendering the encounter ambiguous. Following the exchange of turbans, the *kaji* then initiated a ceremonial exchange of gifts between their sons, Ramdas Thapa and Ochterlony Jr. While Ramdas Thapa presented a turban, a shawl, varieties of cloth, velvet, two gold coins, and one horse to Ochterlony Jr., he received from the latter a turban, a shawl, jewels, Banarasi cloth, scarves, and two gold coins.

Then, in what was probably a continuation of the *mityari* ceremony, Ramdas Thapa stood up, presented a gold coin (*ashrapi*) as a *nazr* and gave a salutation (salaam) to David Ochterlony.[12] At this juncture, the *budakaji* expected a similar gesture from Ochterlony's son. But unsure about how to give vent to his thought, he consulted Ochterlony's *munshi* (scribe), Barkat Ali Khan. The munshi informed him that since the rise of British power in India, the British had never indulged in offering nazrs and salaams to anyone (*nazr rakhi ajasamma kasailai salaam garyako chaina*).[13] The munshi realized the predicament they were all in and the Gorkhali commander's legitimate desire to receive a reciprocal salaam. In a creative move, he, requested Ochterlony Jr. to present a salaam, not to Amvar Simha Thapa as should have been the case, but to his own father, David Ochterlony! The munshi acting as a cultural broker, had, in trying to resolve the situation, only added to its ambiguity.

Needless to say, the munshi's 'resolution' of this dilemma did not satisfy Amvar Simha Thapa. The Gorkhali commander noted that he was baffled when he saw Ochterlony Jr. rise up and prepare to salaam his father![14] David Ochterlony, a veteran of many such engagements, seems to have read the *budakaji's* discomfiture. He reacted

quickly. He announced that as Ramdas Thapa had given him a salaam, there was no reason why his own son should do likewise to Amvar Simha Thapa, which would only be fair. Accordingly, the younger Ochterlony presented an *ashrapi* and gave a salaam to the Gorkhali commander. The Gorkhalis then departed, but not before offering gifts (*saugad*) of deerskin, a live musk deer, 9 scented musk pods, and 21 partridges to the British. It is unclear whether Ochterlony reciprocated this gesture.

The following day, Amvar Simha Thapa returned along with those Gorkhali *bhardars* (nobles) who had been unable to accompany him on the previous visit. Munshi Barkat Ali Khan informed the Gorkhali commander that this time Ochterlony was desirous of conferring *khil'ats* (robes of honour) on Amvar Simha Thapa and the Gorkhali notables accompanying him. Curiously, Amvar Simha Thapa refused the *khil'at* saying that all that mattered to him was the establishment of friendship with the British, and such behaviour is indeed intriguing. A *khil'at* traditionally confers respect and honour on the recipient. Then why did the *budakaji* refuse this gesture; one that would only have cemented that very friendship the Gorkhali commander had sought to establish in the first place? I can only suggest that the *budakaji* was probably unsure of Ochterlony's *real* perceptions of this gesture, given the penchant for British officers to generally downplay the symbolic significance of such practices. Probably, in a deeply unconscious way, the Gorkhali soldier was unsure about how the British represented and distributed honour in their world and what his position would be within such a scheme of things. The Gorkhali commander's concerns were justified, given Ochterlony's ambiguous handling of the *mityari* ceremony the previous day. On the other hand, *khil'ats* are usually conferred on persons of subordinate rank as a mark of recognition of their service to a ruler. Therefore, in this equation, the *budakaji* might have been wary of being seen as Ochterlony's subordinates and therefore chose not to accept it. Whatever it might have been, we will never know the actual reason. We are however certain about one thing: the meaning of the ceremony appears to have undergone some change during the course of that meeting. The usual symbolic equation that bound the giver, the recipient, and the object (the robes of honour, etc.) now appeared dysfunctional. For the *budakaji* at least, the *khil'at* had become an *ambiguous* sign.

Ochterlony on his part, took his cue from this and refrained from offering any *khil'ats* to the *budakaji* and the delegation of Gorkhali

bhardars accompanying him. The *bhardars* were anyway reluctant to accept any *khil'ats* as their own commander had not accepted one. However, Ochterlony did make one exception. He offered a *khil'at* to sardar Bhakti Thapa[15] who was also a member of that delegation, the only apparent reason for doing so being that the sardar was carrying a sizable quantity of his own gifts (to present to Ochterlony?).[16] The reason for Bhakti Thapa's acceptance of these gifts in the face of his commander's refusal to accept them will probably never be known, but it does throw up some new questions. For instance, where did Bhakti Thapa stand in relation to Amvar Simha Thapa and Ochterlony after accepting Ochterlony's *khil'at*? Does this mean that he had admitted to Ochterlony being his superior? Why did he accept the *khil'at*, when the other Gorkhali chiefs, including his commander, had not? Was the *'khil'at'* conferred really a *khil'at*? What did *'khil'at'* actually mean to the participants? Sardar Bhakti Thapa's irregular behaviour suggests that his relationship with *kaji* Amvar Simha Thapa might have been an ambiguous one, produced out of the very nature of the administrative arrangements set up by the Gorkhalis. We know that some time in 1794, Bhakti Thapa was appointed as a Sardar with full authority to oversee administrative and military matters in the Kumaon region. In 1804, Amvar Simha Thapa was appointed supreme commander of the Gorkhali forces on the western front, with the additional charge of overseeing the general administration of the region. Thus, by 1804 Amvar Simha Thapa, a *kaji* by rank, was appointed the seniormost Gorkhali officer in the Western region, superseding senior officials such as Sardar Bhakti Thapa, or even a high ranking member of the royal family such as *chautara* Bam Shah. Thus, the ambiguous relationship between officials such as Amvar Simha Thapa and Bhakti Thapa can be attributed to the fluctuating nature of Gorkhali administrative arragements in the Kumaon–Garhwal region that left administrative hierarchies incoherent, producing conflicts and overlaps in jurisdictions. It is suggested that ambiguities in the Gorkhali administrative set-up of the region crept into the ceremonies of symbolic exchange and rendering them ambiguous.[17]

On the following day, to continue with our narrative, the Gorkhalis, as a token of their goodwill, sent 4 hill horses for their English counterparts at Pinjore. The theatrics of these exchanges came to an end when Ochterlony was instructed by his superiors to send all the gifts he had received to the presidency at Calcutta. This was keeping in line with the Company's policy of forbidding its employees to

treat as personal such gifts as were obtained during the course of their public duties.[18]

However, the matter did not end there. A year later, Ramdas Thapa fell ill and was taken to Ochterlony who provided a physician for his care. On recovering, Ramdas Thapa was escorted to his father's camp by the doctor who had looked after him. On meeting Amvar Simha Thapa, the doctor presented him, among other things, a binocular and a pistol. When the time arrived for the doctor to return to Ludhiana, the Gorkhali commander, in an act of reciprocation, presented him a horse and hundred and fifty rupees. The doctor refused both, saying that he had only come to drop off the boy and not take anything. In all probability deeply insulted, the *budakaji* responded to this by returning the presents (*nazr*) the doctor had given him.[19] In the end, perhaps realizing the embarrassment his insensitivity was generating in the Gorkhali camp, the doctor relented and took the horse, but on reaching his station at Ludhiana (in Punjab), returned that as well![20]

A similar experience seems to have dogged Archibald Seton when he was stationed as the British resident to the Mughal court at Delhi. Seton was the recipient of a formal visit from one Ajit Singh, a Sikh chieftain of 'Ladooa (?)'. In this particular meeting, Ajit Singh offered a *nazr* of 21 gold *mohurs* which Seton promptly refused saying that he had accepted the *nazr* with his heart, 'it being the custom of the executive officers of the British government to accept *nazrs* of Sardars with their hearts only[!]'. The embarrassment this might have caused to Ajit Singh while not recorded can very well be imagined.[21] However, the matter does not seem to have rested here. When Ajit Singh persisted and sent 41 gold *mohurs* to the Compay's government at Calcutta, it too returned them.

In 1815, a meeting took place between one Colonel Nicolls, commanding officer at Kumaon and the Gorkhali *chautaria* Bam Shah, who at that time was superintending Gorkhali operations in Doti, Garhwal, and Kumaon. Bam Shah offered a *nazr* of two small elephants to Colonel Nicolls. The latter refused to accept this by arguing somewhat unconvincingly, (from a Gorkhali standpoint), that this ceremony was required only amongst strangers and that anyway this custom was alien to British customs. Nicolls eventually gave in, only when it became apparent that the *chautara* displayed hurt and suspicion of his intentions![22] Later, Edward Gardner, (the assistant to the governor general in Kumaon), on receipt of these 'two small elephants' informed the government at Calcutta that he would not

keep them for his *private* use, but would surrender them to the Commissariat Department as *'public property'* (emphasis mine).[23]

Human beings are creative in their actions and in their ability to innovate. Thus, responses to *nazr* giving were not always uniform. In some instances we find Company officials accepting these *nazrs*, but putting them to uses that rendered the very act of *nazr*-giving ambiguous. In 1815, the zamindars of Darbhanga and Tirhut (in the present day Indian state of Bihar) were bestowed *khil'ats* by the Company government as recognition of their loyalty and services during the Anglo–Gorkha war of 1814–16. They in return presented *nazrs* to Philip Monckton, the acting magistrate at Tirhut, who promptly used it to pay off the debts of some debtors in jail! We have no information on the response of the zamindars to Monckton's act.[24]

On the Anglo–Gorkha frontier, problems of imperfect translation were always at the heart of such encounters between the soldiers and statesmen of both sides. Imperfect translation, and a mutual incomprehension of one another's practices seems to have extended itself to a range of encounters that went beyond the intricacies of gifting giving and exchange. Such processes appear to have been at work in the boundary investigations conducted by the Company's agents such as Major Paris Bradshaw. For Paris Bradshaw, political agent in Nepal and in charge of the boundary investigations and the negotiations for peace between the East India Company and Gorkha (1813–16), these problems caused grave concern. Bradshaw, a stickler for official formality and decorum, came up with an endless litany of complaints against his Gorkhali counterparts: about their manners, language, lack of punctuality, and so on. For instance, he constantly complained that the hill discourse employed by the Gorkhali representatives had 'obscure and ambiguous modes of expression'. Matters came to such a head, that Bradshaw began insisting that the Gorkhali chief negotiator, Gajraj Mishra, should actually submit any reports he (Mishra) might send to Kathmandu, *prior to actually sending them*, so that he (Bradshaw) was satisfied that his arguments had been properly represented![25] Similarly, the Gorkhali negotiators must have been intrigued by Bradshaw's insistence on them observing punctuality, and confining their official interactions to formal written (rather than oral) communications. Indeed, Bradshaw's dealings with the Gorkhali negotiators provides innumerable instances of such problems of understanding that often took place between the officers of these two states.

Today, protocols between modern armies follow standardized

scripts. This however was not the case in the early nineteenth century, when soldiers belonging to different cultures came into contact for the first time on the frontiers of these two expanding empires. Their meetings became ethnographic moments, rich in meanings, difficult to read, and often ambiguous in their content. There were no established preordained narratives to adhere to. Meanings and practices drawn from different worlds were exchanged, often misunderstood or misrepresented. The Gorkhalis when engaging in these symbolic exchanges (such as *khil'at, nazr, mityari*) were actually drawing from the meaningful practices of the Mughals as well of their own hill cultures. For Amvar Simha Thapa, the establishment of *mityari* relationships between his son and David Ochterlony's through symbolic exchanges of gifts was a matter of honour. Besides strengthening existing ties between the Company and Gorkha, these exchanges would also have cemented his personal association with another soldier, and an important functionary of a powerful state. In 1813 this was very important for Amvar Simha Thapa. The Gorkhali commander had lost much face in that area, after his consistent inability to capture the fort of Kangra in 1806, or even undo the schemes of displaced rajas such as Sansar Chand (of Kangra) or Ram Saran (of Hindur). Moreover, as he himself notes in his letter, these rulers were downplaying his moves to establish friendship with the British, asserting that the Gorkhali commander's meetings with the British were no different from their own meetings with them.[26] For the *budakaji*, being their conqueror and by virtue of that, their superior, this meant a loss of face. Therefore, it became a matter of honour for him to conduct the meeting with Ochterlony in a manner that made it different from, and superior to, the meetings Ochterlony had been having with the other rulers of the area. Hence, the political significance of the *mityari* ceremony. The *kaji* was also looking for some commitment of support from the British, so that he could salvage his lost honour and regain the fort of Kangra.[27] Finally, this meeting also brought him into close contact with a symbol of the European world that Ochterlony represented. Objects such as binoculars, telescopes, weapons such as guns, and others held not only great pragmatic value but symbolic significance too, conferring great status on their bearers. In fact, during much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such European objects were increasingly sought after as items of prestige by elites around the world. In proposing the *mityari* relationship, Amvar Simha took this practice out of its largely Himalayan context to incorporate a European who lay outside this

context. Company officials, on the other hand, with their strong sense of 'public service' and 'private' life, and their reluctance to participate in exchanges which could be construed by their superiors as 'corruption', and conscious of the formality of their offices, were themselves drawing from a semantic world that was the product of many centuries of state formation, with its own set of rituals of rule.[28] Theoretically, honour and status were to be maintained through impartiality in public life, impersonality in their dealings with people, and a clear conception of the distinctions between the 'public' and the 'private' realms of their lives. Thus, while both possessed notions of honour, authority, and exchange, they expressed them in very dissimilar fashions.

Such ambiguous encounters were largely produced under conditions of political flux and situations of cross-cultural encounter.[29] Moreover, as in the case of the *budakaji*'s encounter with Ochterlony, some of these exchanges were carried out by Gorkhali and Company officials, in areas along the Anglo–Gorkha frontier, far away from the influence of central authorities. Undoubtedly, their official stations across a common political frontier and the courtesies associated with this brought these two officers into contact with each other. In the end, however, these early encounters, left both Gorkhali and Company officers locked within a liminal space where the established 'grammar' of these ceremonies eluded them. Both parties brought their own cultural baggage to these meetings, negotiated its fluid meanings, and then came away often unsure as to what had actually transpired, at least in symbolic terms. Ochterlony, for instance, never realized the nature of the *mityari* ceremony, and his insertion of the element of the *khil'at* might have only generated further confusion, especially in the mind of the *budakaji*. The *budakaji* was now probably unclear about the semantic location of Ochterlony in this ceremony. Thus, while these meetings were rich in symbolic content, we are unsure about what meanings the actors were actually apprehending. Both came to 'know' each other only partially as each officer's understanding of the other was refracted through the thick fog of his own cultural predilections. However, these dissonances were not only present between the Gorkhalis and the British. They existed even within the Gorkhali camp. Thus, the relative positions of Amvar Simha Thapa and Bhakti Thapa were rendered ambiguous when the latter accepted Ochterlony's *khil'at*, while the former did not. Consequently, the objects exchanged (turbans, robes of honour, etc.) were uncoupled from their usual semantic moorings, only to remain

entangled within the multiple 'webs of significance' spun by each participant. Such ambiguities and surpluses of meaning were what rendered these exchanges 'ethnographic moments'.

Historians stand to gain much by treating these exchanges as 'ethnographic moments'. In doing so, we would be compelled to acknowledge their semantic wealth, and usefully incorporate such encounters into our accounts of (for instance) state formation. These ethnographic moments were not instances of 'mere' ceremonies gone awry or rendered meaningless.[30] Rather, they were saturated with issues of meaning and power. Indeed, such ceremonies constituted critical aspects of pre-colonial forms of governance, for building alliances, pursuing political projects, and representing authority. They were also diagnostic of flexibility, contradictions, ambiguities, and dissonances that problematize unitary notions of culture, power, kingship, etc. Encounters such as that between Amvar Simha Thapa and David Ochterlony, when contextualized, tell us much about the conflict between contrasting rituals of rule, and the absence of any immediate resolution.[31] They also signal the fluid political situation that existed on the western areas of the Anglo–Gorkha frontier. Our histories of state formation need to incorporate accounts of such 'ethnographic moments'. By doing so, we would render them ethnographic histories of state formation.

ABBREVIATIONS

asst.	assistant
FP	Foreign Political
FS	Foreign Secret
govt.	government
Gov.-Gen.	governor general
NAI	National Archives of India, Delhi
NAN	National Archives of Nepal, Kathmandu
Procs.	Proceedings
Secy.	Secretary
V.S.	Vikram Samvat (usually arrived at by adding 57 years to the Gregorian calendar)

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Annual South Asia Symposium of the Center of South Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in April 2000. I would like to express my gratitude to Peter Hoffenberg, Dinesh Raj Pant, and Sankaran Krishna for their comments and suggestions. A special thanks goes out to David Hanlon and Stewart Gordon for the interest shown and suggestions generously given over the past four years. The usual caveats apply.

2. Greg Dening, 'A Poetic for Histories: Transformations that Present the Past,' in *Clio in Oceania: Towards a Historical Anthropology*, ed. Aletta Biersack (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 347–83. The quotation is from page 355.

3. The Mughal Empire was divided into large provinces called *subas*. A *suba* typically consisted of *sarkars*, parganas, and *tappas* in, though not always, descending order.

4. A *kaji* was a senior member of Gorkha's ruling elite, usually placed in charge of civil and military affairs. For purposes of clarity, this *kaji* Amvar Simha Thapa is distinct from *kaji* Amar Singh Thapa, commander of the Gorkhali forces at Palpa. The former was also known as *budakaji* (elder *kaji*) and was older than the latter who was also father to *janrel* (general) Bhim Sen Thapa, the erstwhile prime minister of Nepal.

