II From Mughal to British
‘Encounters and Calamities’: The History of a North Indian Qasba in the Nineteenth Century.¹

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The Sources

The history of colonial India has generally been written on the basis of British official records for the simple reason that non-official sources are neither quite so abundant nor as easily accessible. This is especially true for the period up to the end of the nineteenth century, i.e. before organizations like the Indian National Congress had emerged and the memoirs of leaders, as well as newspapers and journals in Indian languages and in English, became available in some number. This paper seeks to re-examine a small part of this earlier colonial history in the light of a local historical account, or more precisely a chronicle of events entitled Wāqeāt-ō-Hādesāt: Qasba Mubarakpur, written in the 1880s and preserved in an Urdu manuscript in the qasba of Mubarakpur in the district of Azamgarh,

¹ I am deeply indebted to Qazi Atahar of Muhalla Haidarabad, Mubarakpur, who allowed me to use Sheikh Mohammad Ali Hasan’s manuscript history, Wāqeāt-ō-Hādesāt: Qasba Mubarakpur (which is maintained in Qazi Atahar’s personal library), spent several days translating this and two other valuable documents (referred to in notes 47 and 58 below) that he had traced in the course of his own researches, and helped in many other ways with his intimate knowledge of the area. I owe thanks also to Maulvi Kamruzzaman, Babu Saroj Agrawal and others in Mubarakpur who were unstinting with their time in answering my questions and showing me around.

‘Wāqeāt-ō-Hādesāt’: according to Platts’ Classical Urdu Dictionary, Wāqeāt = ‘events, occurrences; accidents; grievous calamities, battles; conflicts; casualties; deaths’; Hādesāt = ‘new things; accidents; incidents; events; occurrences; adventures; casualties; mishaps; misfortunes; disasters; calamities; afflictions’. ‘Events’ and ‘occurrences’ would cover both these terms but I have translated them as ‘Encounters and Calamities’ in the title of this paper as this seems to me to convey somewhat better the rhetoric and the sense of Ali Hasan’s title.
eastern UP. I hope through this re-examination to say something about the way in which the people of Mubarakpur perceived the formidable developments of the period, something of how they read their history.

In the past it has generally been the anthropologist rather than the historian who has undertaken this kind of task, and several distinguished anthropologists have written about the experience of small towns and cities under colonialism. As we shall see, some of their observations and conclusions are not entirely inappropriate to the history which is the subject of this paper. Mubarakpur was a major textile centre in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries specializing in the production of silk and mixed silk-and-cotton fabrics known as sangi and ghalata, and dependent to a large extent on the patronage of the courts and the nobility of Awadh, Nepal and other places. The establishment and consolidation of a centralized colonial power, the representative of a powerful manufacturing nation, entailed considerable dislocation in Mubarakpur and its environs. The cloth trade was seriously affected, though it survived better here than in many other textile centres of the region. The rules under which land was held were altered and—with their rent-free lands being reduced, other lands fragmented and sub-divided or sold under the pressure of heavy taxation and increased dependence on cash, credit and markets—many like the Sheikh Muslim zamindars of Mubarakpur and neighbouring areas came under severe pressure. Professional moneylenders and traders apparently entered a period of increased prosperity at the turn of the nineteenth century but did not make such headway as to overthrow the existing relations of power in the qasba of Mubarakpur or the countryside around. In Mubarakpur there were other colonial innovations, among them the establishment of a police outpost, an Imperial Post Office and Middle School. Nevertheless, while the power of the panchayat and the zamindars was much reduced, these remained the major court of appeal for most local disputes; and most of those who studied still obtained a traditional religious education.

This paper was completed before I was able to see C. A. Bayly's 'The Small Town and Islamic Gentry in North India: The Case of Kara' in K. Ballhatchet and J. Harrison (eds.), The City in South Asia (London, 1980) or the same author's Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770–1870 (Cambridge, 1983). Bayly's excellent account of the small town 'gentry' under pressure, based on local non-official as well as official sources, is not however directly concerned with consciousness and the perceptions of change that are central to this essay.
The ‘advance towards vagueness’ that Geertz writes about for Modjokuto in east central Java\(^3\) might be a suggestive description of the nineteenth-century history of Mubarakpur too. The ‘uncertainty’, the ‘sense of disequilibrium and disorientation’ that he and others find among the population of such towns by the end of the colonial period\(^4\) is however scarcely a satisfactory indication of the local people’s perceptions and responses, or of their will to live with dignity, to carve out and preserve for themselves areas of independence and honour.

The problem remains one of finding sources adequate to our purpose. In the case of Mubarakpur, while the official colonial records provide us with a particular élite perception (necessarily biased in a certain way), what the Wāqeāt-ō-Hādesāt provides is an alternative élite perception, closer to the ground to be sure but not the less one-sided for that. Sheikh Mohammad Ali Hasan, its author, was a member of a local Muslim zamindari family. He wrote the chronicle at an advanced age, within a few years of his death in 1888. And the Wāqeāt, without ever referring to the wider politics of the emerging public associations (Muslim or other), mirrors several of the contemporary concerns and attitudes of élite Muslim groups in many different parts of northern India—of men who were in many cases from a zamindari background similar to Ali Hasan’s who felt their position in political and economic affairs, as well as important areas of their erstwhile cultural domination, threatened.

We have nothing comparable to the Wāqeāt that emanates from the lower classes of Mubarakpur. Yet we are allowed glimpses of how the ordinary labouring people of the qasba spoke and acted—both in the official record relating to a succession of violent outbreaks in the nineteenth century and in Ali Hasan’s detailed narration of these and other events. I have been fortunate enough also to gain access to two sketchy but valuable documents that come from the weavers of Mubarakpur: one a petition drawn up by the leaders of the weaving community to try and clear themselves from blame for the violent outbreak of 1813; the other the occasional ‘notes’ (or diary) of a weaver that dates from the end of our period.

In what follows I first summarize some of the basic information


regarding numbers, occupations and class differences among the people of Mubarakpur in the nineteenth century, and then set out side by side the alternative versions of the history of the qasba as it appears in the official accounts and Ali Hasan’s chronicle. I then use the evidence that can be drawn out of these histories and the weavers’ own isolated statements to make a few comments regarding subaltern consciousness in nineteenth-century Mubarakpur.

The Qasba

The most important elements in the population of Mubarakpur were the zamindars, the weavers and the trader-moneylenders. There was also a sizeable body of cultivating tenants and labourers as well as men and women belonging to various other service groups. In 1813 the population was estimated at between 10,000 and 12,000. Of these 3,000 were supposed to be ‘weavers of the Mussulman cast [sic]’, i.e. Julahas, while some were wealthy Hindu traders. In 1881, according to the census of that year, the population was 13,157 (9,066 Muslims and 4,091 Hindus). Among ‘actual workers’ the principal groups were 143 ‘landholders’; 560 ‘cultivators and tenants’; 1,877 weavers; 43 halwas (makers and sellers of Indian sweets); 49 pansaris (condiment sellers); 254 ‘general labourers’ and 44 ‘beggars’. By 1901 the population had risen to 15,433 inhabitants—11,442 of them Muslims and the remaining 3,991 Hindus.

The zamindars were the ‘leaders’ of the qasba in historical memory—since their ancestors had re-established the place in the eighteenth century and presumably induced weavers, traders and other groups to come and settle there—and by virtue of their


7 D. L. Drake-Brockman, Azamgarh: A Gazetteer, being Vol. XXXIII of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Allahabad, 1911), notes that little is known of the early history of Mubarakpur. It was said to have been called Qasimabad earlier and to have fallen into decay before it was resettled under the name of Mubarakpur in the eighteenth century (pp. 260–1). For the way in which Maunath Bhanjan and Kopaganj, the other major weaving towns of Azamgarh district, were established and fostered, see my ‘Economic Dislocation in Nineteenth-Century Eastern U.P.: Some Implications of the Decline of Artisanal Industry in Colonial India’ (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, ‘Occasional Paper’ No. 37, May 1981), pp. 15 & 34.
recognition as revenue-payers and local ‘representatives’ by the colonial authorities. They received a small kargabi for every working loom (kargah) in the qasba, said to be no more than a few annas in the 1830s but ‘highly prized by the Zemindars and cheerfully paid by the weavers’. They also collected certain feudal dues from the local traders and merchants of various castes as well as other dues and services from the weavers and members of other artisanal and service castes. For ‘agriculturists’ what the Settlement Officer, J. R. Reid, wrote for the district as a whole in 1877 applied to Mubarakpur as well. High-caste tenants, both resident and non-resident—and of these there were few in Mubarakpur—paid a fixed rent in cash or grain; and non-resident low-caste tenants did the same. But resident low-castes called parjas (praja = subjects) rendered to the landlord ‘a number of petty dues and services besides rent, and . . . look[ed] upon him as a feudal superior’. In villages, or qasbas such as Mubarakpur with several proprietors, the parjas were generally distributed among them, but the distribution was not necessarily proportionate to the land held. ‘A parja allotted to a sharer remains solely his, though the man cultivate[s] land under another sharer, and even though he cease[s] to cultivate land under his superior. The sale and mortgage of parjas—that is, of the dues and services they render—is not unknown’.  