5. Details of this encounter between Amvar Simha Thapa and Colonel David Ochterlony can be found in the letter from *kaji* Amvar Simha Thapa to *janrel* Amar Singh Thapa, Mangsir 1, 1870 and cited in Maheshraj Pant, 'Nepal Angrez yudh hunubandha ek barsha agadhi Amvar Simha Thapa ka chora ra Ochterlony ka chorale miteri layaythe' *Purnima 9, no. 3 (vs. 2033): 48–64; 'VS. 1870 marga sudi 1 ko Ramdas Thapako Patra'* in *Shahkalin Aitihasik Chittipatra Samgraha*, ed. Shankarman Rajbamsi (Kathmandu, vs. 2023), pp. 9–16. The original letter (now missing) could be found in the Bir Pustakalaya Historical Letters Collection (envelope no. 348), at the *National Archives of Nepal* (*NAN*), Kathmandu. For further details on the Thapas, see Jagdish C. Regmi, 'The Thapas', *Nepal Antiquary* 5 (1978): 41–50.

6. David Ochterlony's son was a certain R. P. Ochterlony. He may have been acting as Ochterlony's translator on this occasion, as he appears to have translated some of the petitions presented to his father and subsequently forwarded to Company authorities at Calcutta. I will, for reasons of convenience, refer to him as Ochterlony Jr. Gorkhali documents often recorded English names in interesting ways. Thus, while David Ochterlony was referred to as 'Luniakhtar', his son was named 'Akhtarluni'. Similarly, English names such as Foxcroft would be transformed into 'Faskirap', Moorcroft into 'Moorkirap', Metcalf into 'Matcalap', and Brooke into 'Vuruk'. The same could be said of the British who in the early years of colonial rule were forced to write by ear. So Siraj-ud-daulah became 'Sir Roger Dowlah', Karachi

became 'Crotchy', and Allahabad became 'Isle of Bats'. Cited in Clements R. Markham, *A Memoir on the Indian Surveys* (London, 1878), p. 384.

7. Both Amvar Simha Thapa and Ochterlony reported different versions of this. The Gorkhali commander observed that as Ochterlony had not offered the customary presents (*saugad*) to the Gorkhali party, they too did not present the British with anything. Ochterlony, on his part reported that when they took *leave*, none of the usual ceremonial exchange of presents, as was the practice in 'Hindustan', took place between the two parties. See 'V.S. 1870 Marga Sudi 1 ko', p. 10, line 11; Col. David Ochterlony, asst. to the Gov.-Gen. to John Adam, Secy. to govt., 18 Dec. 1813, FP Proceedings of 4 Feb. 1814, no. 38, *NAI*. The subtle variations in their reports suggest some misunderstanding between them regarding the timing of the exchange of presents.

8. Donald Messerschmidt, 'Miteri in Nepal: Fictive Kin Ties that Bind', *Kailash* 9, no. 1 (1982): 5–43. Messerschmidt points out that the earliest references to *miteri*, found in Eden Vansittart's, *Notes on Nepal* (1896), can certainly be pushed further back in time in the light of the evidence cited here which is probably the first recorded instance of such a relationship being established between a European and a Gorkhali.

9. Ochterlony to John Adams, op cit., 18 Dec. 1813, para 9.

10. Ochterlony only makes passing reference to Ramdas Thapa being his (Ochterlony's) son's 'new brother'. See Col. David Ochterlony, asst. to the Gov.-Gen. to John Adam, Secy. to govt., 18 Dec. 1813, FP Proceedings of 4 Feb. 1814, no. 38, para 9, *NAI*.

11. The presentation of *khil'at*s was not unknown to the Gorkhalis, and Amvar Simha Thapa's letter does mention that *khil'at*s were exchanged between Sardar Bhakti Thapa and Col. Ochterlony. See 'V.S. 1870 Marga Sudi 1 ko', p. 13, line 33–4.

12. Kirkpatrick notes that the 'ushrupee'[or asharfi] or gold coin was recognized more as a medal than circulating currency. Hence, it's special significance in such ceremonies. See William Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (London, 1811), p. 217.

13. 'V.S. 1870 Marga Sudi 1', p. 12, line 27.

14. The *kaji* noted, ' ... *yas kurama mero chitta bhujena* ... '. See 'V.S. 1870 Marga Sudi 1', p. 13, line 28.

15. *Sardar* Bhakti Thapa belonged to the Punwar clan of the Thapa family. Originally employed by the king of Lamjung, he entered the service of the Shah kings of Gorkha, following his capture at the battle of Siranchok in 1781. In Nepali history, he is better known as Vir Bhakti Thapa and remembered for his memorable assault on the East India Company's fort at Deuthal in 1815, where he was killed in action. See Jagdish C. Regmi, 'The Thapas', p. 47, fn. 1. For details about Bhakti Thapa's acceptance of Ochterlony's *khil'at* see, 'V.S. 1870 Marga Sudi 1', p. 13. For details about Bhakti Thapa's life, see Maheshraj Pant, 'Vir Bhakti Thapa', *Purnima* 3, no. 2 (vs 2023), and issues thereafter.

16. The details of Bhakti Thapa's visit can be found in Col. David Ochterlony's letter to John Adam, Secy. to govt., 20 Dec. 1813, *FP* Procs. 4 Feb. 1814, no. 40, *NAI*. Intriguingly, Ochterlony makes no mention of the gifts he had given to Bhakti Thapa, something that Amvar Simha Thapa noted in his letter to *kaji* Amar Singh Thapa. See 'V.S. 1870 Marga Sudi 1', p. 13.

17. For details pertaining to the ambiguous character of Gorkhali administration in the western regions, see Mahesh C. Regmi, *Imperial Gorkha: An Account of Gorkhali Rule in Kumaon*, 1791–1815 (Delhi, 1999). See especially pp. 49–60.

18. John Adam, Secy. to govt. to Col. David Ochterlony, 4 Feb. 1814, FP Procs. 4 Feb. 1814, no. 42, *NAI*.

19. The budakaji seems to have treated the doctor's gifts as a nazr, and instructed latter be returned (*tesle nazr rakhyako tesailai firaideu*). See 'Nepal Angrez Yudh', p. 62, notes.

20. See 'Nepal Angrez Yudh', pp. 61–2. See also *Itihas Prakash* (Kathmandu, vs. 2012) pt 1, p. 26.

21. Translation of a letter from Seton to Ajit Singh, FP Procs. 16 Feb. 1811, no. 64, *NAI*.

22. Edward Gardner, asst. to the Gov.-Gen. in Kumaon to Col. Nicolls, Commanding at Kumaon, 14 May, 1815 in FP 20 June 1815, no. 10. *NAI*. Edward Gardner also became the first British resident to Nepal after the Anglo–Gorkha war of 1814–16.

23. Edward Gardner to John Adams, Secy. to govt., 17 May 1815 in FP Procs. 20 June 1815, no. 30, *NAI*. Distinctions between realms such as 'private' and 'public' can often be found in the Company's official discourse.

24. C.A. Molony, dty. Persian Secy. to govt. to Philip Monckton, actg. magistrate at Tirhut, 30 May 1815 in FS Procs., 20 Sept. 1815, no. 152, *NAI*. Philip Monckton, actg. magistrate at Tirhut to C.A. Molony, dty. Persian Secy. to govt., in ibid., no. 153, *NAI*.

25. Lieut.-Col. Paris Bradshaw to J. Adams, Secy. to govt., 7 June 1815 in FS Procs., 28 June 1815, no. 9, *NAI*. Bradshaw was promoted from Major to Lieut.-Col. in Dec. 1814.

26. 'V.S. 1870 Marga Sudi 1', pp. 11–12, lines 19–20.

27. Ochterlony informed the *budakaji* in quite unambiguous terms that the British would support neither Ranjit Singh (the Sikh ruler) nor the Gorkhalis. The Gorkhali commander noted wryly that as he was unable to express himself frankly to Ochterlony he had to let the matter rest. See *'Nepal Angrez Yudh'*, p. 53. In fact, Ochterlony's meeting with Bhakti Thapa seems to confirm this hypothesis. Bhakti Thapa, passing on a message from Amvar Simha seems to have sought the neutrality of the Company, in the event of the Gorkhalis making a second attempt at regaining Kangra. The Gorkhalis seemed to have been convinced that the British would support Ranjit Singh of the Punjab in the event of the Gorkhalis attempting to retake Kangra. Ochterlony on his part made no such commitment. See Col. D. Ochterlony to John Adams, Secy. to govt. 20 Dec. 1813, in FP procs., 4 Feb. 1814, no. 40,

NAI. The earlier restitution of the disputed village of 'Betowly' by the Gorkhalis to the British should be seen within this larger context of the attempt of Amvar Simha Thapa to recoup the honour he had lost in his defeat at Kangra at the hands of the Ranjit Singh–Sansar Chand combine, by securing the friendship (and neutrality) of the British.

28. For more details on this, see Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (London, Blackwell, 1985).

29. My use of the term 'cross-cultural' does not admit of simple dichotomies such as East vs. West, Orient vs. Occident, pre-colonial vs. colonial, or British vs. Gorkhali. It recognizes the nuances of such encounters by admitting that they could even take place within these categories, to blur their internal coherence. The studies on such cross-cultural encounters around the world during the past 400 years bear ample testimony to this fact. The literature on this subject is too vast to be cited here, but see for example, Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517–40* (Cambridge, 1987); Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774–1880* (Honolulu, 1980); Jonathan D. Spence, *Question of Hu* (New York, 1988).

30. Maheshraj Pant, for instance comments that the British refusal to present *nazrs* arose out of their pride and self-conception as being the most superior power in South Asia. This analysis misses out on some of the issues that have been taken up in this account. See *'Nepal Angrez Yudh'*, p. 60.

31. To some extent these older rituals of rule would be gradually glossed over by those sponsored by the British, but this does not mean that the British would craft the landscape of political signification out of whole cloth. Indeed, some of the newer rituals of rule they fashioned would draw inspiration from older forms, that were reinterpreted to give new meaning. For instance, this is clearly visible in the British appropriation of the ceremony of the darbar. See Bernard S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India,' in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 632–82.

5

Early Modern Legends of Poison Khila'ts *in India*

Michelle Maskiell and Adrienne Mayor

Several historical legends emerged in early modern India featuring deliberately poisoned *khil'at*s or 'robes of honour'. The three legends presented here are set in the contemporary Indian state of Rajasthan between ca 1677 and 1752 CE. These tales share plots, themes, and motifs with the poison-garment family of international folk legends, in which victims are killed by contaminated clothing.[1] Because historical legends often crystallize around actual people and events, and reflect contemporary anxieties and moral dilemmas of the tellers and their audiences, these poison *khil'at* stories have much to tell historians as well as folklorists. They are intriguing examples of the way recurrent narrative patterns emerge under cultural pressure to reveal fault lines within a given society's accepted values and social practices.

Recurrent legends are narratives with analogous motifs and themes across cultures, time periods, and geography. One hallmark of recurrent legends is that the familiar becomes threatening: an ordinary scenario (here, receiving a gift of special clothing) is taken to a shocking but logical extreme, with extraordinary results (the garment causes the death of the wearer). Realistic details, local place names, dates, and historical personages are common folkloristic devices that enhance the plausibility and currency of legendary narratives. Such legends circulate as long as they address significant concerns in a given society. *The Oral Tales of India*, published in 1958, listed several motifs related to deadly garments from 'old Indian lore' collected during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[2] These

Indic versions caught the attention of early British travellers and imperialists who recognized similarities to familiar European folklore and who, coincidentally, harboured their own anxieties about costume, status, and contagion in India.

Poison-garment legends swirled around the equivocal custom of presenting a robe of honour to a friend or enemy. We will argue that complex meanings for gifts of clothing developed in historical India prior to the introduction of *khil'at* ceremonies. These meanings could either resonate with, or problematize, the gifting of luxurious robes of honour. When the British first arrived in the subcontinent, they often found the many-layered possibilities of *khil'at* presentations difficult to understand. However, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British imperialists who collected stories and legends about poisoned *khil'ats* did so in the context of their own preconceptions and anxieties about living in an environment that they often found threatening.

I

Conventions about clothing transactions within the classical Indian environment, including potentially destructive clothing, provided an exceptionally powerful infrastructure for legends about poison *khil'ats*. Gifts of new cloth or clothes 'attended every major life cycle ritual in pre-industrial Indian society', and 'cloth transactions also took place during [Hindu] worship and in the creation or confirmation of political alliances', according to C. A. Bayly. He suggested 'three basic uses of cloth in the social process [uses which in practice overlapped]: *first*, its use in symbolizing status or in recording changes of status; *second*, its magical or 'transformative' use, in which the moral and physical being of the wearer/recipient was perceived to be actually changed by the innate qualities of the cloth or the spirit and substance it conveyed; *third*, its use as a pledge of future protection'. In India, 'the complexity of the [Hindu] social order [imparted] unusual variety to the symbolism of ... dress'. An authoritative Hindu law book written long before the advent of Islam stated that 'a man receiving a wrong or inappropriate gift is "reduced to ashes like a piece of wood [and] evilly taken ... *a garment* [will destroy] *his skin*"'.[3] Thus, the moral ambiguities and physical dangers suffusing clothing transactions pre-dated the poison-*khil'at* legends in India by many centuries.

As a 'second skin' that protects the wearer, cloth can pose physical

perils to the body, such as flammability, poisons absorbed by the skin, and disease transmission, as well as symbolic harm. Besides toxins, poison garment beliefs in India often specified cholera, malaria, or smallpox. Cholera is water-borne and malaria insect-borne, but air- and dust-borne smallpox virus can infect cloth for years. Long before the germ theory of disease, experience taught that illness could be contagious, and that textiles and sealed containers could harbour disease.[4] Symbolic harm could destroy the wearer's status, power, or fortune. These physical and symbolic fears interacted when legends coalesced around historical events, creating scenarios in which an enemy used clothing as a secret weapon.

Giving cast-off contaminated clothing to outsiders was a long-standing Indian folk ritual and was probably used to cope with the fevers and epidemics that raged in Mughal times. In the late nineteenth century, Indian Civil Service official William Crooke (b. 1848) was fascinated by deliberate disease transference rituals, and published descriptions of several 'disease riddance' customs that he believed had been long-term practices. These are crucial to our understanding of poison-*khil'at* tales that circulated in Mughal India, because they suggest that it was widely known that contagion could be deliberately passed on to others. Crooke related one spell for infecting an enemy: 'to transfer his malady to another', one 'gets hold of the latter's cloth', and draws on it secret images in lampblack—'when the owner puts on his cloth he contracts the malady'. In Crooke's other examples, smoke from the pyres of smallpox and leprosy victims was believed to be contagious and ashes from cremated smallpox patients were thrown at enemies; Punjabi babies were 'inoculated' by placing them on shrouds from graves of smallpox victims; people saved smallpox scabs in a cloth worn around the waist; and infected clothing, bedding, and shrouds were given to captive strangers or lower castes. Images of disease goddesses (such as Mari Bhavani) or corked containers of disease were also relayed from village to village in an effort to banish epidemics.[5]

The primary concern in these Indian folk rituals was usually to get rid of disease, but infecting outsiders was a direct and expected result. 'In Northern India during epidemics', notes Crooke, rags were used to 'pass on' disease. Villagers afflicted by smallpox placed scabs and infected cloth at a crossroads in the hope that someone else would contract the disease and take it away. This was morally acceptable, Crooke was told, because it passed the illness on to strangers on a public road, but it must never be done with 'malice or

pretence' to any known person.[6] This folk prohibition expresses the kind of ethical controversy and ambivalence about deliberate infection that informs the poison *khil'at* narratives.

Crooke also recorded a rumour that explicitly links beliefs about disease transference with *khil'at* symbolism. Although Crooke did not attach a date to this unique legend of a *khil'at* that was clearly labelled as contaminated with a dread epidemic disease, we believe that it arose during the vicious infighting that led to civil war between Safdar Jang, governor of Awadh and wazir (first minister, theoretically second in command to the emperor) and the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah. Ahmad Shah appointed Safdar Jang wazir in 1748; the two spent the next five years in deadly intrigues that led to civil war in 1753. Safdar Jang was accused of diverting imperial funds for his own use, particularly the embellishment of his capital city, Faizabad, and of impoverishing the Mughal court as a result.[7] Crooke related a 'grim story' of 'Safdar Jang, Nawab of Oudh [Awadh] ... who, when he was building the town of Faizabad, received a robe of honour from the emperor of Delhi. When he opened the box he found an image of Mari Bhavani (the godling of cholera and plague), and became so alarmed that they abandoned the site'.[8] A robe of honour folded around an image of disease sent a powerful shorthand message from the angry emperor. It neatly combined the long-standing folk method of transmitting a dread disease with a strong allusion to the by-then notorious method of murder by poison *khil'at*. This legend can be considered a *meta*-poison *khil'at* tale; as the Mughal empire became more Byzantine and corrupt, the traditional emblem of honour and investiture assumed especially sinister meanings, reflecting the popular circulation of the legends detailed below.

The act of giving clothing from one's own body thus entailed powerful and ambiguous meanings in the period prior to colonial rule. A garment might simply be a token of friendship, gratitude, respect, or remembrance of some significant event. However, bestowing clothing could also figuratively or literally transfer a condition (such as authority or disease). Among Hindus and Muslims in India, then, gifts of apparel might draw on one or all of these functions, and on those cited by Bayly above, or else the ideal intentions of a *khil'at* might be inverted. One could never be sure of the 'true' spirit or effect of a gift of clothing. The deadly *khil'at* tales explore what can happen when these intertwined social expectations were accidentally or deliberately overturned.