By this time however the Sheikh zamindars of Mubarakpur held ‘only a few villages’ and were said to be ‘in difficulties’. That there were as many as 143 ‘landholders’ listed among the inhabitants of Mubarakpur, and others living in neighbouring Sikhthi and Amlo also held parts of the qasba, indicates the extent of the sub-division of zamindaris. There is evidence too from early in the century of the impoverished state of several of these zamindars. Thus Rikhai Sahu, ‘a Mahajan of considerable wealth’ who was killed in the course of a major clash between Hindus and Muslims in April 1813, was reckoned to be ‘the chief person’ residing in the qasba; and we know that at least two of the zamindars of Mubarakpur were in debt to him. Also


* Ibid., p. 70.
prominent in the events of April 1813 (apparently instrumental in
drawing into the fight Hindu zamindars and their men from a wide
area around) was Devi Dube of Amlo—'second to (Rikhai Sahu) in
point of wealth and influence and more intimately connected with
the surrounding zamindars for his having the management of landed
property to a considerable extent in the neighbourhood'.

It was the traders and moneylenders who profited most in this
period from the cloth trade that was the very life blood of Mubarakpur.
Eight or ten years before the outbreak of 1813, Rikhai Sahu had built
a grand thakurdwara outside the south-eastern limits of the qasba
which the Gorakhpur magistrate described after personal inspection
as 'a beautiful building ornamented with marble images, adorned
with gold and silver ornaments'. 'Such a magnificent building was
not to be found anywhere else in Azamgarh', Ali Hasan records in his
chronicle of events in qasba Mubarakpur. Family tradition has it
that under the headship of Babu Ramdas, and therefore probably not
long after the events of 1813, the family had a grand rangmahal
constructed at Ayodhya for use by any relatives who went there on
pilgrimage. Again, Bicchuk Kalwar, who was one of the principal
targets of attack in another major outbreak of violence in 1842, had 'by
great care, pecuniouness, and usury raised himself to be a dabbler in
Mahajunee' and built for himself a 'fine, delicate' two-storied house
not long before that event. According to the officials who undertook a
detailed enquiry in the qasba following this outbreak, Bicchuk was 'a
hard unrelenting creditor' who had 'several of the reckless and proflig-
gate Mussulman weavers of Mubarakpur' in his debt.

That 'recklessness' and 'profligacy' alone were not responsible for
this state of affairs is however made abundantly clear by other
evidence. In 1881–2 there were 65 karkhanas (or firms) employing a
total of 315 artisans for the manufacture of silk and satinette in
Mubarakpur and the neighbouring (and far smaller) weaving centre
of Khaibarabad. Together with another 2,168 artisans who worked
'independently', these weavers produced sangi and ghalta valued at
approximately Rs 3.5 lakhs per annum.

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of 17 Dec. 1813, para 3.
14 Interview with Babu Saroj Agrawal of Mubarakpur.
March 1842.
16 Report on the Railway-borne Traffic of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh
during the year ending 31 March 1882 (Allahabad, 1883), p. 37.
Yet, as was reported for the most important silk-weaving centre of this area, Banaras, the weavers were bound down by 'hopeless indebtedness to the firms who employ them, and their remuneration depends as little on the demand which may exist for their goods as if their condition was one of actual slavery'. 'Even those [who are] styled independent for want of a better word are in reality in the hands of mahajans, who advance them what is necessary for the support of life and absorb all the profits of their labour'. In Banaras a man who produced in one month a brocade worth Rs 200 was paid a pittance of 2 annas (1/8 of a rupee per day). In Mubarakpur and Khairabad, we are told, 'the jilabas . . . are miserably poor, but the master weavers are some of them very well off. Three of them are landholders and own indigo factories'.

Such are some of the bare facts of 'economic' relations as they existed among the principal groups of inhabitants in nineteenth-century Mubarakpur. It remains to say a word about the relations of the qasba with the towns and countryside around. There is evidence of prolonged zamindari quarrels for control of land and power in this region during the eighteenth century. This contest appears to have been accentuated by the uncertain conditions produced by the end of nawabi rule, and the nineteenth century is replete with instances of tension and conflict between the zamindars of Mubarakpur and those of neighbouring villages and estates.

At the same time, in more everyday terms, Mubarakpur was like other qasbas something of a nodal point for the economy of the surrounding countryside. Milk and vegetable sellers brought their goods to sell here; a number of weavers came in to work from their homes in nearby villages; and of course the landholders, tenants and

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17 Loc. cit., and ibid., for year ending 31 March 1883, p. 37.
18 Loc. cit.
19 In the course of these struggles several of the local notables linked up with some of the greater powers beyond the district such as the Nawab of Awadh, the Raja of Banaras, and the Bangash Pathans who had at one stage extended their influence as far as Jaunpur. In an attempt to resolve the intrigues of men at a higher level the Nawab of Awadh settled the revenue of Azimgarh in 1764 with 'local farmers', among them Mir Fazl Ali of Muhammadabad. But following the Battle of Buxar, Azam Khan, the Raja of Azimgarh, appears to have regained favour at the court and his authority over the district. On his death in 1771 the district was put under a chakladar under whom it remained until 1801. See Drake-Brockman, Azimgarh Gazetteer, pp. 172-3; A. L. Srivastava, The First Two Nawabs of Oudh (Lucknow, 1933).
20 Several examples will be found in the discussion below. See also Thomason, Settlement of Chuklah Azimgurh (1837), pp. 130-1; Reid, Settlement of Azimgarh District 1877, pp. 70-1.
Mubarakpur and Azamgarh Road Links, circa 1850

Source: Selections of North Western Provinces Vol III P XII XII (Agra, 1855)
Artois XII: On the Roads in the Azamgarh District
(Minutes, E.A. Roads, Commissioners-Si Division Amur 6 Dec 1851)
cultivators of the place held and worked a certain amount of land outside Mubarakpur. But in the vicinity there were other centres that vied for this position of leadership as meeting-place and reference-point.

Six miles south-east of Mubarakpur stood the substantial qasba of Muhammadabad Gohna (or simply Muhammadabad), residence of pargana officers and a qazi under nawabi rule and headquarters of the pargana and tahsil of Muhammadabad under British administration (see map). Eight miles west of it was Azamgarh town, founded and nurtured by the important family of the rajas of Azamgarh since the seventeenth century, enjoying fairly good road communications at least from that time and further favoured when it was adopted as the headquarters of a British district from 1832.

Consequently Mubarakpur seems never to have been very important as a commercial or administrative centre. Whereas a bazaar or retail market for the sale of sundry commodities was held here twice a week in the later nineteenth century, Muhammadabad had a similar bazaar four times a week. Significantly too the list of ‘principal occupations’ for Muhammadabad at the beginning of the 1880s included ‘petty bankers and traders’ and ‘shopkeepers’ as well as ‘landowners’, ‘agriculturists’, weavers and other artisans. Recall that the first two groups were not numerous enough to be mentioned in the corresponding list of ‘principal occupations’ for Mubarakpur.\footnote{Fisher, Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of . . . Azamgarh, pp. 171, 176. I have some doubts about the accuracy of occupational details for Mubarakpur as found in this report but have unfortunately not managed to obtain the district census data for either 1881 or 1891. Nevertheless the general point made here remains valid, I think.} It is interesting to compare the above information with that regarding Maunath Bhanjan (or Mau), the other major cloth-producing centre of Azamgarh district in the nineteenth century. Mau, with a population that was only slightly larger than that of Mubarakpur in 1881 (14,945 against Mubarakpur’s 13,157), appears to have combined in itself the roles of Mubarakpur and Muhammadabad, and added a little more besides, since it was that much further from the district headquarters (see map). A bazaar was held here daily and the ‘principal occupations’ included: employment under the government or municipality; ‘ministers of the Hindu religion’; domestic servants; hackney-carriage keepers and drivers; palanquin keepers and bearers; ‘messengers’; landholders; cultivators and tenants; agricultural
labourers; carpenters; weavers; cloth merchants (bazzaz); tailors; shoe-makers and sellers; washermen; corn and flour dealers; general labourers; and beggars.\textsuperscript{22}

The accompanying map of road links in the mid-nineteenth century shows, too, the poor state of the long distance communications of Mubarakpur. This is one reason why Maharajganj on the Choti Sarju river, which lay some fifteen miles north-west of Azamgarh town and not far from the border of Awadh, had become the chief mart for cloths from Mubarakpur (as well as from Mau, Kopaganj and other places).

The nineteenth century brought important changes in communications, the direction of trade and Mubarakpur's general outlook on the world. The movement of traffic to and from Azamgarh seems always to have been northward towards the Ghaghra and southward towards the Ganga, not eastward and westward. This remained the case throughout the nineteenth century both for Azamgarh district as a whole and for the qasba of Mubarakpur. But soon after the uprising of 1857–9 the old road from Allahabad and Jaunpur through Azamgarh town and Jianpur to Dohrighat and (across the Ghaghra) to Gorakhpur was metalled. So was the road linking Dohrighat with Mau and Ghazipur. Within the next couple of decades metalled roads were also developed to connect Azamgarh town directly with Ghazipur and Banaras, and (through Muhammadabad) with Mau on the east. By the end of the century a branch railway line had also been laid to connect Azamgarh and Muhammadabad with Mau, from where a section of the Bengal and North-Western Railway ran to Banaras.