II

From the seventeenth until the twentieth century, British merchants, travellers, imperial ethnographers, and amateur folklorists have claimed the authority to create knowledge about India and Indian peoples. The changing contours of Western historiography over the past three centuries and the creation of a separate discipline of folklore studies in late nineteenth-century Europe determined how poison-dress legends would be collected in English-language literature. Historians, both Europeans and English-educated Indians, who wrote during the British Raj, tended to accept Turkish and Persian court chronicles as valid sources for Indian history and dismissed pre-existing Hindu sources as ahistorical. Hindu history expressed through *khyat*s (historical chronicles) in regional languages was a mode of 'embedded history' in which 'historical consciousness has to be prised out', and this escaped many Raj historians.[9] The history of Indian folklore collection from the early nineteenth century, when travellers 'typically published a few legends, myths or tales', to the mid- to late-nineteenth century work of British officers, missionaries, and their Indian translators, who collected legends and beliefs, has been traced by Islam and Ramanujan.[10] After 1878 when the Folk-Lore Society was established in Britain, 'a new scholarship' of annotation, footnotes, and motif indexes determined the methods of collecting Indian legends. The disciplinary boundaries between folklore and history, separated during the professionalization of the social sciences in nineteenth-century Europe, are today melded through interdisciplinary 'cultural studies'. Thus, the poison-*khil'at* legend collected by James Tod and others (see below) now prove to be an important primary source for both historians and folklorists.[11]

In the deadly clothing tales that arose in early modern India, we find striking parallels to classical Greek, ancient Hebrew, and modern European, and American poison-garment lore. In the basic script of poison-garment legends, an unsuspecting victim receives special clothing as a gift from another (a stranger or enemy, usually of another race, ethnic group, status, gender, etc.). The garment burns up the victim or causes a fatal fever. Heat, water, perspiration, and cremation are common motifs, and the place of death is frequently associated with healing or medicinal hot springs. The ethical relationship between poisoner and victim is ambiguous. The tale plays on fears of contamination via an everyday item and raises questions

about fair rules of gift-exchange and trust, evoking controversy among the performers and audience, and among believers and doubters.[12] Many British imperialists, knowledgeable about European versions of poison garment tales, were primed to pay attention to familiar-sounding tales in India, especially as the tales coincided with their own anxieties in relations with Indians concerning diplomatic status, health, and costume.

In addition, the British were predisposed to find parallels between biblical and classical stories in India, because these were among the tools they used to try to make sense of the different societies they encountered in the Indian subcontinent.[13] In the late eighteenth century, Sir William Jones, an East India Company official steeped in Greek and Latin, was a leader in the study of Sanskrit. Analysis of this classical language of Hindu civilization led to the discovery of the Indo–European language family. Jones considered Hinduism to be the 'living cousin' of 'ancient Greek and Roman texts' and he developed 'a series of parallels among Greco–Roman gods and Hindu ones'.[14] In the Victorian period, Alexander of Macedon's conquest of north-west India (fourth century BCE) was well known, and scholar–officials speculated unreservedly about direct Grecian influence on what they found to admire in Indian culture. They found support for their notions in ancient Greek texts: both Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom had claimed that Homer's epics were well known in India.[15]

In the European body of lore about deliberately contaminated clothing, the earliest examples were from classical Greek myth and the Old Testament. Variants appeared in early modern Europe and have been collected in Mongolia, Africa, and the Americas. The motifs and themes poison-*khil'at* legends share with European poison garment types can be illustrated by the following examples from Greece and the Americas.[16] The Greek myth of Heracles' death in a poisoned cloak is the classic poison-garment tale. Deianeira daubed a ceremonial robe with what she thought was a love charm and sent it to her unfaithful husband Heracles. When he donned the gift, he suddenly began to perspire and the garment burst into flame. The poison corroded his flesh, ate into his bones, and boiled his blood. He tried to rip away the cloth but it adhered to his skin as it burned. He sought relief by plunging into a stream, but the flames only burned more fiercely. He prepared a pyre and immolated himself. The scalding stream where Heracles sought relief was famed in antiquity, and the hot spring is associated with healing today.[17]

Historical legends with strong overtones relevant for our study also grew up around the smallpox-infected garments distributed to native Americans by the Spanish, French, and British in the early colonial era. One notorious incident was documented in British military correspondence. In 1763, the British commander Lord Jeffrey Amherst at Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania today) ordered his men to give the leaders of the Delaware tribe blankets that he knew were fatally infected with smallpox. Similar stories with different victims and perpetrators circulated in the Americas. The victims of these robes sought relief from burning fevers in rivers and sweat baths, but perished from virulent smallpox.[18]

The British officials who came to India during the eighteenth century almost certainly knew of the use of smallpox blankets as secret weapons. We know, for example, that Lord Amherst was lauded in England and his nephew was appointed governor-general in Bengal in 1823.[19] Classical Greek and biblical education in the British Isles had already made the notion of poisoned robes familiar to the British, whose own legendary hero King Arthur narrowly escaped murder by poison cloak. Numerous medieval and early modern European court intrigues involving poisoned articles of clothing echoed the biblical, classical, and Arthurian stories, which permeated both popular and fine art in Britain at the time when the poison-*khil'at* legends were collected in India.[20]

British preconceptions about Asian cultures also encouraged officials and collectors of legends to notice tales that conformed to stereotypes about 'Oriental' poisonings. Similar notions already existed in ancient Greek literature; for example, the Asian witch Medea was a poisoner and Persians were portrayed as poisoning experts.[21] One early traveller's tale concerned the Turk Mahmud Shah I ('Begada'), the 'poison sultan', who was ruler of Gujarat from 1458–1511 and the model for the English satirist Samuel Butler's seventeenth-century lines: 'The Prince of Cambay's daily food/Is asp and basilisk and toad'. Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese who visited Gujarat in the early sixteenth century, supported this popular tale and claimed that the sultan had been so saturated with poison 'that if a fly settled on his hand it swelled and immediately fell dead'.[22] Noting that early European travellers to India frequently wrote of 'the poisoning of princes', British folklorist William Crooke himself asserted that 'secret poisoning' increased during outbreaks of epidemics 'which suppl[ied] favourable chances of evading detection'.[23]

III

Ceremonious presentations of robes were known in Muslim courts of north India and the Deccan, (central India) and in the Hindu courts of the area now known as Rajasthan, at least two centuries before Zahiruddin Babur (1483–1530) founded the Mughal (from 'Mongol') empire in 1526 CE.[24] The circulation of poison *khil'at* legends flourished during the time of the 'Great' Mughals, from Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1606) to the death of Emperor Aurangzeb (1707). Akbar's father, Humayun, fled north India in 1540 and took refuge in the court of Safavid Iran (Persia). When he regained the Mughal throne in 1555, he brought back many customs, including a stronger emphasis on the Persianesque robes-of-honour ceremonies as symbols of submission. We know that the 'sheer numbers of robes given out increased dramatically under Humayun'.[25] During Akbar's reign, *khil'at*s were normally confined to the emperor's ruling circle. After Jahangir's reign (d. 1627), robes of honour were distributed by Mughal commanders in the field. A memoir by Mirza Nathan, a Persian noble who served in military campaigns ordered by Emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58), provides hundreds of eyewitness accounts of how *khil'at*s were used to create and cement political relationships in the early seventeenth century in the Bengal region.[26]

During the Mughal era, when costly *khil'at* exchanges were raised to a sophisticated art with high stakes, rumours and legends about dangerous investitures were especially resonant for Indians and foreigners. The Mughal *khil'at* conferred titles, responsibilities, and rewards, but it also entailed obedience. If the emperor did not personally drape the robe on the recipient, protocol demanded that one immediately don the *khil'at*.[27] Acceptance of a robe indicated acquiescence to the giver's authority. Refusal of a gift of clothing from a friend would be a grave insult, but rejection of a robe from a superior could be treason. The possibility that novel clothing from a suspect source, especially a *khil'at* that could not be refused, could be a secret weapon evoked anxiety not only about the giver's motives but also the cloth's purity. As a projection of a superior's body and will, a gift of secretly poisoned clothing embodied the hidden malice of the giver and poisoned the system's agreed-upon rules. It is no surprise that in hostile situations the robe of honour was believed to be a potential weapon to destabilize hierarchy and destroy enemies. The risk inherent in accepting a robe was compounded by the knowledge that cloth could actually carry contagion.

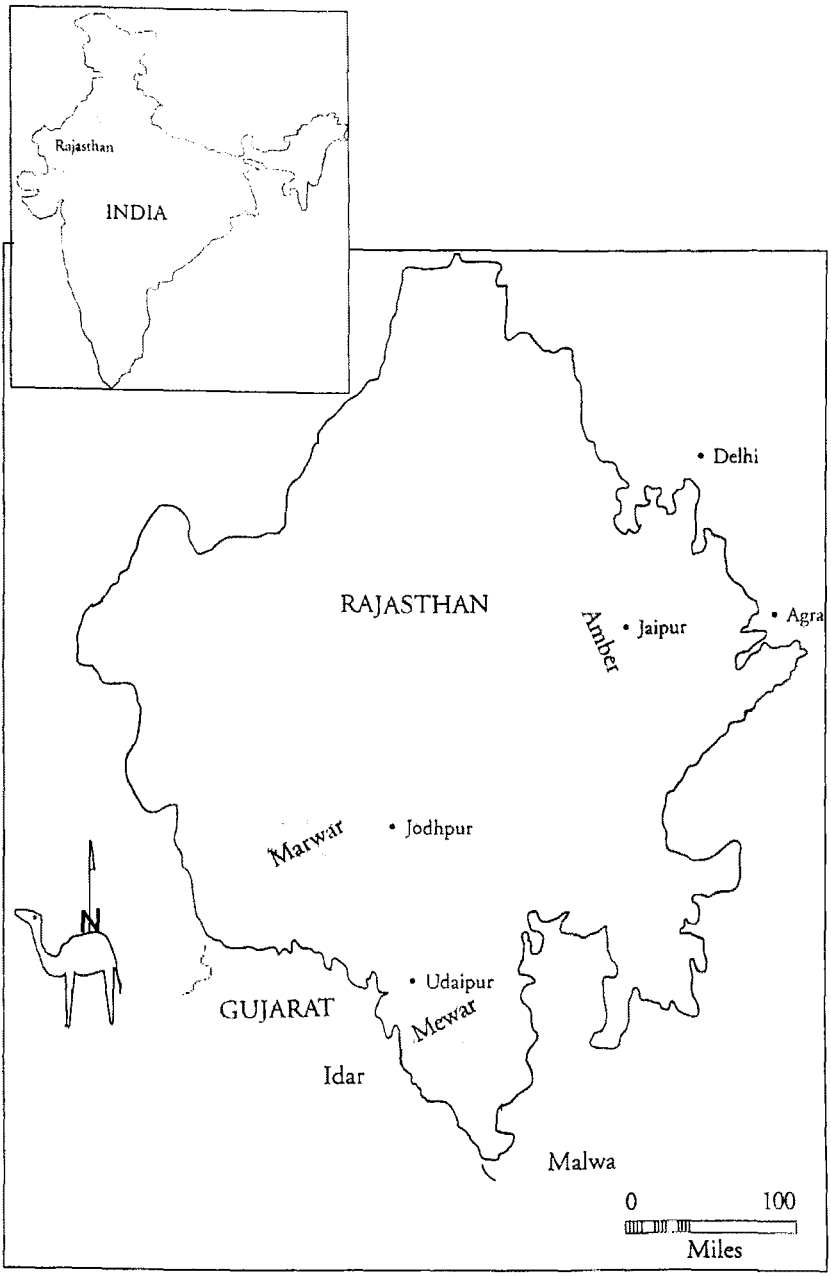

Fig. 1: Rajasthan (Historic States and Regions)

The perpetually shifting valences of robes of honour meant that any *khil'at* was open to manipulation and negotiation. Examples of robes used to dishonour, insult, trick, and harm abound in early modern Indian history. A *khil'at* could become a loyalty test or a contest of wills; it could be offered by a friend or an enemy. Myriad ambiguities and fault lines in the custom could be exploited; one could manoeuvre rivals into accepting *khil'at*s that hid hypocrisy, treachery—even poison. Legends about such subterfuges expose the cracks in the *khil'at* system.

The three following narratives elaborate historical events that occurred between ca 1677 and 1752. The chronological setting and personages are identified for each tale (and variants), as are the collectors and their sources. The narratives are followed by comparisons with other poison garment analogues and contextual interpretations. In all the three tales, the goal was murder by means of a *khil'at* that transmitted disease. These tales were set in the contemporary Indian state of Rajasthan, among the Hindu Rajput kingdoms (Amber, Idar, Marwar, Mewar below) called 'Rajputana' during British rule (see Fig. 1).

Rajput 'princes' established regional states loosely connected through clan communities between the seventh and early thirteenth centuries CE, when the Delhi Sultanate was established in the geographical centre of north India (1206 CE). Renowned for fierce independence and military prowess, the Rajput clan leaders fought each other for hegemony, and in pursuing their own goals they alternately resisted and collaborated with non-Rajput states from the twelfth century until the end of the Mughal empire in the nineteenth century.[28] The British colonial-era interpretation of Turkish invasions and Rajput displacements in north India developed within the complex power politics that characterized the weakened Mughal empire and the aggressive British commercialism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. British administrators and scholars who translated indigenous records placed the information they gleaned within the frameworks of evolving European paradigms of human evolution, history, and religion. During the British Raj, the collectors of the poison *khil'at* tales cast them according to their individual preconceptions of Muslims and Hindus.[29]

TALE 1. EMPEROR AURANGZEB AND PRITHVI SINGH

Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) was a master at manipulating *khil'at* investitures. During his rule, many stories circulated about

*khil'at*s used to insult, trick, and harm enemies. During Aurangzeb's struggle to gain the Mughal throne, for example, his brother Dara Shukoh received a jewel-encrusted *khil'at* from their father. Aurangzeb later captured his brother, stripped him of his fine raiment, and forced him to don dishonourable clothes before having him executed. 'The heir to the richest throne in the world' was paraded through Delhi 'clad in travel-tainted dress of coarsest cloth, with a dark, dingy-coloured turban, such as only the poorest wear'.[30]

Aurangzeb contributed to the empire's decline by pursuing pyrrhic military campaigns and destabilizing alliances with Rajput leaders who had been loyal peers of his Mughal predecessors. For a number of British writers, Aurangzeb was a man of paranoid cunning, treachery, and poisoning; it was reported that his subjects considered him a fakir (religious mendicant, popularly believed to have extraordinary powers).[31] According to the Venetian Manucci, writing in 1653–1708, Aurangzeb's grandfather established a pharmacy of deadly poisons, including ointments for treating cloth, poisons that would have been available for Aurangzeb's use.[32]

The powerful Rajput kingdom of Marwar, also known by the name of its capital city, Jodhpur, was strategic for the Mughal emperors, because it controlled lucrative trade routes from the western sea coast to Mughal capital cities. Maharaja Jaswant Singh Rathor (or Rathaur, r. 1638–78), was both the ruler of Marwar and the chief peer of Aurangzeb's court, although he had not supported Aurangzeb in his wars for succession nor had proved to be a faithful ally.[33] Thus, the emperor and the maharaja were often in conflict despite their theoretically close relationships (as political overlord and chief retainer, and close kin). Sent on a military mission to the north-west by Aurangzeb, Jaswant Singh died there in 1678 (poison was rumoured) and Aurangzeb moved to seize his kingdom.[34] This decision led to the Rajput rebellion of 1679–81, during which Aurangzeb's son, Prince Muhammad Akbar, joined the rebels against his father in a bid to himself become emperor (see Tale 2).

Our first poison-*khil'at* legend concerns the death of Jaswant's son, Prithvi (Prithi, Pirthivi) Singh Rathor (1652–77). The British military and political agent Lt. Col. James Tod (1782–1835) published a collection of genealogies and stories of politically prominent Rajput clans in 1829–32. He had joined the East India Company in 1798; in 1806 he accompanied a diplomatic mission to Mewar; from then until he left India in 1823, Tod focused on collecting antiquarian materials on Rajput history based on his personal experience of hearing their oral

traditions and reading their written records. Indeed, when Tod sailed back to England, he took forty boxes of artifacts, inscriptions, and manuscripts with him, as source materials for his work.[35]

Tod considered *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* to be a 'sacred obligation to the races amongst whom I have passed the better portion of my life' and that his principal goal was 'to awaken a sympathy for the ... interesting people of Rajputana'. *The Annals* were thus 'a copious collection of [primary ethnographic] materials for the future historian' rather than a work 'in the severe style of history, which would have excluded many details'.[36] This inclusive attitude left Tod open to the later accusation of folklorist William Crooke that Tod 'was notoriously a partisan of the Rajput princes, particularly those of Mewar and Marwar'. Crooke, who edited and annotated the 1920 edition of *the Annals*, praised Tod's work, but pointed out that as Tod 'was not a trained philologist', his work included many 'mistakes due to his rashness in following [the] guidance' of his Jain 'guru' and 'Brahman Pandits' who helped him interpret his materials. Moreover, Tod 'reposed undue confidence in the epics and ballads composed by ... tribal bards', and his 'elaborate attempt to extract history and a trustworthy scheme of chronology from the Puranas [texts sacred to Hinduism] must be pronounced a failure'.[37] In other words, Crooke blamed Tod for taking seriously the Rajputs' own oral and written traditions.[38]

Well versed in classical Graeco–Roman myths, Tod held the then-current British theory that the Rajputs were racially related to the ancient Greeks and shared the same Indo–European traditions. He actually proposed that the first Greeks were Indian colonists called the 'Hericula', suggesting a link to Heracles. While this theory had been abandoned by the early twentieth century, the ubiquitous classical references were still alive and well: the 1920 frontispiece of the *Annals* showed a bust of Tod clad in a Graeco–Roman robe.