The opening up of the interior and the growing influx of mill-cloth from Britain led also to a reversal in the direction of the cloth trade. In the later nineteenth century the East Indian and Oudh and Rohilkhand railways, fed by the improved roads, became the main passages out of Azamgarh district for sugar exports to the south and west and indigo exports to the east, and into it for imports of not only raw cotton and grain but cloth, metal and 'other manufactured wares'.\textsuperscript{23} After the artificial 'boom' in exports created by the East India Company's 'investments' at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the balance of trade in quality cloth had soon turned against the district. The weaving industry of Mubarakpur survived rather better than that of the other neighbouring textile centres: 'In silk fabrics, especially of

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 169.
\textsuperscript{23} Reid, Settlement 1877, p. 23.
the mixed kind manufactures in this district’, one official observed, ‘there is a peculiar adaptation to local conditions and prejudices, which enables the industry to hold its own, or at least to decline less slowly than it would otherwise have done’.24 Thus the exports of sangi and ghalta (along with some cottons from Mau and Kopaganj) continued.25 But the scale was much reduced, the increasing competition for raw material and its cost tended to increase dependence on moneylenders and other intermediaries; and the trade depression of the 1870s to 1890s dealt yet another crippling blow to the local industry, compelling many of the weavers of Mubarakpur to shift to the weaving of cotton handkerchiefs and turbans which were now ‘more in demand than satins’.26

By the end of the century the chief exports of Azamgarh were refined sugar and oilseeds (and, one might add, labour in the form of migrants to the industrial belt of eastern India and colonial plantations overseas): ‘with the money obtained therefrom, and from their relatives abroad, the inhabitants meet their revenue and the cost of their litigation, and pay for the cloth, metal goods and foodgrains they have to import’.27 The situation of Mubarakpur was in essentials the same. By this time, it would be fair to say, Mubarakpur faced not, as it had done at the start of our period, north and west to Maharajganj, Nepal and the kingdom of Awadh, but south—to the road and the railway that linked the qasba with the district headquarters and with Ghazipur, Banaras and faraway Calcutta. What bearing all this had on power relations within the qasba and the consciousness of its people is a theme that should emerge out of the ‘histories’ that have been handed down to us.

**Two ‘Histories’**

If one draws up a chronology of events in nineteenth-century Mubarakpur from the official records and from Ali Hasan’s Wāqeāt,


25 Ibid., 170; Fisher, Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of Azamgarh, p. 124.

26 Drake-Brockman, *Azamgarh Gazetteer*, p. 262. See also Gorakhpur Commissioner’s Record Room, Dept. XIII, File 40/1905–9, ‘Rules for the relief of distressed weavers’ that became necessary (as the Chief Secretary to the Government put it in a circular to District Officers on 28 Jan. 1908) ‘owing to scarcity and high prices having rendered it difficult, and in some cases impossible for them [the weavers] to find a market for their manufactured goods’.

one obtains very different results. I set out these chronologies in the
table below, placing Ali Hasan’s more detailed list of events on the
left (see Table 1).

I have omitted from the right-hand column some purely admin-
istrative ‘Events’ such as the establishment of a Police Station in 1813
or its reduction to a smaller police outpost later on, and included in
both columns certain ‘Non-Events’ or ‘Near Events’ (N) that were
recorded by the respective sources as being of significance for one
reason or another. It is plain that what makes an Event in the official
reckoning is a marked positive or negative correlation with the
question of ‘law and order’. Everything in this account is dated from
the ‘accession’ of 1801, which allegedly divides darkness from light,
the days of ‘order’ and ‘improvement’ from the previous regime of
‘anarchy’ and ‘misrule’. 1857 is a notable Non-Event, for in this
dangerous moment when ‘order’, ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’ were
threatened all over northern India, Mubarakpur remained peaceful.
Horne, the Magistrate of Azamgarh, reported in September 1857
that the Muhammadabad tahsil was the ‘best’ in the district, with
‘crime’ low and roads safe. It was a matter for self-congratulation as
‘there is great distress at present in Mubarakpur and Mhow, in each
of which places there are about 5,000 Julahas, who have lost all their
capital by the robbery of their stocks of manufactured goods, which
had been sent out for sale at the time of the outbreak’. Moreover
‘these people are generally very turbulent’. On this occasion however
they had been ‘excellently kept in order by the tehseldar Mahomed
Tukee, who deserves great credit every way’.

Almost all the other entries in the official chronology relate to
outbreaks or threatened outbreaks of violence over the desecration of
religious symbols—proof in this view of the essential irrationality
and fanaticism of the local people, ingredients that would ensure a
return to anarchy if ever the controlling hand of the colonial power
were to be withdrawn. Often there is a harking back to 1813, the year
of ‘the great disturbances’ in Mubarakpur when ‘disorder reigned for
several days unchecked’. Or as the Azamgarh District Gazetteer of
1911 put it in a classic summary of the history of Mubarakpur since
‘accession’:

1835; ibid., Letter no. 96, Sessions Judge Azamgarh to Commissioner 5th Division,
29 May 1844.
TABLE 1: Chronology of Events in Mubarakpur in the Nineteenth Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Nature of Occurrence</th>
<th>Supposed Implications</th>
<th>According to the Official Records</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Late 1790s</td>
<td>Shia-Sunni riot.</td>
<td>Pro-Shia stance of local Nawabi officials.</td>
<td>1 1801 'Accession'. Establishment of direct British administration in Azamgarh and eastern UP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>1810 (1226 Hijri)</td>
<td>'Nakku Shahi'. Shia-Sunni quarrel; Nakku seriously wounded.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>Suicide of a Brahman.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>Cow killed, head placed on platform. Riot averted by local officials.</td>
<td>Greatness of British rule.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30 In this Table the words 'Supposed Implications' refer to inferences which are neither explicitly drawn or implied in the relevant records; 'N' stands for an occurrence or incident that is mentioned in the records but does not rank as a major 'Event'.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Nature of Occurrence</th>
<th>Supposed Implications</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Nature of Occurrence</th>
<th>Supposed Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>‘Katuwar Shahi’. Katuwar, a tailor, apprehended and killed during a burglary.</td>
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<td>VII</td>
<td>1832 (1247 H.)</td>
<td>‘Daka Zani’. Several dacoits apprehended and killed while attacking a money-lender's house.</td>
<td>Bravery of the townsfolk</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>‘Sukhlal Shahi’. Piglet killed and placed on Panj-i-Sharif. Sukhlal Singh, Hindu barkandaz wounded, succumbed to injuries.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Dead pig on Panj-i-Sharif. Hindu barkandaz who went to investigate received several sword-cuts.</td>
<td>Near breakdown of law and order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>1834–41</td>
<td>Successful tenure of Mirza Wali Beg as thanadar or Mubarakpur.</td>
<td></td>
<td>N1</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Dead pig on a chauk. Thanadar had it quickly removed.</td>
<td>Near breakdown of law and order.</td>
</tr>
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<td>IX</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>'Bicchuk Shahi'. Clash between Muslims and Hindu moneylenders. Several of the latter killed.</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>'Doma Shahi'. Quarrel between two teams of wrestlers. One killed. (1265 H.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>'Karima-Shahi'. Murder of a girl and theft of her jewellery.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>'Daka Zani'. Dacoits attacked a moneylender's house. Chased away by townsfolk. (1266 H.)</td>
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<td>Solidarity and bravery of the townsfolk.</td>
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<td>XIII</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>'Tilanga Shahi'. Suicide of a sepoy carried away by his grief while participating in the lamentations at Muharram.</td>
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(Table 1 continued)

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<th>Event</th>
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<th>Nature of Occurrence</th>
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<td>XIV</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>'Baqridu Shahi'.</td>
<td>Baqridu killed in a</td>
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<td>(1267 H.)</td>
<td>Baqridu killed in a game of kabaddi.</td>
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<td>XV</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>'Amanullah Shahi'.</td>
<td>Amanullah, kajam,</td>
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<td>XVI</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>'Faqruddin Shahi'.</td>
<td>Faqruddin killed a pig</td>
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<td>and placed its</td>
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<td>carcass on the</td>
<td>nearly causing a riot.</td>
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<td>XVII</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Mubarakpur</td>
<td>Renowned bravery of</td>
<td>N2</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>No disturbance,</td>
<td>Near breakdown of</td>
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<td>threatened repeatedly</td>
<td>townsfolk. Courageous</td>
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<td>by the rebels, but</td>
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<td>any attack.</td>
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<td>XVIII</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>'Manohar Shahi'. Prolonged dispute over Manohar Das Agrawal's building of a temple inside the qasba.</td>
<td>Qasba tradition defended.</td>
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<td>N3</td>
<td>1860–80s</td>
<td>Repair and extension of Jama Masjid, Imambara, etc. through contributions of all castes and communities.</td>
<td>Qasba tradition honoured.</td>
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| 5  | 1860 | Introduction of local administration under Act XX of 1856. Local revenue to pay for police and 'improvement'. |
| 6  | 1893–4 | 'Religious disturbances'. |
| 7  | 1904 | Riot. |

|  |  | Extension of local self-government and works of 'improvement'. |
|  |  | Religious fanaticism. Breakdown of law and order. |
|  |  | Religious fanaticism. Breakdown of law and order. |
The Muhammadans [of Mubarakpur] consist for the most part of fanatical and clannish Julahas, and the fire of religious animosity between them and the Hindus of the town and neighbourhood is always smouldering. Serious conflicts have occurred between the two from time to time, notably in 1813, 1842 and 1904. The features of all these disturbances are similar, so that a description of what took place on the first occasion will suffice to indicate their character. In 1813 a petty dispute about the inclosing within the grounds of a Hindu temple of a little piece of land near a Muhammadan takia platform was followed first by the slaughter on the spot of a cow by the Muhammadans and then by the defiling of the platform and of a neighbouring imambara with pig’s blood by the Hindus. The Muhammadans retaliated by cruelly murdering a wealthy Hindu merchant of the place name Rikhai Sahu, by plundering and burning his house and by defacing a handsome temple which he had erected. Hereupon the whole Hindu population of the vicinity rose and a sanguinary battle ensued in which the Muhammadans were overpowered after many had been killed and wounded on both sides. The inhabitants of the town fled and the place was given up to plunder for some days till a magistrate arrived with troops from Gorakhpur and restored order. Similar disturbances occurred in 1893–94 and punitive police were quartered on the town for several months.\textsuperscript{31}