Richard Carnac Temple (1850–1931), who spent his administrative career in Punjab and north India, was an enthusiastic collector of folklore. He translated a ballad (Variant B) about Prithvi Singh's death recited by a 'bard' at Ambala, a Punjabi city north of Delhi. In comparison to Tod's earlier efforts, Temple's collection of legends followed the 'latest development of scientific approaches' of his day by *transcribing* the bard's recitation 'exactly as [it] was taken down from the lips of the narrators, with translation' and by using annotations, appendixes, and so on.[39]

Variant A: Tod

'The wily tyrant' Aurangzeb, says Tod, sent Jaswant Singh to war in Afghanistan in about 1670. Then he `commanded' his rival's son, Prithvi Singh, to attend his court; the emperor `received him with the most specious courtesy'. During the last interview between Aurangzeb and Prithvi Singh, Tod reported, the emperor suddenly grabbed his hands and threatened him. The young prince's defiant response apparently convinced Aurangzeb that he should present him with a poisoned robe of honour. Pretending friendship, he presented the prince with `a splendid dress', which, `as customary', Prithvi Singh immediately `put on, and having made obeisance, left the presence' confident of the king's favour. `That day was his last!—he was taken ill soon after reaching his quarters, and expired in great torture, and to this hour [1820s] his death is attributed to the poisoned robe of honour presented by the king. This mode of being rid of enemies is firmly believed by the Rajputs, and several other instances of it are recorded. Of course, [death] must be by porous absorption; and in a hot climate, where only a thin tunic is worn next to the skin, much mischief might be done, though it is difficult to understand how death could be accomplished ... . That the belief is of ancient date we have only to recall the story of Hercules put in doggerel by [Alexander] Pope: "He who Dejanire/Wrapp'd in th' envenom'd shirt, and set on fire."' [40]

Variant B: Temple

Temple related that 'Aurangzeb sent for Prithivi Singh and received him with much courtesy, giving him a khila't or robe of honour, which by etiquette he was obliged to wear on leaving the court. On reaching his house he died suddenly in great pain that same evening, and from that day to this [ca 1900] his death has been attributed to the poison in the robe. There is, however, of course no evidence to show that the robe was poisoned and how it came to affect his health so rapidly.' The prince's body was burned on a pyre on the banks of the Jamuna river. Temple published the bard's 83-line poem, followed by his own translation.[41]

In both versions of the legend, the theme of an uneasy alliance between enemies is prominent: a shrewd king pretends to honour a naive young prince. As soon as the victim dons the robe, insidious poison causes agonizing death, and he is cremated near a river, a

sequence that conforms to the classic poison garment script, especially the myth of Herakles. Tod's direct comparison of this legend to the myth of Herakles tortured by the burning tunic shows his keen interest in proving racial links between the Rajputs and the ancient Greeks.

Controversy over the legend's meaning continued as the British performers Tod and Temple debated the legend's historical truth. Tod inserted scientific speculations into the Indian tale, remarking on the peril of wearing 'only a thin tunic next to the skin in a hot climate', allowing absorption of harmful substances through the pores. Tod may also have had in mind the mythical detail of Herakles' profuse perspiration in the burning cloak. Norman Chevers's *Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India* (1870) recounted many bizarre crimes and legendary homicides involving poisons native to India. Reflecting British health concerns, Chevers attributed the cause of death in Tales 1 and 3 (see below) to powerful vesicants (skin irritants) impregnating very thin fabric and entering pores exposed by perspiration.[42]

The comments on the dangers of sweating through the filmy garments favoured by Indians reveal the British obsession with pernicious clothing in India. They insisted on wearing thick flannel next to the skin as a barrier to tropical disease. Dread of pernicious 'miasmas' and tropical fevers in India was another factor in the British preoccupation with infected clothing.[43] Notably, the smallpox-blanket tales and classical myths focus on perspiration, body heat, and absorption of toxins through skin pores. Asian Indian poison *khil'at*s typically infect with fatal fevers, echoing the biblical and smallpox-blanket tales, whereas fire and heat are stressed in the classical tales.[44]

Despite these additions of European concerns, distinctive Indian elements are deeply embedded in Tale 1. The rhetoric of the *khil'at* relationship, *obligation, etiquette, obeisance, summoned, commanded, respect, honour,* is characteristic of the world of *khil'at*s and is prominent in the ceremonies within Persian-influenced cultures. Just as the smallpox blankets foreshadowed Amherst's defeat of the Delaware in America, Aurangzeb's poison *khil'at* prefigured his imperial claim on Marwar.

TALE 2. AURANGZEB AND HIS SON, PRINCE MUHAMMAD AKBAR

This narrative describes Aurangzeb's thwarted attempt to murder his traitorous son Prince Muhammad Akbar (b. 1658; hereafter Prince

Akbar) with a poisoned garment. The prince joined his father's army in Rajasthan when it occupied Marwar upon the death of Maharaja Jaswant Singh Rathor in 1678. The Maharaja's only living son, Ajit Singh, was a posthumously born infant whose right to the throne of Marwar was contested by Aurangzeb and championed by a small band of loyal Rathor nobles. The Sisodia ruler of Mewar, whose state was also known by the name of its capital city, Udaipur, was alarmed by the military might that Aurangzeb had brought to his neighbour's territory and decided to protect young Ajit Singh with financial and military aid against the Mughals.

During the year before his rebellion, Prince Akbar had defeated several Rajput rebels in his father's name. Perhaps because of his military success, Akbar then decided to challenge his father and, with the promise of Rajput support, declared himself emperor in early 1681. He was however, no match for Aurangzeb in either military boldness or diplomatic manoeuvring. His rebellion collapsed almost immediately and, helped by a few loyal Rajputs, he fled to the Maratha court in western India where Raja Shivaji's son, Shambhuji, ruled his father's kingdom.[45] Raja Shambhuji gave the prince asylum, but after five years (in 1687) Prince Akbar fled to the Persian court, where he died in 1704.[46]

The tale of Aurangzeb and Prince Akbar was published in 1727 by the Scottish adventurer–merchant Captain Alexander Hamilton. He traded in the East Indies in 1688–1723, arriving in India the year after Prince Akbar's flight to Persia. His memoirs are chiefly concerned with shipping, harbours, trade opportunities, local histories, and gossip about royal intrigues, based on his detailed merchant seaman's journals and memories. Hamilton reported what he learned from 'Natives': he says knew some of their 'vernacular Languages'. Before becoming an independent trader, Hamilton commanded East India Company naval forces in skirmishes against Rajputs and pirates. At some point he heard about or met two English sea captains who claimed to have arranged Akbar's escape to Persia in 1687. In 1908, Hamilton's biographer praised Hamilton's 'honesty and truthfulness', but cautioned that his work relied on memory and brief notes.[47]

Hamilton related several other anecdotes in which Aurangzeb manipulated robes of honour to steal other men's wives and swell his treasury by 'many millions'.[48] Yet he did not mention Aurangzeb's notorious murder of Prithvi Singh with a poison *khil'at*, which would have occurred shortly before Prince Akbar's failed rebellion of 1681. His silence suggests that Tale 1 about the Rajput prince cited by Tod

in 1832 and the subject of Temple's ballad published in 1900 must have become current after 1723, decades after Aurangzeb's death. Moreover, the fact that Tod and Temple omit Hamilton's anecdote in their list of poison *khil'ats* implies that this early rumour of attempted murder circulated during the Rajput rebellion and was later assimilated into the more famous legend of Aurangzeb and Prithvi Singh.

Tale Text

'About the Year 1685', writes Hamilton, `when *Aurengzeb*'s Army was in *Decan*', he wanted `to bring *Sevajee Rajah* [Raja Shivaji] to submission'. A `Son of *Aurengzeb*, called *Sheek Eckbar* [Prince Akbar], had contracted a Friendship with the Rajah'. Aurangzeb `entic'd the *Sevajee* to come to his Camp', intending to capture and kill him, but Raja Shivaji escaped, which Aurangzeb blamed on Prince Akbar (this had happened in 1665). Aurangzeb intended to kill his son in revenge, by a `Stratagem; wherefore, pretending more Kindness than ordinary to his Son, he sent him ... a Vest, which was very rich and beautiful, but poisoned by a perfumed Powder. His Son, with great Acknowledgments, received the Present, but, being too well acquainted with his Father's Subtilty, put not the Vest on, but deferred it to another Time, that he might put it on with more Solemnity'. Then he `ordered it to be put on a Slave, who died a Day or two after he put it on. On which *Sheek Eckbar* fled to *Rajahpore*', from whence he escaped with the help of `two English gentlemen', Bendal and Stephens, who `provided a Vessel to carry him to *Persia*'. Rajapur was renowned for its `natural hot Bath ... reckoned very medicinal'.[49]

Hamilton reported as a 'genuine' event the rumour, rich with raw legend material, he had heard during Aurangzeb's reign. He connected Prince Akbar's subsequent (1681) secret alliance with Raja Shivaji's son, Shambhuji, to Shivaji's abrupt escape earlier (1665) from Aurangzeb's camp, perhaps aided by Prince Akbar. He also suggested that Englishmen were somehow involved with the rebellion, or, at least, with Prince Akbar's escape. One of them, 'Bendal', was probably Ephraim Bendall, an agent for the British Crown and the East India Company until 1711.[50]

The conflict between Aurangzeb and his son crackles with moral ambiguity. In a cascade of betrayals, the son's rejection of his father's poison gift reveals the treachery of both men. The poison corrupts the *khil'at*'s ideal meaning of honour and obedience, and Prince Akbar

only survives by weaseling out of the expected *khil'at* etiquette. The vest was sprinkled with a 'powder' from Aurangzeb's storehouse of poisons, bringing to mind cloth deliberately infected with smallpox dust (cf. the smallpox blankets). The prince fled to a place famed for its curative hot springs; Hamilton thereby concludes with a common poison garment motif.[51]

TALE 3. THE PRINCESS OF IDAR, ISHWAR SINGH, AND BAKHT SINGH

The legend of Maharaja Bakht (Bakhta, Bakhat, Bukht, Vakhat) Singh Rathor's death in 1752 is entangled in Rajput clan rivalries and Mughal claims of overlordship in the region. It appeared in Tod's 1829–32 *Annals*. It was repeated by N. Chevers in 1870, garbled by C. J. S. Thompson in 1926, derisively dismissed by J. Sarkar in 1939–40, and resurrected by R. A. Singh in 1992. Bakht Singh (1706–52) was the second son of Maharaja Ajit Singh of Marwar (Jaswant Singh's posthumous son, born 1678, shortly after Prithvi Singh's death). Ajit Singh fought both the Mughals and neighboring Rajput clans for the Marwar throne, which he won only after Aurangzeb's death in 1707. He received crucial aid from Maharana Jai Singh II Kachhawa (or Kachvaha, d. 1743), a leading noble at the Mughal court from the state of Amber, also known by the name of its capital city, Jaipur. During his reign (1710–24), Ajit Singh tried to gain political and economic advantages from the Mughals even as he exploited the weaknesses of Aurangzeb's successors, and he habitually encroached on his own Rajput neighbours.[52] In 1724, Ajit Singh was murdered in his sleep by his second son, Bakht Singh. A variety of reasons were offered for the murder, from a plot masterminded by Abhai Singh (1703–49), Ajit Singh's eldest son and Bakht Singh's brother, to the claim that Ajit Singh had seduced Bakht Singh's wife and 'was guilty of incestuous intercourse'.[53] The Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah (d. 1748) immediately confirmed Abhai Singh's succession to the Marwar throne (r. 1724–49). Three of Abhai's younger brothers rebelled against him and took refuge in Idar. In the ensuing civil war, Abhai's brother Bakht, who had murdered their father, finally reestablished his loyalty to his own clan, the Rathors, and to his state, Marwar.[54]

The tangled dynastic histories of Marwar's and Amber's ruling clans provided a ripe setting for poison *khil'at* tales. In 1743 (the year Jai Singh II died), the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah confirmed

Jai Singh's second son Ishwar (Iswar, Ishwari, Isari, Isri) Singh Kachhawa to the Amber throne. When Abhai Singh died in 1749, Bakht Singh (r. 1751–2) claimed the Marwar throne over Abhai's son, Ram Singh, and was supported by the Mughal emperor. However, Ishwar Singh backed Abhai Singh's son Ram Singh rather than Abhai's brother Bakht Singh (the emperor's choice) and, to strengthen his ties to Ram Singh, married his daughter to him. The ruling houses of Marwar and Amber had often intermarried; Bakht Singh was the uncle of Ishwar Singh's wife, a Princess of Idar, who was also Ram Singh's sister. Bakht Singh died in 1752: of cholera according to Persian records; of poison administered by his niece, the Princess of Idar, according to Rajasthani sources. The throne of Marwar passed to Bakht Singh's son Vijaya Singh, but Ram Singh, although exiled in Jaipur city, did not give up his military efforts to win it for himself.[55]

Tod cited inscriptions on the Rajput battlefields and at the mausoleum of 'the Rathor' (Bakht Singh) where a 'simple record of name, clan, and *sakha* [lit. branch; family] of him whose ashes repose beneath, with the date' was inscribed 'in rude characters. Of these monumental records I had copies made of about a score; they furnish fresh evidence of the singular character of the Rajput'.[56] According to Lindsey Harlan, Rajput men still cite Tod's renditions of tales that exemplify the inherited traits of Rajput character.[57] Alternate versions of Tale 3, see later, attribute Bakht Singh's death to a curse pronounced by Ajit Singh's wives when they became sati (which means both 'a good woman' and 'a woman who dies on her husband's funeral pyre'). Harlan's research documents still-existing local beliefs that women attained both the power to give a curse (*shrap*) and the power to confer a blessing (*ashirvad*) in the period between their vow of sati and their death.[58]

The early-twentieth century Indian historian Jadunath Sarkar dismissed poison as the cause of Bakht Singh's death and ridiculed Tod's reliance on the 'bardic gossip' of 'Rathor fabricators' and 'opium eaters' that surrounded these events up through the twentieth century. He attributed Tod's errors to the latter's own careless notes or else to his clerks' mistranslations of Rajasthani sources.[59] In a recent history of Rajasthan, however, Rajvi Amar Singh supports Tod's version, as corroborated by the *khyat*s (historical chronicles) of Ram Singh (Ishwar's son-in-law) and Bakht Singh. R. A. Singh recounted that the 'Rathore Rani, the dowager queen of Isri [Ishwar] Singh, Ajan Kanwar of Idar, presented a poisoned robe to Bakht Singh' in

1752. He named the seer–doctor who attended the dying Raja Bakht Singh as 'the Vaidya Suraj Mal' and noted the place of death as Sonoli, Jaipur [Amber].[60]

Tale Text

In 1832, Tod related that the 'Queen (the Rhatorni) wife of Eesuri Sing [Ishwar Singh], Prince of Jeipur [Jaipur, i.e. Amber]' helped him kill a rival, Raja Bakht Singh of Marwar. They gave Bakht Singh a poisoned robe and he soon developed a fever. The physician could do nothing; the *'vedya'* [*vaidya*, a healer–seer] confirmed that he was dying. Bakht Singh prepared a pyre and recalled a curse that he would be consumed in a foreign land. After his cremation a 'cenotaph was erected and is still called *Booro Dewul* the "shrine of evil"'[61]

Crooke's 1920 edition of Tod's work added background information. 'To lull all suspicion', the Princess of Idar visited Bakht Singh in his camp on the 'frontier of Mewar, Marwar, and Amber' and presented him with a poisoned robe of honour as the 'medium of revenge'. 'Soon after the arrival of [the Princess] his niece', Bakht Singh was 'declared in a fever; the physician [healer–seer] was summoned [and] declared he was beyond the reach of medicine'. The 'intrepid Raja' Bakht prepared a pyre for himself, made his chiefs promise to defend his son's rights, and summoned the 'ministers of religion' to receive his 'last gifts to the church'. However, his dying thoughts were of the curse that haunted him: 'May your corpse be consumed in a foreign land!' The curse, now fulfilled by his death on the border, had been uttered by his father's wives as they mounted his cremation pyre to become sati; women he had, in effect, also murdered.[62]

The 1920 edition inserted European concepts (eg. 'last gifts to the church' for last rites) into a local Rajput legend and inscription on a monument elaborating upon the turbulent struggle among Rajput clans and the Mughals after the death of Aurangzeb. Assassinations, family betrayals in the name of revenge, the poison/cholera controversy, tension over contradictory *khil'at* prestations, continually shifting Mughal support, the curse of the murdered man's wives-all created a fertile ground for folklore. In the legend, the burden of hierarchical corruption is carried by the anathema hurled by the wives immolating themselves, and it culminates in a poisoned robe of honour. These devices, along with the seer summoned to the raja's tent, the body burnt on the spot, the commemorative shrine, lend an

India-specific shape to a characteristic poison garment that results in a fatal fever followed by cremation.