The power of auto-suggestion displayed here is truly remarkable. Consider the writer’s statements on the ‘disturbances of 1893–94’. 1893 was a year of widespread strife between groups of Hindus and Muslims, when the agitation for cow protection led to violent demonstrations and clashes in many places in Azamgarh and other districts of this region.\textsuperscript{32} Nowhere in the detailed official records relating to these events, however, or in contemporary newspapers is it reported that Mubarakpur was involved in these outbreaks. Nor is the qasba included in the list of villages and towns upon which a punitive police force was imposed in their wake. But riots had occurred at numerous spots in Banaras and Ghazipur, Shahabad and Ballia, not to mention Mau and Kopa, Azmatgarh and a host of other places close to Mubarakpur. And in Mubarakpur itself, as the compiler of the District Gazetteer saw it, ‘the fire of religious animosity’ between Muslims and Hindus was ‘always smouldering’. There were serious conflicts between them in 1813, 1842 and 1904: or ‘from time to time’ in his phrase. So the ‘disturbances of 1893–94’ which were not mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph on the history of

\textsuperscript{31} Drake-Brockman, \textit{Azamgarh Gazetteer}, pp. 260–1.

\textsuperscript{32} For an account of these, see my ‘Rallying Round the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpur Region, c. 1888–1917’, in R. Guha (ed.), \textit{Subaltern Studies II} (Delhi, 1983).
Mubarakpur had become a major Event by the end of it, 'and punitive police were quartered on the town for several months'.

Ali Hasan's Wāqeât-ō-Hādesât gives us a very different 'history'. First, it contains no reference to the 'accession' of 1801, that favourite date of colonial administrators of the region. There is a statement, in the discussion on Event II, that the British power was already installed. But in this narrative the Great Event, the turning-point, is Event III—the 'Rikhai Shahi' of 1813. 'British rule' it would seem was established only when an English magistrate and troops first arrived in Mubarakpur after the outbreak of violence in April that year. It was in 1813 we are told, after the 'riot', that a thana was established in Mubarakpur and courts in Azamgarh—though the latter suggestion is clearly incorrect for it was only in 1820 that a Deputy Magistracy under the Jaunpur collectorate was established at Azamgarh, and Muhammadabad pargana (which contained Mubarakpur) was then part of Ghazipur district.

This difference in perspective is not attributable simply to the inevitable distance that separates a local from a wider—regional, national or colonial—view. If 1801 was the beginning of a new era in colonialist reckoning for obvious reasons, 1813 was for equally good reasons a watershed in the eyes of the people of Mubarakpur which became a point of reference for a long time afterwards. This was not however—as officials would have it—because of the 'delightful license' to plunder that 1813 had provided. (Otherwise 1857 would have been welcomed as another great opportunity for this pastime: on the contrary, the people of Mubarakpur prepared for battle to defend the qasba's moneylenders when these were threatened by rebels in the vicinity). What 1813 stood for locally was a dreadful calamity—such a blood-bath, writes Ali Hasan, that 'God save every Musalman from such a fate' (Wāqeât-ō-Hādesât, p. 18)—and what people feared was the repetition of such a massacre. So in N1 (see Table 1) the thanadar Mirza Karam Ali Beg promised that what had happened in the 'Rikhai Shahi' would not happen again (Wāqeât, p. 22). Or more strikingly in Event VII, the armed dacoity of 1832, Muslim

Yet the District Gazetteers compiled by the British are relied upon heavily by most writers on the political history of colonial India. And the argument is still readily put forward that 'the interpretation may be biased, but the facts are correct'.

Wāqeât-ō-Hādesât, p. 20.


youth like Fateh and his comrades moved to the defence of Babu Ramdas, mahajan, with some slight hesitation because the dacoits were Hindus (mainly Rajputs) and the youths did not want to arouse Hindu fears of another ‘Muslim’ attack upon Hindus (Wāqeāt, p. 30). It is noteworthy too that Ali Hasan undertook to write this history, as he tells us in a prefatory statement, one day in the early 1880s when conversation turned to the bloodshed of 1813 and someone remarked that such a holocaust had never occurred before or since (Wāqeāt, p. 1).

The difference between the colonialist outlook and that of the Wāqeāt is revealed very clearly indeed in the criterion employed for the selection of Events. If it is the question of ‘law and order’, its consolidation, its breakdown or its being endangered, that made an Event in the colonialist reckoning, it seems to have been ‘unnatural death’ that did so in Ali Hasan’s. Thirteen of the eighteen Events recorded in the Wāqeāt—all except II, XII, XVI, XVII and XVIII (see Table 1)—involved the violent death of one or more persons killed in the course of quarrels, riots, dacoities and, in two cases (IV and XIII), through suicide. Of the remaining five Events too, two involved casualties. In the ‘Nakku Shahi’, Event II, Nakku was badly beaten up and left for dead, though Ali Hasan tells us that he died a natural death shortly after the termination of the court case that arose out of this incident. (Wāqeāt, pp. 6–7). In Event XVII (1857) of course there was a considerable amount of violence and deaths all around; and the author takes care to note what he calls ‘the only death of the Mutiny period’ in Mubarakpur—that of a young lad called Magrooh, attacked one night as he was returning from the Katra bazaar by some constables from the local police outpost, possibly on account of a personal grudge (Wāqeāt, p. 73). The very title of Ali Hasan’s chronicle, Wāqeāt-ō-Hādesāt, with its suggestion of disasters and calamities, perhaps reflects this concern with violent, ‘unnatural’ occurrences and incidents, interruptions in the normal progress of the life of the qasba.

To put it differently and perhaps more fairly, what makes an Event in the eyes of the author of the Wāqeāt is its ‘public’ character—the fact that the qasba community as a whole was interested, involved in or affected by a particular happening. It is possible to say a little more about this collective, the ‘public’, for with all the attention to violence and death there are certain other principles of selection at work in the compilation of this ‘history’. The Wāqeāt is very clearly a Muslim
'Encounters and Calamities'

account. This perhaps is one reason why N1 in the Table above, an incident in which a cow was killed and its head placed on a chaum, and an explosive situation developed, is mentioned but not given the status of an independent Event, whereas No. XVI which is very similar—a piglet being killed and placed on the Jama Masjid, and tension mounting—is discussed as a major Event, the ‘Faqruddin Shahi’. The nature of the discussion of this Event is even more revealing. Ali Hasan begins by saying that now he has to write about a great outrage, an insult to Muslims, perpetrated by a Muslim (Faqruddin): ‘but since the wāqeāt [occurrences, misfortunes] of the qasba are being related, it is necessary to include this incident too’ (Wāqeāt, p. 56). ‘Faqruddin’ means ‘the pride of religion’, but this man should have been called ‘Faqrushiheyatin’—‘the pride of the shaitans (devils)’, for he betrayed his religion by this base deed in the hope of profiting from the plunder that might follow. Fortunately such a calamity was averted. Faqruddin was discovered to have been the rogue responsible for the act, arrested and sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment. On his return he was not accepted back into the community, for he was ‘zalil-o-khar’ (base and disagreeable).37 He was still alive when Ali Hasan wrote, had become a faqir, wandered from village to village and was known as Pakhurdia badmaash. (Wāqeāt, p.60).

Equally significant is the choice of other Non-Events (N2 and N3) that are included in the record, and of the remaining Event that was unaccompanied by unnatural death or grievous injury—the ‘Manohar Shahi’ of 1877 (Event XVIII). N2 refers to Mirza Wali Beg’s ‘memorable’ tenure as thanadar of Mubarakpur. What made it memorable, we learn from the brief entry, was that Wali Beg, a Shia, called excellent marsia readers to participate in the Muharram celebrations in the qasba: this was something that people still remarked upon forty years later when Ali Hasan wrote (Wāqeāt, p. 35).38 N3 relates to the repair of the mazār of Raja Mubarak Shah, a Sufi saint of the eighteenth century after whom Mubarakpur was named, and the

37 According to Ali Hasan a similar punishment was meted out to those Muslims who gave evidence against Muslims involved in the attack on Hindu moneylenders and the temple in 1842. They were thrown out of the community and not re-accepted even after two of them had performed the haj to Mecca: ‘lekin yah daag hamesha ke liye raha aur tamam Musalmanon men hamesha zalil-o-khar rabe’: Wāqeāt-6-Hādesāt, pp. 45.