This legend implicated Ishwar Singh because of his high stakes in the intrigue, even though he himself had taken poison to escape a related political crisis in 1750, two years *before* Bakht Singh died in 1752. To Chevers, who included the legend in his 1870 medical law manual, the death demonstrated once again the perils of Indian apparel and climate.[63] C. J. S. Thompson, curator of London's Royal College of Surgeons Museum (1899–1931) who wrote on the 'romance' of sensational poisoning crimes, conflated the Princess of Idar with the heroine of a different poison-*khil'at* tale, citing the conflated legends as an example of the stereotypical female, 'Oriental' poisoner.[64]

Late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century English-language publications by Indian authors generally followed the methodological paradigms of their colonial contemporaries; what appears to be a much earlier version of this particular legend centred on Idar and set during the reign of Emperor Akbar (d. 1601) appeared in *Hind Rajasthan, or the Annals of the Native States of India*, compiled by Mehta and Mehta in 1896 using a miscellany of largely British sources. According to *Hind Rajasthan*, Viram Dev was the son of the chief of Idar, who had rebelled against the Mughal government, was defeated in 1573, and escaped to the nearby hills, leaving his capital in Mughal hands. Both father and son obeyed Emperor Akbar's summons to appear at Delhi (n.d.). When Viram Dev demonstrated unusual bravery in an episode with a tiger, the delighted emperor restored his hereditary state of Idar. Viram Dev proved to be 'as cruel and tyrannical as he was brave and daring' ordering the murder of his brother and attacking neighbouring chiefs. He visited Amber, where his half-sister was married to the ruler. Viram Dev Awas apprehensive that she would poison him to take revenge for her [other] brother's [murder]; therefore he used every precaution in regard to what he ate or drank. At the time of taking leave, a very valuable dress of honour was presented to [him], which, however, was poisoned'. Viram Dev returned to Idar, 'forgot his fears, and put on the dress. He was immediately seized with excruciating pains, and within an hour became a corpse'.[65]

IV

Lore about contaminated garments had already developed in India by the time Europeans arrived: the European collectors cited 'natives',

bards, and storytellers, old manuscripts, epic poems, family annals, and temple chronicles' as their sources. In later editions of the stories and in quotations of each other's publications, variations, asides, and contradictions crept into the surviving variants of each of these tales, all in keeping with the characteristics of living folklore. The British collectors saw themselves as faithful recorders of genuine Indian lore, but understanding the standpoints of these later legend performers is key. Many drew explicit comparisons between the Indian tales and ancient Greek myths, and we can detect European strands interwoven into some *khil'at* tales. Yet in all three legends and their variants, the cultural details, situations, and historical characters remain firmly rooted in distinctive Indian milieus.

A unique combination of factors contributed to the development of poison *khil'at* legends among Rajputs and Mughals and then helped perpetuate versions of those tales among the British in India. Rajputs, Mughals, and British all participated in the custom of ritually presented clothing in diplomacy and all experienced anxieties about status conferred by costume and feared the potential for contagion in clothing. Different cultural perspectives of course shaped these intersecting sets of beliefs and fears, traditions and 'realities', of course, but their complementary character meant that poison garment tales in India were bound to attract the notice of the British.

In interpreting these legends, it is essential to bear in mind Frank Korom's cautions about forcing English translations of South Asian lore into European folk genres.[66] Bangladeshi scholar Mazharul Islam's critical history of South Asian folklore collection by foreigners is also valuable in this regard, as is folklorist A. K. Ramanujan's stress on the importance of context and uniquely Indian themes and motifs in comparing European parallels.[67] Bearing all of these cautions in mind, we suggest that the following parameters influenced the three poison-*khil'at* legends recounted here.

First, the tales tell us something about the dynamics of power, status, hierarchy, and control by Mughals and Rajputs of their allies and enemies, through the system of *khil'at* exchange, and through *poisoned khil'at* exchange. By demonstrating the logical extremes of subtle *khil'at* relationships, these shocking tales enrich our understanding of the robe of honour system. The tales circulated as 'true' historical incidents, but the truth of poison dress tales is moot: their retelling and variations in this time period demonstrate the unresolved tension, among Indians and British, about the status, honour, and even health conferred by *khil'at*s. A robe of honour was never a

mere gift. The complex and ancient custom lent itself to 'worst-case' scenarios, giving rise to legends in which gift clothing could be wielded as a weapon. The *khil'at*'s unique potential for symbolic and physical harm came to the fore in Mughal times, especially under Aurangzeb, who manipulated investitures for political ends. The folklore of poison garments challenges the ideal that a *khil'at* could ever be a transparent conduit of power.

Second, long-standing folk beliefs in India linked gifts of clothing to disease or misfortune. Efforts to banish smallpox, fatal fevers, cholera, and other epidemics that raged in pre-modern India led to ritual practices that depended on popular knowledge of contagion. Such practices could arouse negative judgment, as seen in the claims that only strangers should be infected. The British living in India were aware of these public rituals.

Third, nuances of power relationships and metaphorical exchange embodied in robes of honour were in the first instance confusing to Europeans initially looking for simple market exchange in India. The meaning(s) of *khil'at* oscillated depending on the giver's motives and the recipient's understanding; acceptance could send inadvertent signals of submission, while refusal might be taken as an insult or treason. Hearsay about and personal experience with Aurangzeb and other rulers' *khil'at* ploys, plus a desire for profitable economic and political treaties, made *khil'at*s items of extreme ambivalence among the British. Indian oral or written tales that linked *khil'at*s with fever or misfortune resonated with the expectations and anxieties of the British imperialists, who selected such historical tales for publication. The selection of these tales demonstrated the British desire to understand and to participate in the political hierarchy controlled by *khil'at* exchange despite deep-seated anxiety about their place in the subcontinent.

Fourth, poisoning was a long-standing theme in Indian history and folklore. Norman Penzer has traced biological warfare techniques back to ancient Sanskrit epics; folklore about poisonous individuals appeared by the seventh century CE in India, with parallels to classical Greek legends. Similar lore about exotic 'Oriental' poisons had circulated since ancient Greek times.

Fifth, knowledge of biblical, ancient Greek, and European legends of murder by gift cloaks, plus the expectation of finding Indo-European equivalents in India, led British imperialists like Tod, Temple, and Crooke to notice poison *khil'at* tales in India (similarities to European versions may well have been foregrounded in their

collection, a possibility acknowledged at the time).[68] Many British officials were also aware of the smallpox-infected blankets presented to native Americans in the New World.

Sixth, health issues associated with garments obsessed the British in India, who were nervous about tropical disease, absorption of toxins through pores, and dangers of locally made cloth touching the skin. Their concerns about the barrier/transmitter functions of clothing were congruent with Indian popular beliefs about the protective/harmful attributes of special garments. Elaborate theories about 'insensible' perspiration, hot baths, fevers, and body heat, 'cholera' sashes/belts, the search for fabrics impervious to poisons, and the avoidance of contaminated clothing are remarkably evocative of the distinctive motifs of poison-garment tales from classical times to the present. Sara Suleri points out that fear of deadly clothing was one of a series of 'subcontinental threats' described in the memoirs of British women in India during the Raj. For example, Harriet Tytler, the daughter and wife of British military officers, recounted the story 'of the death of a poor little English baby' in her memoirs (ca 1858). When an *ayah* (nurse) tried to comfort the crying child, she inadvertently caused the scorpion hidden in its nightdress to sting repeatedly until the baby died. Suleri concludes that 'the tale ... [serves] as a parable for the extreme vulnerability of Anglo-India, in which each home (and even baby clothes) can be infested with deadliness'.[69]

What can historians and legend scholars glean from these tales? In the early contact and colonial periods in India, complementary and long-standing belief patterns in the interacting cultures about physical and symbolic perils lurking in costume interacted. Indian oral or written tales that linked clothing with fever or misfortune conformed to the expectations and anxieties of the British colonials, who selected such historical tales for publication in English. The basic structure of such recurrent legends 'provides a "body" to be "clothed" in performance', in the words of contemporary scholar of legends Paul Smith. Each localized legend is 'dressed in a way that provides an opportunity to discuss a relevant issue' at some particular time and place, and similar plot structures may later appear 'reclothed' to express similar issues by another group elsewhere.[70]

Recurrent historical legends demonstrate how old story lines can reappear re-clothed in the cultural concerns of the day. Similar anxieties in different cultures evoke similar story patterns in the attempt to impose meaning on historical events. The Indian tales collected by the British reveal significant cultural expectations and controversies.

By suggesting the logical extremes of subtle *khil'at* relationships, and exposing the dynamics of power, status, hierarchy, and control as expressed through the system of *khil'at* prestations, and through corrupt *khil'at* exchange, these narratives enrich our understanding of the robe of honour system. The popularity of such tales in this particular time period lays bare unresolved tensions among Mughals, Rajputs, and the British. Such legends were told and retold as long as the events they described could pack a visceral punch and articulate otherwise cloaked ethical controversy.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For a discussion of the poison garment family of legends, see Adrienne Mayor, 'Fiery Finery: Burning Cloaks in Classical Antiquity', *Archaeology* (1997): 54–8. In the late 1990s, rumours circulated in Europe and South Africa about attempts to assassinate both Adolf Hitler and Nelson Mandela with poisoned clothing. The assassination of a lady-in-waiting by poison dress was depicted in the 1998 film *Elizabeth*.

2. Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys, *The Oral Tales of India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Folklore Series no. 10, 1958) listed several motifs related to deadly garments from 'old Indian lore' collected in the nineteenth century, for example, S111.6 'Murder by Poison Robe', comes from our Tale 1. Motif D1402.0.1.2 'Holy Man's Cloak Burns Person Up' is another tale we analyse elsewhere; see 'Raja Shyam Sen and Jand Pir', *in* Mayor and Maskiell, 'Killer Khil'ats Part I: Legends of Poisoned "Robes of Honour" in India', *Folklore* 112 (2001) pp. 23–45.

3. C. A. Bayly, 'The Origins Of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700–1930' in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 286–7 and 290–2. Bayly is quoting from *The Laws of Manu* [ca 100–200 CE] iv, p. 189, trans. G. Buhler, on Bayly's, p. 291 and 318 n. 20, italics in original.

4. William Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, 2 vols (London: Archibald Constable, 1896), pp. 1, pp. 164–5. See also Sarat Chandra Mitra, 'On Some Indian Ceremonies for Disease-Transference', *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, n.s. 13 (1917): pp. 13–21. On the physical harm possible through treated cloth, see Adrienne Mayor, 'The Nessus Shirt in the New World: The Smallpox Blanket in History and Legend', *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (1995): pp. 54–77; esp. 73, nn. 7–8.

5. Crooke had entered the Indian Civil Service in 1871, served for twenty-five years in north India, and retired to England where he continued to publish articles and books on anthropology and folklore. Philip Mason's introduction to William Crooke, *The North-Western Provinces of India* (1897; rept, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1972), p. vii. Lampblack spell and

other examples: William Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of North India*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 1, pp. 117–44; cf. Dominik Wujastyk, 'A Pious Fraud': The Indian claims for pre-Jennerian smallpox vaccination', in *Studies on Indian Medical History*, ed. G. Jan Meulenbeld and Dominik Wujastyk (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1989), pp. 131–67. On inauspicious and/or harmful prestations to lower castes, cf. Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift: Ritual, Prestation, and the Dominant Caste in a North Indian Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

6. Crooke, *Religion and Folklore*, 1: pp. 139–40.

7. Richard Barnett, *North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals and the British, 1720–1801* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 20–41 and 254; R. C. Mazumdar, ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People* vol. VIII, 22. *The Maratha Supremacy* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1977), pp. 7–42 and 113–8.

8. Crooke, *Religion and Folklore*, 1, p. 125.

9. Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 137–9.

10. Quotations from Mazharul Islam, *A History of Folktale Collection in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan* (Calcutta: Panchali Prakasan, 1982), pp. 17–8 and 31; see also A. K. Ramanujan, 'Foreword' to Brenda E. F. Beck, Peter J. Claus, Praphulladatta Goswami, and Jawaharlal Handoo, eds, *Folktales of India* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. xi–xxi.

11. For more contemporary evaluations of Tod's sources, see Norbert Peabody, 'Tod's *Rajast'han* and the Boundaries of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century India' *Modern Asian Studies* 30 (1996), pp. 185–220, and Vinay Kumar Srivastava, 'The Rathore Rajput Hero of Rajasthan: Some Reflections on John Smith's *The Epic of Pabuj*', *Modern Asian Studies* 28 (1994): pp. 589–614.

12. Mayor, 'Nessus Shirt' and 'Fiery Finery'.

13. For the classical literature read by British men staffing the empire and their classical references, see Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 331–46.

14. Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 37–61.

15. Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom cited in John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 94 n. 55. Such claims may have reflected Greek perceptions of similarities between their own folklore and that of India, but Drew points out that the flourishing Greek colonies in north-west India after Alexander lends support to the ancient notion. The changing British opinion on the subject was encapsulated in the career of Vincent Smith (1848–1920), a retired member of the Indian Civil Service, who wrote the first authoritative history of early India in English (1904) and the *Oxford History of India* in 1919. Smith claimed in his 1880s publications that Hellenistic influence on ancient India had created all

that was admirable, but in the 1920s he concluded that Greek influence was actually 'slight and superficial'. Vincent Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, 2nd edn (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923, second edition), p. 142. On Smith as a historian, see C. H. Philips, ed., *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon* 3rd edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 228, 266–74.

16. For other examples, see Mayor and Maskiell, 'Killer Khil'ats Part I'.

17. H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959), pp. 209–29. Hereafter cited as Rose. The 'Nessus Shirt' tale was first recorded by Sophocles, *The Trachinian Women*, pp. 440–20 BCE.

18. Smallpox blankets are analysed in Mayor, 'The Nessus Shirt'.

19. For examples of 'senior British officials of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries [whose careers] encompassed imperial theatres of operation in both the West and the East', see Peabody, 'Tod's *Rajast'han*, p. 209.

20. Crooke, *Religion and Folklore*, 1, 195; Lucien Nass, *Les Empoisonnements sous Louis XIV d'apres les documents inedits de l'affaire des poisons 1679–1682* (Paris: n.p., 1898); and C. J. S.Thompson, *Poison Mysteries in History, Romance, and Crime* (1924; rept Lippincott: Philadelphia, 1928).

21. Rose, p. 204; the tale was first recorded by Euripides, *Medea* 431 BCE; for other examples, see Norman Penzer, *Poison-damsels and Other Essays in Folklore and Anthropology* (London: Sawyer, 1952), pp. 3–5, 8–10, 12–29, and passim. Hereafter cited as Penzer.

22. The two travellers' tales about Mahmud Sultan I of Gujarat are those of Ludovico di Varthema and Duarte Barbosa, cited in M. S. Commissariat, *A History of Gujarat* (Bombay: Longmans, Green & Co., 1938), pp. 163, 230–1.

23. Crooke, *North-Western Provinces*, p. 135.

24. Stewart Gordon, 'Robes of Honour: A 'transactional' kingly ceremony', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 33 (1996): pp. 226, 229. Hereafter cited as 'Robes'.

25. Under Humayun, *khil'ats* were given out in the 'tens of thousands'. Gordon, 'Robes', p. 233.

26. 'Robes', pp. 234–5. Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi: A History of the Mughal Wars in Assam, Cooch Behar, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa during the Reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan*, trans. M. I. Borah, 2 vols (Gauhati, Assam: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Government of Assam, 1936), 1, pp. xix–xx, 21, 70; 2, 747. See also Stanley Lane-Poole, *Aurangzib and the Decay of the Mughal Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), p. 36. Hereafter cited as Lane-Poole.

27. A French physician at the Mughal court, Francoise Bernier (1620–88), described the ceremonies surrounding Emperor Aurangzeb's reception of an ambassador from Iran, including Aurangzeb's order that the ambassador 'be clothed in his presence' in a robe of honour. Cited in Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3, Book 2, *South Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1993), p. 711.

28. Richard G. Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja, and Rule: State-Hinterland Relations in*

Preindustrial India, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 14–57; B. D. Chattopadhyaya, 'The Emergence of the Rajputs as Historical Process in Early Medieval Rajasthan' *in* Karine Schomer, ed., *The Idea of Rajasthan* (Delhi: Manohar and AIIS, 1994), II, pp. 161–91, and Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 151–73.

29. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 1–65, and Romila Thapar, 'Ideology and the Interpretation of Early Indian History', in *Interpreting Early India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 1–22. For Rajputs as 'uprooted royal clans' that preserved 'age old traditions' of the last Hindu kings of Delhi, see Kalyan Kumar Ganguli, *Cultural History of Rajasthan* (Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1983), pp. 89 and 96.

30. Jadunath Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzib, 1618–1707*, 3rd edn (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar and Sons, 1962), p. 78, cf. pp. 263 and 440. Hereafter cited as Sarkar, *Short History*. In 1687, Abdul Hasan, King of Golconda, used a *khil'at* to insult Aurangzeb's general, the Turk Firuz Jang. A 'pariah dog' barked during Firuz Jang's attempt to enter Golconda fort while under Mughal siege, which, warned the defenders in time to repulse the attack. Abdul Hasan rewarded the 'unclean animal' with a khil'at—gold chain, jewel-studded collar, and gold-embroidered coat—and bestowed on the dog titles that mocked those Aurangzeb had given Firuz Jang. See Sarkar, *Short History*, pp. 264–65. For 'robe of dishonour', see Richard Carnac Temple, *Legends of the Panjab*, 3 vols (1884–1901: repr. Arno Press: New York, 1977), 3, p. 242. Hereafter cited as Temple, *Legends*.

31. Lane-Poole, p. 65. Lane-Poole recounted another example of a duplicitous *khil'at* and a false gesture of alliance and submission between Mughals and Rajputs on pp. 157–8.

32. James Tod cited Niccolo Manucci as his source for poisonous ointments used to treat cloth in *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, ed. William Crooke (1829–32; rpt Oxford University Press: London, 1920), 2, p. 728, n. 1. Hereafter cited as Tod's *Annals* (1920). Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, or Mogul India, 1653–1708* (trans. William Irvine, 4 vols, London: John Murray, 1907–8). For Persian/Arab pharmacopoeias of drugs/poisons brought by Muslims to India, see P. D. Gaitonde, *Portuguese Pioneers in India: Spotlight on Medicine* (Bombay: Sangam Books Ltd., 1983), ch. 8, esp. p. 103.