38 For the central place of the Muharram celebrations in the life of other such habitations, see Rahi Masoom Raza, Aadha Gaon (Delhi, 1966), passim.
repair and extension of the Jama Masjid and Imambarah that were built adjacent to it, tasks that had gone on for twenty years and more from 1866–7 until the last pages of the Wāqeāt came to be written. And Event XVIII (which does not find place in the colonial ‘history’) was a long drawn out dispute that arose when Manohar Das, mahajan, challenged a long established custom by building a shrīvalaya (temple) within the limits of the qasba.

The last two entries lead us on to a rather different perspective. The Wāqeāt is the work of a Muslim who is steeped in and deeply concerned about the traditions of an isolated qasba, settled in the eighteenth century by Sheikh Muslim zamindars and made prosperous by the patronage of the nawabs of Awadh and other contemporary rulers. ‘Mubarakpur’, rather than ‘British rule’ or even the ‘Muslim community’, emerges as the real hero of this story. There is striking testimony to this in Ali Hasan’s discussion of the defence of the qasba’s Hindu moneylenders on different occasions when they were attacked by dacoits (Events VII and XII and again in 1857, Event XVII).

When the ‘Daka Zani’ of 1832 (Event VII) occurred a large number of townsfolk turned out as the cry went up for help from the house of Babu Ramdas, mahajan: such a crowd congregated that ‘it was difficult to find standing space’ inside or around the house. The dacoit gang was surrounded, engaged in battle and a number of its members killed. Later on, Ali Hasan tells us, a wounded dacoit who was arrested told the magistrate of the district that the gang included such renowned and dreaded dacoits as Bagi Singh and Chatar Singh, that they had attacked and looted all sorts of places before, including the government treasury, but no one had stood up to them until they encountered the ‘warlike’ (jangī) men of Mubarakpur (Wāqeāt, pp. 30–2).

In 1857 Rajab Ali, the rebel landowner of village Bamhur a couple of miles south-west of Mubarakpur, announced his intention of plundering the mahajans of the qasba in a letter addressed to Sheikh Gada Husain, zamindar, and Baksh Mehtar, ‘sardar nurbaft’, the head of the weavers. ‘Everyone’ in Mubarakpur was enraged, writes Ali Hasan, and after consultations Gada Husain threw back the challenge to Rajab Ali with the warning that if the rebels tried to enter Mubarakpur to loot the mahajans they would have to bear all the consequences. ‘Do you think that the inhabitants of Mubarakpur are dead that you have made this decision [to loot the mahajans]? If ever
again such a threat [kalma, literally 'word'] escapes from your mouth, then you should prepare to defend your own village. Let us see who has the greater abilities in war' (Wāqeāt, p.63). And regarding a further message (possibly, a ruse) in which Rajab Ali expressed his desire to make offerings at the Panj-i-Sharif and Raja Sahib’s mazār in Mubarakpur, the ‘Mubarakpur people together’ wrote in reply that four or five persons could come unarmed and fulfil this wish for prayer. But if a larger number came or any were armed, then ‘tum apnon ko misl shirini-muaz ke tassawur karna (you can think of yourselves as sweets which will be distributed and eaten). We have 1,700 guns and 9 maunds of powder and shot ready for you’ (Wāqeāt, p. 64).

It is noteworthy too that Ali Hasan emphasizes that all castes and communities, Hindu as well as Muslim, contributed to the repair of Raja Mubarak Shah’s mazār and certain extensions of the Jama Masjid. We are told that the Hindu mahajans of Mubarakpur revered the memory of Raja Sahib and lit lamps and made offerings of sweets at his mazār every Thursday. But the poor state of the walls of the Jama Masjid, which lay in the same compound as the mazār, meant that ‘dogs and cats’ got to these offerings and put out the lamps. Sometime in 1866-7 (1281 H.) therefore Sheikh Gada Husain, a widely respected and influential zamindar, appealed to the mahajans to help in the repair of these walls. Ali Hasan records that the latter responded very generously indeed at that time and later on, so that ‘the entire wall along the length of the mazār was built through the donations of the Hindus’, and work estimated to take all of six months for repairing the walls and the floors, as well as for the construction of a washroom and excavation of a well adjacent to the mosque, was completed in four (Wāqeāt, pp. 86, 88).39

Ali Hasan’s description of the defence of the traditions of the qasba in the ‘Manohar Shahi’ of 1877—occurring as it did while the joint endeavours described above were still in progress—is again instructive. When it was discovered that Manohar Das had built a small shivalaya inside the compound of his house, anger flared up among the Muslims of Mubarakpur. It should be mentioned that there was already a history of such moneylender encroachment on the rights of the Muslims as embodied in the traditions of the place: in 1813, Angnu

39 For a similar corporate identity and pride in other Muslim qasbas in the region, and the role of the Sufis in their establishment, see Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, Ch. 9, esp pp. 366-7
(Aknu?) Kalwar had built a shivalaya inside the qasba and an attempted extension of its boundary was the immediate cause of the outbreak of violence on that occasion; in the years before the 1842 outbreak too there had been continuous friction between the mahajans and the Muslims after Bicchuk Kalwar and Babu Ramdas Agrawal had extended a wall onto the road and thus created an obstruction in the path of the tazias taken out in procession during the Muharram. Now in 1877 Sheikh Gada Husain and other Muslim leaders questioned Manohar Das over this new development and, receiving no satisfactory reply, reported the matter at the police station in Muhammadabad and to the Collector in Azamgarh. The latter came to Mubarakpur to make an on-the-spot enquiry along with another English official who was, by chance, already there and some of the exchanges that Ali Hasan reports as having taken place before them are of the utmost interest.

Manohar Das argued that he had built the temple within the compound of his own house and the zamindars had nothing to do with that area. He pointed out too that the Muslims of Mubarakpur built mosques and other places of worship wherever they liked without objection from any source; that no more than five or seven months ago Faqir Kunjra erected a masjid close to a place that was sacred to the Hindus and ‘we did not object’. Yet the Muslims wished to destroy the small shivalaya that he had built inside his own house: this was nothing but ‘a show of power and tyranny’. To this Muslim leaders replied that Faqir Kunjra had built his masjid with the permission of ‘us zamindars’: all the zamindars of Mubarakpur were Muslims, none Hindu—so ‘what right had the Hindus to object or allow?’ (Wāqeāt, pp. 77–8, 81–2).

Gada Husain put the rest of the case against Manohar Das’s new shivalaya as follows: Raja Mubarak was ‘the guiding light of his age’ and the founder of Mubarakpur. It was Raja Sahib’s ‘blessing’ that had maintained the prosperity of Mubarakpur, and it was his farman (injunction) that ‘when any person shall try to rise higher than me in this habitation [i.e. erect a building that rises higher than the height of Raja Sahib’s mazār], he and his line will be no more’. The qasba had many great and very wealthy mahajans and many rich Muslims as well, Gada Husain said. But because of Raja Sahib’s farman, ‘no one has a two-storied house’. Only once was this injunction defied, when

— See Pandey, ‘Rallying Round the Cow’ for an analysis of the circumstances leading to these outbreaks.
Angnu Sahu had a shivalaya built inside the town. He spent a great sum of money and all the Hindus of the town worshipped there. But, Gada Husain went on, the shivalaya lasted less than ten years. In the plunder, arson and bloodshed of 1813 which raged for nine days and nights, the building was destroyed and Angnu killed while his son ‘so lost his mind that he began to eat the food of the Musalmans, and perished in his madness. Now no one survives from that family’. (Wāqeāt, pp. 81–2). Ultimately the shivalaya was dismantled, but that is not the point of this digression.

What emerges from the evidence is a certain picture of the author of the Wāqeāt-ō-Hādesāt, or should we say the ‘authors’. For it is necessary to stress the unusual nature of this ‘history’, which appears very much in the form of a collective catalogue. Quite unlike the practice of the standard ‘histories’ we have become used to since colonial times, 41 there is no attempt here to authenticate the chronicle that is presented. The narrative, it appears, requires no ‘proof’. It is the inherited knowledge of the qasba, or at least those sections of it that for Ali Hasan represented the qasba. In the sole instance of direct authorial intervention found in the manuscript, which comes in the prefatory statement referred to above, it is stated that the idea of putting together this chronicle arose out of a conversation in the Middle School at Mubarakpur, when someone remarked that the bloodshed of 1813 had been unprecedented and unrepeated, and Gada Husain asked Ali Hasan to undertake this task as ‘a labour of love’ (Wāqeāt, p. 1). It is important to look at the construction of this narrative, then, not simply as the product of a single authorial voice, but rather to carefully consider its different constitutive aspects. For this reason it may help to dwell a little longer on the Wāqeāt’s perception of some of the wider changes that came with colonialism.

The Wāqeāt and the British

Where the Wāqeāt refers directly to these changes is in the area of administrative control, and here it appears at one level to share the perspective of the colonial authorities. The importance of having good local officials is stressed (see N1 and N2 in Table 1). There is implicit recognition of the strength of British rule: thus when writing of how groups of men from Sikhthi, a village adjoining Mubarakpur, joined in the plunder of 1857 the author remarks that they had not

stopped to consider what would happen to them afterwards (Waqeaat, p. 61).\textsuperscript{42} Again, Ali Hasan expresses much admiration for individual British officials—'Penny',\textsuperscript{43} who emerges as the hero of 1857–8, fighting bravely and successfully against very great odds, or Tucker, Officiating Magistrate at the time of the 1842 outbreak in Mubarakpur who was ‘a very worthy (capable) Englishman’ (Waqeaat, p. 36). We have indeed a formal acknowledgement of ‘the greatness of British rule’. In the incident listed as N1 above, when a cow’s head was placed on a chauk in the qasba, the thanadar, Mirza Karam Ali Beg apparently handled the situation with efficiency and tact. He assured the inhabitants that what had happened in the ‘Rikhai Shahi’ of 1813 would not happen again, that no one from the countryside would be allowed to invade Mubarakpur, and that they should not panic and flee. He also sent an urgent message to the District Magistrate, who came with a troop of sepoys and camped in the qasba for several days. Thus ‘a riot was averted’. ‘All this was the greatness of British rule’. (Waqeaat, pp. 22–3).