33. G. D. Sharma, *Rajput Polity: A Study of Politics and Administration of the State of Marwar, 1638–1749* (Delhi: Manohar, 1977), ch. 3. See also, Robert C. Hallissey, *The Rajput Rebellion Against Aurangzeb: A Study of the Mughal Empire in Seventeenth-Century India* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1977). Hereafter cited as Hallissey.

34. Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb*, 5 vols, (1912–25, rept. Orient Longmans: Bombay, 1973), 3, pp. 214–7. Hereafter cited as Sarkar, *Aurangzeb*.

35. Most of the manuscripts were donated to the Royal Asiatic Society, see

William Crooke, 'Introduction', Tod's *Annals* (1920), pp. xvii–xliv. Hereafter cited as Crooke's 'Introduction'.

36. [James Tod], 'Author's Introduction to the Second Volume of the Original Edition', in Tod's *Annals* (1920), pp. lxvii and lxv for quotation on 'severe style of history'. Tod's sources in the *Annals* were 'native works': (1) the *Puranas* [lit. 'ancient tales']; (2) 'genealogical legends of the princes'; (3) 'heroic poems' in writing (Tod also referred to these as *'raesas* or poetical legends of princes'); (4) living bards ('the primitive historians of mankind'); (5) 'accounts given by the Brahmans of the endowments of the temples'; (6) Jain records; and (7) inscriptions, coins, and 'copper-plate grants'. See [James Tod], 'Author's Introduction to the First Volume of the Original Edition', *in* Tod's *Annals* (1920), pp. lviii–lxi.

37. Crooke's 'Introduction', pp. xxvii, xxviii–xxix, xxx and xl.

38. For more recent analyses of all of Tod's sources, see Norman P. Ziegler, 'Marvari Historical Chronicles: Sources for the Social and Cultural History of Rajasthan', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13 (1976): pp. 219–50; S. C. Misra, *The Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat* (Bombay: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982), p. 15; Peabody, 'Tod's *Rajast'han*'; and Ganguli, *Cultural History*, pp. 91–143.

39. Mazharul Islam, *A History of Folktale Collections in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan* (Calcutta: Panchali Prakasan, 1982), p. 52.

40. Tod's *Annals* (1920), 2, pp. 984–5.

41. Temple, *Legends*, 3, pp. 252–60. Temple pointed out that the ballad's image of Prithvi Singh seizing the forepaws of Aurangzeb's lion (line 29) seems to be a poetic revision of the last interview between Aurangzeb and the prince described by Tod. cf. Penzer, p. 9.

42. Norman Chevers, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India*, (London: Thacker, 1870), pp. 298–9. Hereafter cited as Chevers.

43. David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 8, 32–9 and ch. 3 on smallpox. Bernard S. Cohn, 'Cloth, Clothes, and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century', in *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 151–9. For the early Mughals' opinion that the air of Bengal was 'poisonous', see David Arnold, 'India's Place in the Tropical World, 1770–1930', in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26 (1998): pp. 6, 15.

44. Maskiell and Mayor, 'Killer Khil'ats, Part I'.

45. Hallissey, ch. 7, and pp. 69–74. Sarkar, *Aurangzeb*, pp. 223–43. S. Moinul Haq, trans. *Khafi Khan's History of Alamgir* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1975), pp. 279–81. In 1665, Raja Shivaji had rejected a *khil'at* from Aurangzeb, see Stewart Gordon, *The New Cambridge History of India*, II.4. *The Marathas, 1600–1818* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 78.

46. Hallissey, p. 74. Haq, *Khafi Khan's History*, pp. 288–93.

47. Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, ed. Sir William

Foster, 2 vols (1727, rept. Argonaut Press: London, 1930), 1, pp. 3–4. Hereafter cited as Hamilton. Clement Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars* (1737, rept. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1924), pp. 14–25. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1908. See also Michael Smithies, ed., *Alexander Hamilton: A Scottish Sea Captain in Southeast Asia, 1689–1723* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), introduction.

48. Hamilton also claimed that Aurangzeb had became rich by summoning 'fakires' (Muslim mendicants) to his palace and forcing them to accept *khil'ats*. He was said to have confiscated their old rags and shaken out the diamonds and gold hidden in the folds. Hamilton 1, pp. 100–3.

49. Hamilton 1, pp. 138–9, with Foster's editorial commentary on pp. 245–6; cf. Penzer, pp. 9–10.

50. Downing, *Indian Wars*, pp. 33–4 and 64.

51. See Crooke, *Religion and Folklore*, 1, pp. 66–7, on the association in India of hot springs with disease; and Temple, *Legends*, p. 419, on purifying power of water, springs, and pools in Indian folk belief.

52. Jadunath Sarkar, *A History of Jaipur* [written but not published in 1939–40], rev. and edn Raghubir Sinh [*sic*] (Jaipur: Orient Longman/Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, 1984), p. 195.

53. For the supposed plot, see Markand Nandshankar Mehta and Manu Nandshankar Mehta, compilers, *The Hind Rajasthan or The Annals of the Native States of India* (1896; rept. Usha: n.p., 1985), p. 258. For the incest motive, British historian William Irvine was quoted in Zahiruddin Faruqi, *Aurangzeb and His Times* (1935; rept. Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli: Delhi, 1972), p. 245. On the motive for Bakht Singh's murder of Ajit Singh, J. Sarkar sided with Irvine, who found the accusation of incest in the Persian history *Tazkirat-us-Salatin-i-Chaghtaia* of Kamwar Khan. See Sarkar, *Jaipur*, p. 196. In general, Faruqi's project was to rehabilitate Aurangzeb and to contradict Jadunath Sarkar's interpretation of the emperor's actions, even though in this case Sarkar and Faruqi agreed. See P. Hardy, 'Modern Muslim Writing on Medieval Muslim India', in Philips, ed., p. 303.

54. Mehta and Mehta, *Hind Rajasthan*, p. 261.

55. Harish Chandra Tikkiwal, *Jaipur and the Later Mughals 1707–1803* (Jaipur: Hema Printers, 1974), pp. 95–107. On the 'rupture between Jaipur [Amber] and Jodhpur [Marwar]' and the death of Bakht Singh, see Sarkar, *Jaipur*, pp. 198–201 and esp. p. 202. Sarkar cited 'the *Vir Vinod*, written in the late nineteenth century, [as ascribing his death] to poison, given by Jai Singh's son Madho Singh [both of Jaipur]' rather than a princess of Idar.

56. Tod, *Annals* (1920), 2, pp. 866–7.

57. Lindsey Harlan, *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 2–3. See also, Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, eds, with Mohan Singh Kanota, *Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh's Diary, A Colonial Subject's Narrative of Imperial India* (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies and Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 13–15, 44 n. 11, 123 n. 46.

58. Harlan, *Rajput Women*, pp. 138, 242.

59. Sarkar, *Jaipur*, pp. 196, 202, 204, n. 7. Of course, Sarkar wrote these mocking words under commission for the rulers of Jaipur; the quotation about 'Rathor fabricators' was in the context of arguing that Marwar/Amber rivalry [expressed as Rathor/Kachhwaha rivalry] led Rathor bards to recite a number of false accusations about Kachhwahas.

60. Rajvi Amar Singh, *Mediaeval History of Rajasthan* (Bikaner: Rajvi Amar Singh, 1992), pp. 1248–9.

61. Tod, *Annals* (1832), 1, 751–2.

62. Tod, *Annals* (1920) 2, pp. 866–7; cf. Penzer, 9 and Chevers, pp. 298–9. See also, Mehta and Mehta, *Hind Rajasthan*, p. 261. This tale in particular begs for a gender analysis which limitations of space prevents here.

63. Chevers, pp. 298–9; cf. Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, pp. 1–60.

64. Thompson confused this legend with the legend of the Queen of Ganore: see Maskiell and Mayor, 'Killer *Khil'at*s Part I', C. J. S. Thompson, p. 201.

65. Mehta and Mehta, *Hind Rajasthan*, pp. 430–2.

66. Frank J. Korom, 'Review of H. Jason, *Types of Indic Oral Tales: Supplement*', *Journal of American Folklore*, 106, (1993), pp. 235–6.

67. Islam, *Folktale*, passim. A. K. Ramanujan, 'Foreword', in Beck et al., pp. xi–xxi.

68. In William Crook's 1906 review of Elic [*sic*] Elizabeth Dracott's *Simla Village Tales* (London 1906), he suggested that she would be 'well advised' to study what has already been printed so that she could 'make a more careful selection from the stories at her command, to detect the traces of foreign contamination of the indigenous folklore, and so to make her next book more novel'. Quoted in Islam, *Folktale*, p. 79; the review appeared in the journal *Folk-Lore* 17 (1906): 502.

69. Sara Sulari, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 99.

70. Paul Smith, 'Contemporary Legends: Prosaic Narratives?' *Folklore* 106 (1995): 99.

6

The Emperor's Old Clothes
Robing and Sovereignty in Late Mughal and Early British India

Gail Minault

As the British gradually conquered north India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they reduced the Mughal empire to a shadow of its former self, and the Mughal emperor to a mere pensioner. In the course of these events, the British East India Company made the transition from subordinate to ruler, and the Mughal emperor from ruler to subordinate. This shift in power relations was symbolized by rituals of sovereignty, with the British at first offering signs of their submission, but later showing increased reluctance to participate in forms of ritual subordination that were at odds with political reality. These rituals evoked the sources of Mughal legitimacy, and it behoved the British both to tap the same sources, and eventually, to divert them to their own benefit.

The Mughal empire had once rested upon a firm base of military power, sustained by the loyalty of men of talent to the central figure of authority, the emperor. The emperor's authority, effected in the first instance by military conquest, was then perpetuated by an elaborate structure of symbols and rituals. Among his symbols of authority were the yak tails of Turko–Mongol kingship and dynastic descent from the charismatic Timurids, the throne and other trappings of Persian kings, and the umbrella, drums, and peacock fans, symbols of Indian rulers. The symbols of Islamic legitimacy, the *khutba*—(the sermon read in the emperor's name in the Friday prayer service in mosques throughout the realm), and the *sikka*—(coins minted in the emperor's name), also bolstered the authority of the

central power. These symbols alone, however, would have been insufficient to sustain the dynasty without further territorial expansion and constant reinforcement of the emperor's position through rituals in which his subordinates reaffirmed their obedience and he invested them with his authority.[1]

RITUALS OF MUGHAL AUTHORITY

These rituals took various forms, all of them designed to confirm the personal ties of loyalty among the emperor and his officers at the apex of the Mughal administrative hierarchy. Symbolizing the grant of patronage and protection, on the one hand, and clientage and service, on the other, these rituals also linked imperial authority to divine authority, the source of all earthly power.[2]

An example of a Mughal imperial ritual that reinforced the emperor's authority and symbolized the loyalty of his subjects was the *jharoka*. This was a practice begun by Akbar, based on the custom of Rajput rulers, of appearing on a balcony in the early morning for all his subjects there present to see, to assure themselves that he was in good health, to prostrate themselves, and to tender petitions. The *jharoka* was elaborated by Akbar and his successors, who sometimes followed it with a great public audience (*diwan-i-'am*), during which the imperial officer corps was arrayed before and below the emperor in intricate order of precedence, with ordinary subjects also in attendance to seek relief from their afflictions.[3]

The symbolism of the *jharoka* tapped Rajput royal tradition. It also perpetuated the Persian tradition that held that the king should be accessible to all his subjects for the redress of grievances. In its elaborated form, the custom resembled the impressive military audiences held by Central Asian Turkish conquerors and their Indian successors, from Mahmud of Ghazna to Muhammad bin Tughlaq, designed to overawe all and sundry, and hence reinforce royal authority.[4] In asserting the role of the emperor as grantor of boons and as final court of appeal, the ritual gave him a role in the sacred order too: as intercessor between ordinary men and God's compassionate justice. The Mughals thus wove together a number of cultural strands and symbolized their authority for all their subjects, regardless of rank or religion.[5]

The ritual that best symbolized the personal loyalty of the subordinate to the emperor and the exchange of patronage for service was the exchange of gifts. The subordinate would present the emperor

with a *nazr* (an expensive gift, usually gold or silver coins), and the ruler would reciprocate by presenting his servant with a *khil'at*, or robe of honour. An important element in this exchange was its personal and incorporative nature. The term *nazr* (derived from Arabic *nadhr*, or vow) implied an oath of allegiance that was customarily presented in person—as opposed to a *pishkash*, or offering, that could be sent to the ruler without a personal appearance by the giver.[6] The *khil'at*, in turn, if not the shirt off his back, was at least a garment that the emperor had worn, or failing that, which had, at the very least, been brushed across his shoulder. In presenting it, the emperor was symbolically making the recipient an extension of himself, and hence delegating some of his authority. To accept a *khil'at* was an honour, but also an acknowledgment on the part of the recipient of subordination to the donor. The robe was sometimes accompanied by other symbols of the emperor's esteem, such as a bejewelled sword, saddle, or turban ornament, a fine steed, or a new office or title.[7] The subordinate would then prostrate himself before the emperor as a further expression of loyal submission. Variations of this ritual endured into the nineteenth century, with British officials too presenting *nazr*s to the later Mughals and receiving *khil'at*s that were increasingly threadbare, both of brocade and meaningful authority.[8]

In addition to these rituals that symbolized imperial authority, the ideology of protection and service was expressed in other ways. The term *khanazadi*[9] referred to devoted, hereditary service to the dynasty. This term, similar to the ritual submission described above, implied not only a personal connection to the emperor, but also an extended familial tie, as in the relationship of a slave to his master, or a religious disciple to his spiritual preceptor (*piri-muridi*).[10] *Khanazadi* also implied notions of pure lineage (traceable to origins outside India) and shared culture. Given the incorporative nature of Mughal rituals, however, 'pure' lineage must have been very broadly construed indeed. Men of talent, whether from outside India or within, once granted imperial office and favour, might claim *khanazad* status.

This terminology was also sometimes employed in the sense of the empire as a social organism, with the emperor as the 'heart' and his officers as the 'limbs'. This usage particularly reflected dharmic notions of the social order. For example, in *Tarikh-i-Dilkasha*, an account in Persian of his career in Mughal service in the late seventeenth century, Bhimsen, a North Indian *kayastha*, described himself as a *khanazad*.[11] His hereditary link to the Mughals extended from his

father and uncles to other members of his family, all of whom had served as middle-ranking officials for the Mughals: inspectors, auditors, and paymasters with the Mughal forces in the Deccan during Aurangzeb's campaigns against the Marathas. Bhimsen described the working of the empire in organic terms as follows:

> [God] hoisted the banner of love in the field of the human body by making the heart the ruler of the empire of the physical body of man, and He gave orders to the parts and the limbs of the body to abide by the commandments of the heart ...[12]

Similarly, he and members of his family, as minor but necessary 'limbs', served God and the social order by serving the emperor, who was the 'heart' of the imperial body.[13]

The ideology of loyal service to the Mughal emperor thus encapsulated elements that appealed to all his subjects, regardless of faith, and other elements that were specifically Islamic. In this latter sense, the emperor was not only a political patron, but also the symbol on earth of God's authority and protection. Just as the emperor's bounty was shared with those who served him, so God's bounty was bestowed upon those who served Him. Wealth, consequently, was a sign of divine favour.[14] If God's bounty were withdrawn, this could be construed, not just as misfortune, but as a sign of spiritual failure. This helps to explain why, as the Mughal empire declined, the more pious of its servants sought to save the situation by becoming better Muslims. Others maintained their symbolic loyalty to the emperor while recreating the imperial order on a smaller scale and eventually creating new polities, as did, for example, the first nizam of Hyderabad.[15]

The ideology of service to the empire, therefore, was not without its elements of flexibility and realism in the face of adversity. Service to the emperor might be next to godliness, but if God's favour had somehow deserted the empire, what then? One's prosperity in the world and one's salvation in the next might, in that case, require adaptive behaviour. The eighteenth century, frequently described as a time of collapse and confusion, is replete with examples of creative restructuring that testified to the power of Mughal ideology and its flexibility in the face of challenge and change. Successor states emerged in Hyderabad, Awadh, Bengal, Bhopal, and elsewhere. Rival realms emerged under the Marathas in the Deccan and the Sikhs in Punjab. All these powers perpetuated Mughal culture and symbolism in various ways.[16]

THE BRITISH COMPANY AND THE MUGHAL RITUAL ORDER

The British East India Company, as it expanded its territories in India, fitted into this pattern, first by recognizing Mughal authority and participating in its rituals, and then by replacing the Mughal as the source of military might, protection, and patronage. Robert Clive, for example, though aware of the Mughal's military impotence, nevertheless recognized that the emperor was the source of political legitimacy and that certain niceties of form had to be observed. In 1758, the Mughal awarded the victor of Plassey the elaborate title, 'Zabdat ul-Mulk, Nasir ud-Daulah, Colonel Clive Sabat Jang Bahadur', at the request of the nawab of Bengal. Clive was thus ostensibly a client of the nawab, who was a client of the Mughal, whereas actually the nawab owed his position to British arms, and the Mughal was simply ratifying a state of affairs that he had no ability to prevent. Clive did not appear in person to receive this honour, thereby breaking with the traditions of the ritual, but rather sent a *nazr* via a representative. He later received from the nawab a *jagir* to go with his title; it was a grant of revenues from the lands around Calcutta already held by the Company. This caused a certain stir in London, as the Company had become, thereby, a tenant of one of its own servants.[17] However, as Clive pointed out, the only change was that the revenues would now go to him (and thus be 'to this nation a profit'), instead of to the government of the Bengal nawab.[18]

The question of who was patron to whom was becoming hopelessly tangled.[19] In 1765, when the Mughal granted the Company the diwani of Bengal, Clive's audience with the emperor took place at Clive's encampment near Allahabad, the throne a hastily improvised, cloth-draped chair atop the dining table in Clive's tent.[20] The emperor was nevertheless seated at a higher level, implying his superior station and Clive's subordination. The proceedings gave an aura of legality and even sanctity to the fait accompli of British military and economic dominance in the lower Ganges plain.