Yet in spite of this sympathy for the British and their administration, it is, as we observed in the last section, the differences in perception revealed by the two accounts that really stand out. We may obtain a better appreciation of this if we pursue some of the above points of similarity further. While Ali Hasan recognizes the importance of having fair-minded and experienced officials appointed by the state, he emphasizes also the wisdom and influence of local leaders which is recognized only obliquely in the colonial account. Writing about Event I, a clash between Shias and Sunnis in the qasba, he accuses the Nawab’s amil of favouring the Shias because he was, like the Nawab himself, a Shia. But Shahab Mehtar, the head of the Mubarakpur weavers, ‘wise and respected’, ‘the like of whom is not to be found in

\textsuperscript{42} What happened afterwards is described by Ali Hasan himself in the following words: ‘The people of Mubarakpur, especially the Nurbāf [weaving] community, on behalf of the Government and at the orders of both Penny Sahib and the Tahsildar of Muhammadabad’ took a prominent and profitable part in the loot of Sikhthi; Waqeaat, p.69. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{43} This name refers almost certainly to Mr Pennywell, Deputy Magistrate of Azamgarh in 1857, but Ali Hasan appears to have confused his story with that of the European indigo planter, E. F. Venables. It is the latter who appears as hero and saviour in British accounts of the Mutiny in Azamgarh and it was he—not ‘Penny’, as Ali Hasan believed—who was fatally wounded in an encounter with the forces of Kunwar Singh in April 1858; S. A. A. Rizvi (ed.), Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh, Source Material, Volume IV (Lucknow, 1959), pp. 5–6, 77, 85, 139–40, 466.
our times’, who had had to journey to Lucknow before the nawabi officials agreed to act at all, now saved the situation and restored amity between the sects (Wāqeāt, p. 5). At the time of Event II, another Shia-Sunni conflict, Shahab Mehtar ‘who was still alive’ again intervened, unravelled a complicated court case and obtained the release of the innocent men who had been arrested by the police of the Muhammadabad thana. (Wāqeāt, p. 7). In 1857–8, to take just one more instance, it was in Ali Hasan’s view the determination and foresight of the zamindars and sardars (leaders) of Mubarakpur that was responsible for the maintenance of peace in the qasba. In the British official’s view, we may recall, this achievement was credited to the tahsildar of Muhammadabad, Mohammad Taqi. If ‘Penny Sahib Bahadur’ had lived, Ali Hasan comments, the local zamindars and sardars would certainly have been rewarded and decorated (Wāqeāt, p. 73)—a notable example of the acceptance of colonial standards and colonial aspirations by the 1880s.

But that this was not always how the Muslims of Mubarakpur, or even their zamindars and leaders, had responded to the colonial power is amply demonstrated by local actions in the aftermath of the Hindu-Muslim fight of April 1813. Then the intervention of the colonial power had produced a quick closing of ranks and a display of considerable suspicion and hostility towards the new regime by both Hindus and Muslims of the region. Eight months after the ‘riot’ the Gorakhpur magistrate reported his failure to obtain the kind of evidence that was required in spite of the transfer of two sets of officials suspected of being insufficiently energetic in the pursuit of their enquiries. He felt that further delay in the commitment of the trial was pointless. In part this was because both sides, ‘having been guilty of great outrage’, were afraid to come forward. More significant however was his observation that ‘the parties have now mutually agreed to adjust their grievances’. Further:

The accounts existing between the Muhammadans and Hindoos which were destroyed by the fire or otherwise have been re-adjusted and new bonds and agreements have been entered into by the parties concerned, and I am of the opinion that a considerable quantity of property plundered must have been restored or that an understanding exists between the parties that it shall be when an opportunity offers . . .

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44 We may note in passing that the earliest detailed report on Mubarakpur to be found in the colonial records acknowledged the influence of Shahab Mehtar: See p. 258 below.

By the 1880s some of this had changed and the change is reflected in the pages of the Wajeet. A particular class of Muslims speaks to us here at (need I add?) a particular time: these are men from an impoverished zamindari background, acquainted with Arabic and Persian and Islamic theology, beginning to pick up elements of a ‘modern’ English education, having to reckon with the wealth of moneylender-traders and other ‘upstarts’, sometimes sharing a belief which was gaining ground in certain quarters that British power alone could defend their positions and their culture. Ali Hasan now emphasized the importance of ‘Muslim’ tradition and ‘Muslim’ unity, and with these the ‘benefits’ of British rule. He harked back to Shia-Sunni conflicts that are supposed to have plagued the qasba of Mubarakpur both before and immediately after the establishment of the colonial power (Events I and II). One wonders whether this does not have more to do with the Shia-Sunni and other sectarian differences that were coming to the fore in the later nineteenth century than with the state of affairs as it existed in the last years of nawabi administration.\footnote{For the later nineteenth century developments in Muslim public affairs, see F. Robinson, Separatism Among Indian Muslims. The Politics of the United Provinces Muslims, 1860–1923 (Cambridge, 1974), Chs. 2 and 3; R. Ahmed, The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906. A Quest for Identity (Delhi, 1981). The implications for the Muslim élite at the local level are spelt out in Bayly, ‘The Small Town and Islamic Gentry in North India’ and his Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, pp. 354–8. The ‘Village Crime Register’ for Mubarakpur, Pt. IV, entry for 1909 or 1910, notes that the qasba was inhabited by Muslims belonging to four sects: Sunni, Hanfi, Wahabi (which is inaccurately identified with Ahl-i-Hadis) and Shia. ‘All these sects have their own separate mosques. They do not pray in one another’s mosques. All take part together in the taziadar [at Muharram] but the Ahl-i-Hadis do not participate in this at all’. Qazi Atahar’s researches also indicate that Shia-Sunni and other sectarian differences among the local Muslims became significantly more pronounced in the later nineteenth century; see his Ta’zkara-i-ulema-i-Mubarakpur (Bombay, 1974), pp. 30–3.}

Shahab Mehtar, ‘the like of whom is not to be found in our times’, and ‘the greatness of British rule’ is a curious juxtaposition. Yet it is not quite so curious if one bears in mind the overall perspective of the Wajeet-ö-Hadesät. What is honoured in Ali Hasan’s chronicle is a body of traditions, customs and values that were for him the life of the qasba. There is a fundamental consistency here. British rule is saluted, as is the memory of Shahab Mehtar, for both served (or might serve) in their different ways, more or less efficaciously, to uphold these traditions and the position of the class that was above all responsible for creating them.
A Weaver Speaks

To what extent did the other, lower-class Muslims of Mubarakpur—in particular the weavers who constituted by far the largest segment of the population—share Ali Hasan’s perspective and entertain the same hopes, fears and expectations? The available records do not enable us to give a definite answer to this question. They do however indicate some of the elements of one.

There was without doubt an important area of beliefs and concerns shared by these different classes. We get some idea of this from a comparison of the Wāqeāt with the ‘notes‘ (or diary) kept by Sheikh Abdul Majid (c. 1864–193?), a weaver of muhalla Pura Sofi in Mubarakpur. Abdul Majid writes some time after Ali Hasan, his ‘notes‘ dating mostly from the 1910s and ‘20s, but he pays similar attention to disputes between Hindus and Muslims of the qasba. Thus Event XVIII in Ali Hasan’s chronicle, the dispute over the temple built by Manohar Das in 1877, is remembered and described by Abdul Majid in a note headed Mubārkpur kā wāqeā (‘An event in Mubarakpur’).47 The ‘balwa’ (‘riot’, ‘insurrection’) of 1904, the latter part of which at least was witnessed in person by the diarist, is traced to its ‘root’—Mian Khuda Baksh, son of Fateh Kalandar, zamindar of Mustafabad (a hamlet near Mubarakpur), who planted a pig’s head in a masjid in the hope of using the commotion that would ensue to settle scores with a rival zamindar. In a reaction reminiscent of Ali Hasan’s when he wrote of the baseness of Faqruddin in the ‘Faqruddin Shahi’ (Event XVI), Abdul Majid remarks on Khuda Baksh that this ‘kam-zāt’ (‘base person’, ‘of low origin’) was behind all the trouble.48 At a certain level ‘Muslim unity’ is accepted as natural and essential in this weaver’s diary as in the Wāqeāt. Hence the Muslim police official, during whose time in 1906 Hindus of Mubarakpur were first permitted to blow shankhs (conch-shells) at prayer, is accused of having taken a bribe from the Hindus.49 And as Ali Hasan had written of the Muslims who gave evidence against other Muslims after the ‘riot’ of 1842, so Abdul Majid comments on Muslim witnesses against Muslim ‘accused’ during the Non-Co-operation Movement of 1921–2: ‘These Musalmans are responsible for having sent other Musalmans to jail’.50

47 The diary of Sheikh Abdul Majid, c. 1864–193? is retained at the house of his descendant, Sheikh Wazir Ahmad, Muhalla Pura Sofi, Mubarakpur. The date of the above dispute is given as 1875–6 in the diary.
48 Entry headed 19 May 1904. For details of this incident see Pandey, ‘Rallying Round the Cow’.
49 Entry headed 29 June 1906.
50 Entry headed 19 June 1922.
Other evidence indicates that Abdul Majid’s outlook was not a departure from the views of the local weavers in the nineteenth century. Members of the weaving community had taken a leading part in raising contributions for and supervising the work of repair and construction of the mazār, Jama Masjid and Imambahar in the 1860s and 1870s.31 The concluding sentences of Ali Hasan’s chronicle expressed the hope that the system of public subscriptions organized by the weavers would within a short time enable them to buy land to be bestowed as waqf (charity) on the masjid, and the prayer that God may grant the weavers of Mubarakpur such favour that they would ‘with their abilities and determination forever maintain this system of subscriptions’ in the service of religion.32

In 1842 there was a striking demonstration of local Muslim unity in the face of an insult to their faith. On the occasion of the ‘Bicchuk Shahi’ (Event IX in Ali Hasan’s list), the ‘simultaneous attack’ by several thousand Muslims ‘headed by old offenders’ on the houses of five Hindu merchant-moneylenders was so swift—it was launched ‘within fifteen minutes’ of the carcass of a pig being found on the imambahar at day-break—that the Magistrate saw in it evidence of ‘design, unanimity and previous arrangement . . . throughout’.33 Yet even if the dead pig was planted on the imambahar as a pretext (a suggestion that the weavers and other Muslims of the town indignantly rejected), the evidence speaks unmistakably of a large number of angry Muslims gathering by the imambahar to discuss their course of action. Bearing in mind the obstacles deliberately thrown in the path of the tazia procession by Bicchuk Kalwar and his associates at the Muharram for several years prior to this, we may infer that the ‘unanimity’ observed here was one of emotion rather than of ‘design’ or ‘conspiracy’.34

31 Wāqeʻāt-o-Hādesāt, pp. 87–9.
32 Ibid., 89.
34 Cf. India Office Library: Home Misc., Vol. 775, Report on Benares City by W. W. Bird, 20 Aug. 1814, para 12, which notes: ‘The inhabitants by the most simple process imaginable can assemble in multitudes at any given spot on the shortest of notice. The method by which they do this bears a striking affinity to the practice of “gathering” in the Highlands of Scotland, and to a similar practice in Scandinavia. Swift and trusty messengers run full speed all over the City proclaiming in a single word the place of rendezvous, and invoking infamy and eternal vengeance on those who do not at the appointed hour repair to it. From the City the alarm is spread over the country. The first messenger conveys the symbol, which is a Dhurmuttree or paper containing a mystic inscription to the next village, and that to the next, till all know where, when, and wherefore they must meet. This practice is common not only among the Hindoos but the Mahomedans [here too, chiefly weavers] also, and in the disturbances of 1809 and 1810 was the means of collecting together an innumerable multitude at one spot in the space of no more than a few hours’. 
'Encounters and Calamities'

In 1877 it was a general body of Muslims at prayer (namaaz parhne wale) who, on noticing the trishul at the top of Manohar Das’s recently completed shivalaya went to ask of Gada Husain whether he had given permission for the building. The Hindus, they remonstrated, would sound the shankh and bells in the temple morning and evening; these and the bhajans would disturb the namaaz. And it was the threat of violence which weighed heavily with the Collector when he decided to order the dismantling of the shivalaya.55

Similarly in 1904 it was some weavers of Pura Sofi who discovered that a small unenclosed mosque which was being constructed by them in the open fields outside the qasba had been desecrated with the carcass of a piglet. They returned immediately to raise the matter in one or two mosques in their muhalla. A party went out to consult the zamindars of Sikhthi, in whose estate this section of Mubarakpur fell. An attempt was also made to get the local police to take action and then a deputation of weavers went out to Muhammadabad to report the matter at the police station there. Barring the brief consultation with the zamindars of Sikhthi, which was followed by further discussions in their own muhalla, the weavers appear to have acted on their own—gathering a large crowd at the defiled mosque by the sound of a drum, marching north to Gujarpur where the temple was defiled by the killing of a cow seized on the way, and then marching back to the town and through it (inviting ‘neighbours and friends’ to join them) onto the Mubarakpur temple which lay just beyond its southern extremity, where a cow belonging to the priest and a calf confiscated on the way south from Gujarpur were slaughtered and the images smashed.56

In 1813 too the investigating magistrate had observed that ‘Shah Mahter, the Surdar of the Musulmans’ (this refers to Shahab Mehtar, the head of the weavers) was at the time of the outbreak absent in Gorakhpur: ‘had he been present the act [that set off the violence] would probably not have been committed’.57 The sequence of events leading up to this outbreak is described in the Wāqeāt-i-Hādesāt as also in a petition presented to the Gorakhpur court in 1813 by Shahab Mehtar and four other weavers of Mubarakpur, and a comparison of these is instructive.

55 Wāqeāt-i-Hādesāt, p. 78, records that the magistrate warned Manohar Das that he was creating the conditions for a riot.
It is said in Ali Hasan’s narrative and in the weavers’ petition that the merchant-moneylenders were becoming arrogant, ‘puffed up by their earnings’ and ‘drunk on their wealth’. According to the former it was roughly around the time of the construction of Rikhai Sahu’s thakurdwara that Angnu Kalwar, another prospering mahajan, also built a shivalaya in the middle of Mubarakpur and all the Hindus of the town began to worship there. Adjacent to the shivalaya was a chauk (or platform) on which tazias used to be kept during the Muharram: and the Hindus, out of consideration for their Muslim neighbours, used to suspend the singing of bhajans and the playing of music during prayers for the ten days of the Muharram. Thus four or five years passed in peace. Then, writes Ali Hasan, some among the Hindus argued that they should not have to suspend their worship for ‘ten to twelve’ days: ‘Islam reigns over us for that period’. So ‘the mahajans of the town, puffed up with their earnings’, had a wall built around the Muslim platform—and this was the immediate cause of the ‘famous Rikhai Shahi’, the ‘biggest’, bloodiest and most fearful Event of all.\(^\text{58}\)

The petition by Shahab Mehtar and other representatives of the weavers (‘representatives of those who have suffered’) puts the matter in a slightly different and broader historical context. It observes that Hindus and Muslims had lived together in amity until then, with tolerance and respect for one another’s religious practices and customs; but ‘since the Hindus have gained amaldari [from amil—important government official] the killing [sic] of Muslims has begun’.\(^\text{59}\) The petitioners quote Devi Dube and Rikhai Sahu as saying to the panchayat, when the Muslims brought the question of the extension of the boundary wall before it, that they would spend a lakh of rupees if necessary on the shivalaya and ‘leave not a trace of you people [the Muslims]’. In addition they explain the slaughter of a cow on the chauk in front of Angnu Kalwar’s shivalaya in terms of a religious necessity.

Among Muslims and among ‘the lower castes of other religions’, says the petition, there is a practice of doing a minnat (prayer for a particular blessing) at an imambarah, masjid, Qadam Rasool or any

\(^{58}\) Wāqeāt-ī-Hādesāt, p. 8.

\(^{59}\) Arzi ba Ādalat Gorakhpur, ba silsila-s-jang Mubarakpur (Sat. 17 April, AD 1813) Signed by Shikh Shahabuddin and four other nurbafs on 7 June 1813, Introduction and para 2. Qazi Atahar made a copy of this petition from a copy he found in a rather poor condition with the late Maulvi Hakim Abdul Majid, Bakhri, Mubarakpur, and very graciously translated for me from the Persian.
dargah, and sacrificing a cow or performing some other act of piety when the prayer is answered. Just so, ‘someone’ (a weaver called Boodhan, according to the Magistrate’s report), had done a minnat at this chauk, and promised the sacrifice of a cow if his wish was fulfilled. Now, seeing the boundary wall of the shivalaya being extended to enclose the chauk, a step that would end his chances of making the sacrifice there, he had killed a cow at the spot ‘to fulfil his minnat’. There may be no truth in this story; for a petition submitted after such destruction and murder as occurred in 1813 to a court that will determine the punishment to be meted out to the petitioners or their friends, has good cause for exaggeration and fabrication. But the fact that Boodhan, when arrested soon after the ‘riot’, confessed his deed and explained the killing of the cow in similar terms lends some credence to it. What in any case is significant in the present discussion is the fact that such an argument was put forward at all in defence of the act.

Thus far the evidence points to substantial agreement among the Muslims of Mubarakpur. Yet it would be surprising if there were no variations in outlook. There were after all marked differences of status among both the Muslims and the Hindus of the qasba. The distinction between the sharif (or ashraf, the ‘respectable’ classes) and the razil (literally ‘base’, the labouring people) was well established. And Ali Hasan revealed his perception of these distinctions of community and birth in his peculiar interpretation of the Mubarakpur people’s anger on receipt of Rajab Ali’s letter threatening an attack on the mahajans in 1857: how could ‘this Rautara (‘new Muslim’ zamindar)’ dare to contemplate such action?

In spite of all the influence of their Mehtars and sardars, there was a difference between the weavers and other lowly classes on the one hand and the ‘pure’ or ‘noble’ Muslims of the upper classes on the other, which the weavers were not easily allowed to forget. As a maulvi of the town put it to me, until well into the twentieth century ‘no one was willing to give them [the weavers] the sardar’s position in public prayers’ or indeed to sit behind them in the congregation.