The British defeat of the Marathas near Delhi in 1803 opened a new chapter in Anglo–Mughal relations. The Mughal became a pensionary of the British with no real power except within the walls of Red Fort. The British had become his overlords. Thereafter, the Governors-General discontinued the practice of presenting *nazr*s to the emperor, as they no longer wished to offer even symbolic obeisance. Lesser officials, however, continued their expressions of

deference and loyalty. Lord Lake, the conqueror of Delhi, for example, was instructed to show the emperor 'every demonstration of reverence, respect and attention, and every degree of regard for [his] comfort ...'[21] Lake was received by Shah Alam (r. 1759–1806) in Red Fort in September 1803, expressed his loyalty, and was granted an elaborate title: 'Samsam ud-Daulah, Astia ul-Mulk, Khan-i-Dauran, Khan Bahadur, Sipah-i-Salar, Fateh Jung', and the office of Commander-in-Chief (that is: *sipah-i-salar*), an office he already held in the British forces.[22] The Mughal thus again only ratified a de facto situation over which he had no control, notwithstanding ritual appearances to the contrary.

Thereafter, British concern for the niceties of Mughal etiquette followed the trends of administrative policy. Governors-General insisted upon equality of status and refused to meet the Mughal on any other basis, but lesser officials, particularly the British resident at the Delhi court and other important visitors, maintained elaborate rituals of deference and continued to present *nazr*s and receive *khil'at*s. Illustrative of these gradations is the following description of an audience in 1828 between the Mughal emperor, Akbar Shah II (r. 1806–37), and the British Governor-General, Lord Amherst, written by Edward Raleigh, a member of Amherst's staff. Raleigh first notes the negotiations leading up to the audience, reflecting not only status concerns on both sides, but also the Mughal's economic realism and the British concern to offer him some face-saving device:

> It is here necessary to state that the reception of the Governor General of India on anything like equal footing had never occurred ... No Gov. Gen. has ever *sat* in presence of [Mughal] Royalty. Our Resident was obliged to go through on some occasions menial forms in acknowledgement of Inferiority ...
>
> It appears that the King [i.e., the Mughal, Akbar Shah], who receives a stipulated income from the Company, was very desirous of an increase of allowance, and consequently sought an interview with the Gov. Gen. This, the Gov. Gen. of India expressed his wish to accede to, but only on one condition: 'That as representative of the British Government and the Crown of England, he should be received on equality by the King of Delhi and sit in presence as did the King'!!!
>
> This matter required the most dexterous diplomacy to effect, but after much consideration ... the King of Delhi consented to allow the King of England to be an equal ...[23]

The Governor-General arrived at the walled city of Delhi on 15 February, 1828. About a mile outside the city, he was received by the

Mughal's eldest son and heir-apparent, who joined the procession to the British residency. Lord Amherst encamped in the compound of the residency and held a dinner that night, attended by the prince. The meaning of this British ritual was also subject to negotiation. Raleigh explains:

The Prince informed Sir C[harles] Metcalfe [the resident] that it would have been his wish to have entertained the G.G. but that [at] the palace none but the King could entertain. He asked Sir C. if he would allow him to do so at the Residency. Sir C.M. informed His Highness that at the Residency he alone was the person to entertain, but that he should be happy to have the Prince's countenance at the table, and that he may *imagine* that he was the entertainer. This the Prince highly approved of as a brilliant idea!!![24]

On the day appointed for the audience between the Governor-General and the Mughal, Raleigh describes the elaborate procession, the escort offered by another Mughal prince, and the reception at the palace:

Saturday 17th [Feb. 1828]: ... At 8 a.m., the Gov. Gen. (not Ladies) with a very full Sawaree [mounted procession], joined to which was that of Sir C. Metcalfe's and invited guests, headed by the body guard and followed by 'Skinner's Horse' and with every emblem of State and dignity, left the Residency for the palace of the King of Delhi. On a separate elephant, on the Gov. Gen'.s right, was the Prince (4th son of the King) as escort ... Near to the palace the 55th and 17th Reg'ts. were drawn up to salute. The Cortege now entered the outer gates of the palace, and the Prince advancing, led the way thro' two inner portals and squares. At the second gate all but the Prince and the G.G. dismounted and walked to the door of the palace. The Prince and the Gov. Gen. came thus far on elephants and here dismounted and advanced, followed by the Suite into the hall of audience, in the centre of which the old King was seated on a square platform about four feet high from the ground, covered by a canopy, the whole gilded, with at each corner a little gilded peacock having a string of pearls hanging from their beaks. At the foot of this throne was a moveable flight of gilded steps which were removed when the King had ascended or descended and did not require them.

On the Gov. Gen.'s entering the Hall, the King descended from the throne and advanced some way to meet him. An embrace took place and the King handed Lord Amherst to a gilded chair placed opposite and close to the throne and then ascended his throne. Mr. Stirling standing near to interpret between the two great personages. Little in the way of conversation transpired. After about ten minutes the Lord rose and the King's steps were brought and placed at the foot of the throne. The King descended and led the Lord again to the distance at which he had met him and embraced again. The Lord retreated and the King returned to his seat. During the ceremony the

G.G.'s suite were ranged at the sides and behind him, the King's attendants on each side of his throne ... The King was a fine looking old man with a long white beard and handsome countenance ... [25]

A few days later, the Governor-General's staff was presented to the Mughal, and did present *nazr*s and receive robes of honour. Raleigh describes the scene:

23rd Friday [Feb. 1828]: This day the Staff of the G.G. were to be presented to the King in due form. We all assembled in full uniform at the Residency, mounted our elephants, and proceeded, led by Sir C. Metcalfe, in great force, to the palace. At the second gate, all dismounted and walked through the next two squares. On entering the court into which the throne room opens and through the windows of which the King is beheld in distance, we were directed to bow our heads three times, saying Salam, whilst a herald with stentorian voice called out, 'Salam Padshaw, Ackbar Shaw'.

We then passed into the Hall of Audience, where we had to repeat our three Salams ... Having been ranged in lines on the right side of the hall, Sir C. Metcalfe (as Resident), who stood near the throne called us up one by one. And placing three gold mohurs on our white pocket handkerchief, with a bowing grace, we presented our offering. The King took the gold mohurs in his august fingers and we walked backwards to our places. And when all had given their nuzzer [*nazr*], we together made a profound bow, and were then conducted to the balcony outside the hall. Here we were dressed in a killanth [*khil'at*] over our uniforms (the swords, epaulettes and gold lace of which were rather in the way). These killanths consisted of a petticoat of coarse gauze, spangled all over with silver spangles, and a yellow tinsilled [sic] jacket. Round the neck a piece of tinsil calico and round our cocked hats, two or three bands of tinsil and tape with tassels. The whole of these dresses were of the most wretched material and over military and civil uniforms of considerable splendour, had an effect only to be approached by the chimney sweepers of May Day![26]

The following day, 24 February, the emperor paid a return call on the Governor-General. He came to the residency in a procession of numerous elephants, similar to Lord Amherst's previous progress to the palace. His throne had been sent ahead and set up in the largest room of the residency, with a chair next to it for the Governor-General. When the emperor descended from his elephant, he was carried to the reception hall in a 'sort of seat'. Lord Amherst led the Mughal to the steps of the throne, and 'a little conversation took place' with Sir Charles Metcalfe serving as interpreter. Then the Governor-General's gifts were presented to the Mughal. Their value was carefully noted, though it is unclear whether they equalled or exceeded the value of gifts received by Lord Amherst from the Mughal:

The presents were now laid before the King on the floor, consisting of 101 trays containing shawls and jewels to the amount of Rs 80,300 or L 8,300 ... He soon after descended, the G.G. taking his hand, led him to the door, where he reseated himself on the chair and was restored to his elephant, the Prince behind him. A salute of guns was fired on his arrival and departure, and the Cavalry and Infantry were in saluting position near the palace ...[27]

Notwithstanding of all this dexterous diplomacy, the emperor's request for an increase in his stipend from the British was not granted. Akbar Shah then refused to meet the next Governor-General, Lord Bentinck, during the latter's tour of north India in 1831.[28] Emily Eden, the sister of the subsequent Governor-General, Lord Auckland, writing about their tour of north India in 1838, mentioned that she visited the palace but her brother could not, 'for some point of etiquette'.[29]

Bishop Heber, during his visit to north India in 1824, was presented to Akbar Shah. As a distinguished British visitor, but not on a par with the Governor-General, the bishop was expected to present *nazr*s and receive a *khil'at*. Heber's writing style is livelier and more detailed than Raleigh's matter-of-fact account, although Raleigh gave a much fuller picture of British concerns over protocol and symbolic meaning. The bishop's description of the palace and his audience with the Mughal is a classic of the genre:

[O]ur guides, withdrawing a canvas screen, called out in a sort of harsh chaunt, 'Lo the ornament of the world! Lo the asylum of the nations! King of Kings! The Emperor Acbar Shah! Just, fortunate, victorious!' ... Opposite to us was a beautiful open pavilion of white marble, richly carved, flanked by rose-bushes and fountains ... within which was a crowd of people, and the poor old descendant of Tamerlane seated in the midst of them. Mr. Elliott [the acting resident] bowed three times very low, in which we followed his example. This ceremony was repeated twice as we advanced up the steps of the pavilion, the heralds each time repeating the same expressions about their master's greatness. We then stood in a row on the right-hand side of the throne, which is a sort of marble bedstead richly ornamented with gilding, and raised on two or three steps. Mr. Elliott then stepped forwards, and, with joined hands, in the usual Eastern way, announced, in a low voice, to the emperor, who I was. I then advanced, bowed three times again, and offered a nuzzur of fifty-one gold mohurs in an embroidered purse, laid on my handkerchief ... I had thus an opportunity of seeing the old gentleman more plainly. He has a pale, thin, but handsome face, with an aquiline nose, and a long white beard. His complexion is little if at all darker than that of an European. His hands are very fair and delicate, and he has some valuable-looking rings on them. His hands and face were all I saw of him, for the morning being cold, he was so wrapped in shawls, that he reminded me extremely of the Druid's head on a Welsh halfpenny ...[30]

Heber then received a *khil'at*. Like Raleigh and his fellow officers, the bishop felt somewhat bizarre in his finery. He described the ceremony as follows:

> The emperor then beckoned to me to come forwards, and Mr. Elliott told me to take off my hat ... on which the emperor tied a flimsy turban of brocade ... with his own hands, for which, however, I paid four gold mohurs more. We were then directed to retire to receive the 'Khelats' (honourary dresses) which the bounty of the 'Asylum of the World' had provided for us. I was accordingly taken to a small private room ... where I found a handsome flowered caftan edged with fur, and a pair of common-looking shawls, which my servants ... put on instead of my gown, my cassock remaining as before. In this strange dress I had to walk back again, having my name announced by the criers ... as 'Bahadur, Boozoony, Dowlutmund, etc., to the presence ... I now again came forward and offered my third present to the emperor, being a copy of the Arabic Bible and the Hindoostanee Common Prayer, handsomely bound in blue velvet laced with gold, and wrapped up in a piece of brocade. He then motioned me to stoop, and put a string of pearls around my neck, and two glittering but not costly ornaments in the front of my turban, for which I again offered five gold mohurs. It was, lastly, announced that a horse was waiting for my acceptance, at which fresh instance of imperial munificence ... I again paid five gold mohurs. It ended by my taking my leave with three times three salams ...[31]

Later administrators chafed at these rituals, regarding them as meaningless relics of an increasingly irrelevant past. In 1828, the East India Company in Calcutta prohibited its officers in Delhi from accepting titles bestowed by the Mughal, but it appears that the practice continued, for in 1835, Calcutta reiterated that: 'the British government does not recognize the right of the Court of Delhi to confer titles on any of the Company's subjects'. The resident was instructed 'peremptorily to interdict the receipt in future of titles'.[32] This increasing inflexibility on the part of the East India Company was born of the desire to withdraw recognition from the Mughals as an equal sovereign power.

Finally, in 1843, the practice of offering *nazr*s and receiving *khil'at*s was also forbidden. Such practices, noted the then Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, were 'altogether inconsistent with the relative position of the King of Delhi and of the British government which now possesses the power from which alone the house of Timur derived its dignity'.[33] When the emperor, Bahadur Shah II (r. 1836–57) protested, Ellenborough noted that, though they would no longer offer *nazr*s, the value of such offerings in the past had been approximately Rs 10,000 per annum, so he proposed that they increase

the Mughal's stipend by Rs 833 per month. The emperor was not amused. He noted that the presentation of *nazr*s was intended to show respect to the throne of Timur, and consequently the proposal to commute *nazr*s into a monthly allowance was 'perplexing and astonishing'. He did not consent to the arrangement, though a decade later, during the Governor-Generalship of Lord Dalhousie, he asked for the arrears of this allowance. Dalhousie turned him down.[34]

This gradual withdrawal of recognition from rituals that were symbolic of a power relationship that no longer existed may have seemed, to the British administration, the only practical and rational thing to do. In place of a symbolic exchange of patronage and protection for loyalty and service, these British administrators saw only a form of payment for office, evidence—to them—of oriental decadence and decline. They regarded the practice of giving *nazr*s as tantamount to bribery. Where the exchange of *nazr*s for *khil'at*s was unavoidable, they established a strict scale of equivalence, so that instead of being a ritual of incorporation, the practice was reduced to a commercial transaction. This was already in evidence at the time of Amherst's visit, when Raleigh's account carefully enumerated the number of trays of shawls and jewels offered, and their value.[35] This could then be placed in the account books as part of the Mughal's stipend, evidence not of equality, but rather of his subordination. In this way, the British administration continued the Mughal patronage system and even some of its rituals, but either misunderstood the symbolic meanings of those rituals, or, more probably, deliberately altered their meanings.[36] This was done in gradual stages and not without considerable debate in the councils of government and voluminous bureaucratic correspondence.[37] In so doing, however, the East India Company was repudiating the very rituals that had given it a claim to legitimacy in the first place. It did so at its own peril.

CONCLUSIONS

In retrospect, it seems that one of the reasons the East India Company officials repudiated these rituals was that they believed, all too well, in their efficacy and no longer wanted to give the Mughal any reason to misunderstand his position. Indeed, withdrawal from the rituals signalled the emperor's subordination more clearly than the payment of a stipend, as the latter might be construed as tribute. Even before the cataclysmic events of 1857, plans were under way to evict the Mughals from Red Fort, the one piece of territory where they still

held sovereignty, and oblige them to live in their palace near the Qutb Minar.[38] 'It is fitting', wrote Dalhousie, 'that we should exert our power and our right to the full ... On the death of the King [Bahadur Shah Zafar] I would propose that the [Mughal] Dynasty should cease'.[39] Whether the aged emperor knew of this intention or not when he welcomed the mutineers from Meerut, he may have suspected it.

It is, therefore, no irony that after the revolt, the British Indian government, in seeking to bolster its own power, instituted elaborate rituals of its own, played out in a series of fatuous Durbars. Lytton's pageantry of 1878[40] was followed by others, culminating in the magnificant Coronation Durbar of 1911, at which King George V received the various reigning princes of India in a glittering ceremony, and in his role as successor to the Mughal, announced a boon: the return of the imperial capital to Delhi.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Peter Hardy, 'The Authority of Muslim Kings in Medieval South Asia', in Marc Gaborieau, ed., *Islam et Societe en Asie du Sud* (Paris: Collection Purusartha, #9, 1986), pp. 37–55; J. F. Richards, 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir', in J. F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison: U. of Wisconsin, South Asia Studies Publication #3, 1978), pp. 252–85; idem., 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers', in Barbara Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 255–89.

3. Douglas E. Streusand, *The Formation of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 123–36, citing Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*; Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 159–60, citing Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*; 'Jharoka', in *Fatehpur Sikri: A Source Book*, ed. Michael Brand and Glenn Lowry (Cambridge, MA: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1985), p. 128, citing Badauni, *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*; Ibn Hasan, *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire* (rpt Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 65–91.

4. For these rituals, see C. E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran, 994–1040* (2nd edn Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1973), pp. 135–37, citing Baihaqi, *Tarikh-i-Masudi*; and Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, trans. and ed. H. A. R. Gibb (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1929), pp. 197–200.

5. Streusand, *Formation*, p. 124; Eaton, *Rise of Islam and Bengal*, pp. 28–30, 159–60; Richards, 'Formulation of Imperial Authority'. On the Persian tradition of kingship, see Nizam ul-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings (Siyar ul-Muluk or Siyasat Nama)*, trans. by Hubert Darke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

6. Streusand, *Formation*, pp. 139–41.

7. See the articles by J. F. Richards cited above: 'Formulation', p. 273; 'Imperial Crisis', p. 243; and 'Norms of Comportment'. For an extended discussion of the symbolism of the *khil'at*, see F. W. Buckler, 'The Oriental Despot', in *Legitimacy and Symbols: the South Asian Writings of F.W. Buckler*, ed. M. N. Pearson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for S. and SE Asian Studies, Paper #26, 1985), pp. 176–87. Buckler, however, assumes a stability of symbolic meaning that, as Stewart Gordon shows, had considerable negotiability.

8. Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals* (rpt Delhi: Oriental Books, 1969. lst pub. 1951), pp. 54–9, 68–71; B. S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', in his *An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 632–82, espec. pp. 635–7; 1st pub. in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983).

9. *khanazad*: a son of the house; a member of the royal household.

10. J. F. Richards, 'Norms of Comportment', pp. 262–7; 'Formulation', pp. 272–3; cf. M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966), pp. 63–6; Peter Hardy, 'The Authority of Muslim Kings', pp. 45–7.

11. This account of Bhimsen is based on Richards, 'Norms of Comportment', pp. 270–89.

12. Ibid., p. 276, citing Bhimsen, *Tarikh-i-Dilkasha*.

13. Bhimsen maintained his loyalty to the imperial system to the end of his career, but with growing disillusionment and a sense of foreboding. Ibid., p. 287; cf. Richards, 'Imperial Crisis'.

14. Muhammad Baqir Najm-i-Sani, *Advice on the Art of Governance Mau'izah-i-Jahangiri: An Indo–Islamic Mirror for Princes*, trans. and ed. Sajida Sultana Alvi (Albany: SUNY Press 1989), p. 86.

15. Yusuf Husain, *The First Nizam: The Life and Times of Nizam ul-Mulk Asaf Jah I* (Bombay: Asia, 1963); Karen Leonard, 'The Hyderabad Political System and its Participants', *JAS* 30, 3 (May 1971): 569–82.

16. Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986); C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 7–44; Richard Barnett, *North India Between Empires* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600–1818* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993).

17. Mark Bence-Jones, in something of an understatement, remarks that

this was: 'An Anomalous Situation Bound to Cause Trouble'. N. C. Chaudhuri, *Clive of India* (London: Constable, 1974), p. 174.

18. Bence-Jones, *Clive of India*, pp. 254–5; Abdul Majid Khan, *The Transition in Bengal, 1756–1775* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 100–7.

19. Cf. Stewart Gordon's description above of the robing of the *peshwa* and Shinde in Pune in 1792 is fraught with similar ambiguities.

20. Bence-Jones, *Clive*, pp. 218–9. The reality was quite unlike Benjamin West's famous depiction of the scene, which shows an elaborate Mughal throne in a palace setting. See Mildred Archer, *India and British Portraiture, 1770–1825* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1979), pp. 417–8, pl. 332.

21. Spear, *Twilight*, p. 35, citing Wellesley to Lake, 27 July 1803 (Pol. Cons., 2 March 1804), Home Misc. vol. 492, pp. 241 ff, *India Office Library and Records* [IOLR].

22. Spear, *Twilight*, pp. 36, and 240, n. 12.

23. Raleigh, Edward W. W., 'The Log of a Griffin on the Personal Staff of the Rt. Hon. Governor General of India, the Earl of Amherst, during a Diplomatic Tour through the Presidency of Bengal, 1827–28', Mss. Eur. D786/2, p. 56, *IOLR*. As this source is unpublished, it seems worthwhile to quote it at some length.

24. Raleigh, 'Log of a Griffin', p. 55.

25. Ibid., pp. 56–7.

26. Ibid., p. 58. Raleigh and a fellow staffer later resold their *khil'ats* for Rs 150 to jobbers for the palace who recycled them for 're-presentation' to other honourees, (ibid., p. 61).

27. Ibid., pp. 59–60.

28. Spear, *Twilight*, p. 46.

29. Emily Eden, *Up the Country: Letters written to her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India* (rpt London: Curzon Press, 1978), p. 97.

30. Bishop Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Carey, 1828), vol. I, pp. 450–2.

31. Ibid., pp. 452. Spear, *Twilight*, pp. 69–71 quotes this passage at greater length.

32. R. H. Scott to T. T. Metcalfe, d. Agra, 3 Sept. 1835; and W. H. Macnaghton to R. H. Scott, d. Calcutta, 28 Sept. 1835, Foreign (Pol.), 18–19, 28 Sept. 1835, *National Archives of India* [*NAI*].

33. J. Thomason to T. T. Metcalfe, d. Camp Chatta, 26 Feb. 1843, Foreign (Pol.) 117–19, 22 March 1843, *NAI*.

34. Correspondence re Nazrs and Monetary Equivalents in Foreign (Pol.) 180–96, 29 Oct. 1852, *NAI*.

35. Raleigh, 'Log of a Griffin', *loc. cit.*

36. F. W. Buckler, 'The Oriental Despot'; cf. Michael H. Fisher, 'The Resident in Court Ritual, 1764–1858', *Modern Asian Studies* 24, 3 (July 1990): 419–58; Spear, *Twilight*, pp. 50–1.

37. The Foreign (Pol.) Dept. proceedings contain frequent reference to

ceremonial practices. See, e.g., Foreign (Pol.) 87–8, 21 June 1843; 18–20, 15 Dec. 1849; 105–6, 20 June 1851; 180–96, 29 Oct. 1852, *NAI*.

38. Memo from T. T. Metcalfe, resident, Delhi, d. 17 Feb. 1848; J. Thornton to H. M. Elliot, d. Agra, 31 March 1848, both in Foreign (Pol.) 20–6, 24 Feb. 1849, *NAI*. The palace in question is Zafar Mahal in Mehrauli, south of Delhi.

39. Lord Dalhousie's Minute re-succession to the throne of Timur, d. 10 Feb. 1849, Foreign (Pol.) 20–6, 24 Feb. 1849, *NAI*.

40. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India'.

7

Conclusions

Stewart Gordon

What, then, were the principal features of the practice of the *khil'at* ceremony in the South Asian context? In line with current re-thinking of the term 'culture' as historically contingent, contested, and intertwined with politics and power, the *khil'at* ceremony was centrally about establishing a political relationship between giver and receiver. At its simplest, this relationship was one of fealty, that is, a generalized and largely unspoken loyalty. The giver expected to provide maintenance; the receiver expected to serve with his skills and his life, if necessary. The ceremony marked the body of the receiver and made him 'suitable' for court before an audience similarly robed. We found the ceremony in active use, as one of the most common and important ceremonies of kingship throughout South Asia for almost a thousand years.

In actual practice, however, *khil'at* was rarely simple. The ceremony was thoroughly enmeshed in specific local and imperial politics. Many besides kings bestowed robes, such as queens, male relatives of the king, merchants, jurists, and Sufi teachers. This pattern of investiture suggests many sites for initiative and power within the political system, a feature also highlighted by the many rebellions and succession wars. Many also received robes from sons of the king down to low-caste forest guides. Great kings exchanged elaborate robes in a 'circulation of fabulous objects'. The ceremony descended from a decisive demonstration of loyalty to an adult king in control of a stable, solvent state to the most ambiguous of ceremonies at times of succession or otherwise disputed authority. We have seen *khil'at* in competition with other ceremonies of loyalty (such as the giving of pan) as well as several occasions of refusal of

khil'at. Let us now turn to some of the larger implications of this study.

KHIL'AT AND BUREAUCRACY

Khil'at is important for conceptualization of the empires in South Asia from perhaps the tenth to well into the nineteenth century. Scholars have long noted that during this period sultans and kings experimented with administrative structures that gave the ruler greater stability, power, and income. In many of these experiments, the ruler attempted to impose regular taxes collected by salaried officials who had written job descriptions. What is fascinating is that over the course of a thousand years these geographically dispersed experiments in bureaucracy and hierarchy did not displace fealty and its ceremonies, like robing. Rather, bureaucracy often ended up underneath fealty in an uneasy relationship. Perhaps one example will illustrate what I mean.

In the sixteenth century, the Mughal empire indeed had written tax contracts, tax collectors, carefully structured assessment guidelines, and officials who dealt with everything from the royal workshops to the branding of horses among low-level soldiers. Nevertheless, an élite above this bureaucracy was structured by fealty. The *mansabdar*s (that is, men holding a grant for the maintenance of troops), consisted of only a few thousand men, each—father and son–known to the emperor and raised to this rank in a simple ceremony of fealty before him. No specific duties were attached to being a *mansabdar*. It was assumed and expected that any member of this elite would lead troops, even if his family had been administrators for generations. Likewise, it was expected that this élite would share in the ruler's prosperity either from peaceful development or expansion by war. As Gavin Hambly has described, ties of fealty were regularly renewed in face-to-face encounters between *mansabdar*s and the emperor at court, in conference, and on the hunt. Robing was the ceremony that recognized successful service, whether in war or peace, and was especially used to maintain ties when distance precluded face-to-face contact. Robes arrived in far-flung provinces by special emissary. Recipients faced the capital, bowed deeply, prostrated, donned the robe in the presence of the troops and subordinates, placed the warrant on the forehead, and bowed deeply again.

Whenever a ruler tried to adapt robing away from first-among-equals fealty toward bureaucracy or hierarchy, the process was

surprisingly similar. The ruler used his power to simplify the meaning of the robe, to wring ambiguity from its presentation, control its exact meaning, and formalize the personal ceremony, often by the addition of a written, fixed protocol for the ceremony, sworn oaths, and written warrants of duties. It is perhaps worth suggesting a few examples of this process outside India. As early as the eleventh century in Iran, certain robes of honour had become robes of office, the very name of the office stitched into the robe.[1] As early as the tenth century, the Byzantine emperor before a campaign bestowed to the army robes whose worth was carefully 'ranked' to match the rank of the soldiers. The exact monetary value was sometimes stitched into robes.

Nevertheless, the fealty aspects never completely disappeared from *khil'at*. In spite of developing bureaucracy, it was enormously useful that personal bestowal of the robe meant that the 'hand of the ruler' was in direct relationship to the receiver. Even in the normal run of things, any ruler, strong or weak, needed a way of maintaining a relationship with officeholders, especially when offices were heritable. A ruler could demand of 'his' man (as marked with the robe) actions and loyalty that he could not ask of a mere salaried employee. Any reign could have crises in which just this sort of loyalty might make the difference, such as succession disputes, the frequent plots against the king by his own nobility, failure in war, an unpopular marriage, or a serious rebellion. For many in service, this personal aspect, characterized by robing, kept the ruler, if only in imagination, as a companion and accessible.

RELIGION, THE LOCAL, AND KINGLY SYMBOLS

One of the most striking features of the *khil'at* ceremony was that, with the exception of Sufi robing, it had no religious overtones in the giving or receiving. The custom was anything but exclusively 'Islamic'. It was in active use in hundreds of Hindu courts, Christian Constantinople, among Egyptian Jews, Buddhists in Tibet, and Confucians in China. Use by the Mughals in cementing loyalty by Rajputs was paralleled by similar use by Constantinople among the Eastern bishoprics. Both Constantinople and the caliph of Baghdad simultaneously sent luxurious ceremonial robes in a bid for the loyalty of the royal families of Armenia during the ninth century. Early Christian travellers and ambassadors to India readily accepted *khil'at*. A few, such as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, proudly had their portraits painted

in their robes. British traders and officials accepted *khil'at* well into the nineteenth century, notwithstanding an increasingly Evangelical tone to the Indian administration.

This 'secular' functioning of *khil'at* suggests a need to reconsider other kingly symbolism in South Asia. The umbrella, for example, is generally viewed as a 'South Asian' symbol and associated with Hindu kingship. The symbol is, however, found on 4000-year old Persepolis friezes in Mesopotamia. On these friezes, umbrellas shade kings. Other 'South Asian' kingly symbols have perhaps, equally deep roots and far-flung origins. The fly whisk, for example, has been found in late Neolithic kingly burials in Central Asia. The sunshade in its pipal-leaf shape is undoubtedly Indian, but the general use of a flat sunshade on a tall pole is also found in ancient Persia.

Perhaps kingly symbols were of two types. One set drew on a common religious background; kings used them for integrating kinsmen and ethnically similar local folk. This sort of symbolism might include regular patronage of a local temple or shrine or 'stages of life' ceremonies. The second set of symbols and ceremonies was known throughout a wide region and were 'secular'. In the South Asian context, horses, elephants, the umbrella, drums, horns, jewels and jewelled weapons, the sunshade, and banners might belong to this category. It is at least suggestive that a set of Bijauri paintings nearly contemporary with the Battle of Talkot show identical symbols surrounding the Hindu king of Vijayanagara and the Muslim sultan of Bijapur.[2] Perhaps kings needed these more, widely, known symbols to integrate troops and tax-paying people beyond their own religious or ethnic group.

We usually think of conflict and contestation between large, transnational symbol systems and local custom as a feature of the 'modern'. The meanings of, for example, Coca-cola and Hollywood movies in local and especially non-Western settings have been the subject of much recent research and theory. The *khil'at* ceremony, however, challenges us to consider such 'globalization' in the premodern setting. Here we have a large-scale symbol system interacting with local customs that resulted in many of the phenomena associated with the 'modern' predicament. Ibn Battuta visited several groups who were only a generation or two into the 'conversion' process: Timbuktu, the Mongol Il-Khan, Samarkand. We find groups at the fringes of the robing world adopting the custom for many reasons—access to larger trading markets, luxury goods, credit networks, entry into wider knowledge often based on texts,

alliances with larger powers, 'suitability' in courts when and if they travelled.

Local custom, nevertheless, hardly disappeared and the relationships of local custom to the larger symbol system of *khil'at* were complex and contested. In the Maldives, for example, resistance was the order of the day. Women simply refused to cover up even though Ibn Battuta, as *qadi*, ordered them to do so.[3] Also, in the Maldives, Ibn Battuta observed the existing local custom of 'throwing down' cloth when approaching a ruler or dignitary. It seemed to carry on comfortably with *khil'at*.[4] As Ibn Battuta discovered, the constellation of honorifics included in a *khil'at* ceremony was adopted to local circumstances. Where horses were scarce, such as in south India, he did not receive them along with robes. This rich mosaic of responses suggests that, just as in the 'modern', we look to the interface of local custom and larger symbol systems for many of the issues raised in 'modern' studies: agency, hegemony, subject-formation, identity, and legitimation.[5]

LINES OF RESEARCH

Let me suggest a few lines of research that might follow from our analysis of *khil'at*. First, it seems clear that we need to drop the simple categories of élite and subaltern for the pre-modern period in South Asia and accept the documented evidence that the élites were 'porous' at the bottom to groups, families, and individuals. Second, we need to shift our focus from normative texts and peaceful conditions to war. Military service was the commonest entrepreneurial activity of pre-modern South Asia. From successful military service came whole new castes—Marathas and Rajputs. From successful leadership in war came wholesale shifts in status. We need only think of Shivaji's move from general to ruler. I believe that *khil'at* was central to this process. It could be scaled up or down to recognize individuals or groups and did not require or even suggest religious conversion. It operated at the interface of local custom and a larger symbol system. It made the receiver both suitable for court and could raise his status in the eyes of followers.

Third, the *khil'at* ceremony suggests a fresh approach to the general process of religious 'conversion'. We might view the practice of conversion as less about a profession of beliefs than a gradually closer or more important relation to a whole constellation of symbols, objects, and ceremonies, not all of them overtly 'religious'. Here I am

following Richard Eaton and his analysis of an Islamicate world.[6] *Khil'at* was one of the core ceremonies that connected that world to others, especially local practice in courts across South Asia.

Finally, I would recommend that the sort of analysis used here for *khil'at* be broadened to include other kingly symbols found in South Asia. I believe that the reason that *khil'at* and many other kingly symbols and ceremonies have been little studied is that one can only approach them through practice. These symbols and ceremonies have no text, handbooks, or Brahmanic accounts. By the pervasive privileging of text over practice in the study of kingship, scholars have missed how rule actually worked. If we look, for example, at the symbolism associated with Rajput, Maratha, or Mughal, we find an eclectic mix of symbols of diverse origins. We need to be aware of agency among many more actors in the system than just the king and see adoption of any symbol or ceremony as historically bound, politically motivated, and contested. We need to analyse through practice rather than only normative texts or theory.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. An example of this type of robe is Buyid *khil'at*. Object no. 3.116, *The Textile Museum*, Washington, DC. This magnificent blue robe (c. 1000) is decorated with two gold-embroidered inscriptions in elegant, elongated Kufic script. The larger directs 'glory and prosperity' to a sultan, 'may his life be long'. The smaller inscription reads 'for the use of Abu Sa'id, Zandanfarruk ibn Azadmard, the Treasurer'. Of the Buyid textiles that surfaced in the 1920s and 1930s, virtually all have been challenged as later productions or outright fakes—except this piece. Published in Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Arts* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), fig. 119.

2. See *Tarif-I-IHusain Shah Badshah Dakhan by Aftabi*, ed. and trans. by G. T. Kulkarni and M. S. Mate (Pune: Bharata Itihasa Samshodaka Mandala, 1987).

3. See Phillip P. Wagoner, 'Sultan Among Hindu Kings': Dress, Titles, and Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55, no. 4, 856–61. Wagoner discusses the Islamic attitude toward covering the body and indigenous south Indian expectations of the more 'revealed' body (see Ibn Battuta's condemnation of uncovered women in Gibb, IV, pp. 966–7.) Robing was one compromise Vijayanagara élites adopted to enter the larger Islamicate world. My only reservation with Wagoner's analysis is calling the larger world 'Islamicate'. This would depend on one's position in the larger political system. The robing world was far larger than the Islamicate world. The emperor of Constantinople would certainly not have thought of his robing as 'Islamicate', nor would, for example, the Armenian receivers of his

robes. Even in India, to label the system 'Islamicate' implies that there was a stable culture one can compare with a stable 'Indic' culture. Conversely, I see 'Islamicate' culture as a rapidly changing mix of influences from Central Asian nomadic war band life, Persia, Rajputs, and other local peoples in service. We need new words for these phenomena. Though Islamicate is an improvement over Islamic, it is still not the best terminology.

4. Gibb, IV, 825.

5. I find, for example, Joanne P. Waghorne, *The Raja's Magic Clothes: Revisioning Kingship and Divinity in England's India* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) wonderfully insightful for the Victorian period, but lacking awareness of the same issues in the pre-colonial period. Rulers may have been wearing Mughal dress for the same reasons that they later wore European suits.

6. Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

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