Wāqṣāt-ō-Hādesāt, p. 62.

Interview with Maulvi Kamruzzaman, Mubarakpur.
There is a clear recognition of this division between those with wealth and social standing and those without in Abdul Majid’s comments on the ‘riot’ of 1904: ‘It occurred at the instance of the notables [bade log, literally, big men]’, he wrote in his diary. ‘The lower classes [chote log, literally, small or unprivileged people]’ were taken unawares. ‘If the latter had known that they would in their haste commit excesses and be punished for them [in place of the bade log who had inspired the disturbance], they would certainly never have taken such action’.\(^4^4\)

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the weavers struggled to close this gap between sharif and razil Muslims in a movement that gradually spread across most of northern India. Their caste appellation, Julaha, was in all probability of Persian origin (from jula—ball of thread), but many commentators sought to derive the word from the Arabic juhala (‘the ignorant class’). The weavers responded with the argument that it came from jils (decorated), jal (net), or ujla (lighted up, or white), from which perhaps came one of the other names that the community used for itself (the one that Ali Hasan also employed) in the later nineteenth century—nurbafs or ‘weavers of light’. By this time Muslim weavers in many places had come to reject the name Julaha altogether, and insisted that they be called Ansaris (after a claimed Arabic ancestor who practiced the art of weaving) or Momins (i.e. ‘the faithful’ or ‘people of honour’).\(^4^5\)

Yet it was to be a long and determined struggle before the community of weavers could overcome the marks of social inferiority and ignorance implicit in the ‘impure’ status, and indeed the very name, ascribed to them: and even then the label would not come completely unstuck.

The marked distinctions of caste and class noticed above were bound to make for important differences of outlook among diverse groups of Muslims in Mubarakpur, as elsewhere. One aspect of these differences is highlighted by another comparison of Ali Hasan’s Wāqeāt with Abdul Majid’s diary. What the advent of colonialism meant for the people of Mubarakpur is perhaps not unfairly summed up in the following terms: more rigorous administrative demands and control following the establishment of a centralized colonial

\(^4^4\) Entry headed 29 May 1904.

power; improved communications, increased traffic and a significant change in the direction of the cloth trade; and higher prices of food and of the raw materials needed for the local cloth industry, at least for important stretches of time. Of these new trends however it is only the first that finds place in Ali Hasan’s ‘history’.

The fortunes of the cloth trade are a notable silence. For if it was the bazaar and the palace, the ‘Islamized trader’ and the ‘Hinduized aristocrat’ who in Geertz’s phrase ‘stamped (their) character’ on the Indonesian towns of Modjokuto and Tabanan, it was the weaving of silken fabrics and the Muslim Julaha that gave to Mubarakpur its distinctive figure—as the above pages should have made clear. Large stocks of finished goods were lost by the weavers in 1857–8 (as we learn from a single-line entry in the colonial records). The miserable condition of the majority of the local weavers was testified to by officials who enquired into the region’s industry and trade in the early 1880s. Large numbers of these ‘workers in silk’ were being forced by the later nineteenth century to turn to the weaving of ordinary cottons—a far less ‘honorable’ vocation.

Yet these occurrences feature nowhere in Ali Hasan’s chronicle. ‘Processes’ are of course not expressed as ‘public’ Events in this particular ‘history’. But what of the loss of substantial stocks by the weavers in 1857? We do not get any hint of the longer-term process or this sudden loss in the not inconsiderable space devoted by the author to ‘Non-Events’ or ‘Near Events’ either.

Abdul Majid’s sketchy diary offers a sharp contrast in this regard. Everyday life figures prominently here—births, deaths (‘natural’ as well as ‘unnatural’), marriages and scandalous affairs in the qasba. And while this certainly has something to do with the fact that ‘diaries’ and ‘histories’, even ‘local histories’, are different genres, there is no understating the concern with the cloth trade and its progress—a concern that is entirely missing from the Wāqeāt.


This remains true to this day; thus a young educated Kayasth contractor who gave me a lift to and from the qasba on one occasion said to me that this was only his second visit to the place because ‘mujhe to in lungs walon se dar lagta hai’ (‘I am afraid of these lungi-clad folk’). The lungi was the dress of lower-caste Muslims in this region, cf. Raza, Aadha Gaon, p. 65.

See ibid., passim, for a very rich ‘anthropological’ account which reveals very much the same kind of everyday concerns among other Muslim inhabitants in this region in a slightly later period.
The haphazard entries in the diary contain numerous detailed statements regarding the price of different kinds of cloth and of silk thread, as of grain and other necessities, and comments on their implications. Thus on 10 August 1919: 'This year the trade has been such that Mubarakpur has become prosperous [aabaad, literally, 'populated' or 'full of life']. Until this year there has never been such a (prosperous) trade—nor will there be (again) . . . . And this year as many as 142 members of our brotherhood have proceeded to Hajj-i-Kaaba from here'. Again in July 1920: 'This year the outlook for the trade is not so happy. Silk thread has become very expensive'.\textsuperscript{69} Or on a different subject, referring to the soaring prices of goat-skins in November 1916, the price having touched Rs 3 and Rs 4 per skin by this time: 'Many of the big and wealthy Muslims have taken to trading in these skins'.\textsuperscript{70}

The concern with the immediate problems of subsistence that is reflected here may be one reason why the weavers of Mubarakpur appeared on the whole somewhat more ambiguous in their response to British rule than the Ali Hasans of the 1880s. In respect of the cloth trade, colonialism had certainly not been an unmixed blessing. I have written at some length elsewhere about the hardships suffered by the weavers of eastern UP owing to the dislocation of their market and supplies of raw material, and the increased dependence on intermediaries and new trails of migration that developed.\textsuperscript{71} Whether it was because of this experience of being buffeted about or because of Gandhian support for handicraft industry or some other local factors, we know that the weavers of Azamgarh were, with most of their community throughout the rest of UP and Bihar, supporters of the Congress struggle for independence long after the emergence of a Hindu-Muslim schism at the level of provincial and 'national' politics.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{69} Both these entries appear under the date, 10 Aug. 1919, but the second is clearly an addition made in a new paragraph.

\textsuperscript{70} Entry for Nov. 1916.

\textsuperscript{71} See Pandey, 'Economic Dislocation in Nineteenth-Century Eastern UP', section VII. There appears to have been a wave of migration from Mubarakpur and other such places to Malegaon and other cloth-producing centres in western and central India during the rising of 1857–9, Hafiz Malegumi, Nakšīb (Malegaon, 1979), pp. 70, 72, 116. (I owe this reference to Maulvi Kamruzzaman).

\textsuperscript{72} National Archives of India: Govt. of India, Home Dept., Political (I) Branch, File 31/1/41, 'D.I.B.'s report on the political situation in Bihar' (Memo. by D. Pilditch, 15 Jan. 1941); Rajendra Prasad Papers, File XV/37, Col. I, d.g. Hakim Wasi Ahmad, Pres., Bihar Jamiat-al-Momineen to Rajendra Prasad, received 12 July 1937; Raza Aālība Gāon, pp. 252–4; interviews Maunath Bhanjan, Mubarakpur and Banaras.
Abdul Majid’s own evidence on this is somewhat paradoxical. At more than one place in his diary he refers to the death of some distinguished British personage—Lord Kitchener or the wife of the Lieutenant-Governor of UP—and expresses a feeling of deep sorrow: ‘The subjects [of the Lieutenant-Governor] were deeply grieved and they mourned for four days, and whatever we could give as charity we gave’.\(^73\) Again, referring to the boycott of the Prince of Wales on his visit to Calcutta in December 1921, he writes: ‘Afos! Sad afsos! [Shame! Undying shame!]. As far as my understanding goes, we cannot obtain Suraj [Swaraj] by such means’.\(^74\)

But we know from other sources that Abdul Majid was very close to the police and local officials: ‘Abdul Majid, resident of Pura Sofi, although he is an ordinary person [i.e. of no great wealth or distinction], always informs police officers of any secret—[meetings?] in the qasba that he comes to know about’.\(^75\) It is probable that this relationship had something to do with the opinions he formed. In addition it is not entirely clear what significance one can attach to this reverence for (or fear of) distant overlords like Lord Kitchener, the Lieutenant-Governor’s wife and the Prince of Wales. For not only does the diarist add to the above comment on the Prince of Wales’ visit: ‘Yes, if God wills it, then there can be Suraj’.\(^76\) He also condemns those Muslims who were responsible as prosecution witnesses for sending other Muslims to jail for their part in Non-Co-operation activities.\(^77\)

In any case the weavers of Mubarakpur seem to have taken an active part in the Non-Co-operation Movement. Abdul Majid records meetings of the ‘panchayat of twenty-eight’ (referring to the twenty-eight \textit{muhallas} of Mubarakpur) and of the ‘chaurasi’ (or ‘eighty-four’, which drew in the leaders of the weavers from a considerable number of villages and qasbas to decide on matters of

\(^73\) Entries dated 12 July 1914 & June 1916.

\(^74\) ‘Note’ on Congress, Nov–Dec. 1921.

\(^75\) ‘Village Crime Register’, Mubarakpur, Pt IV (entry dated 1909 or 1910).

\(^76\) ‘Note’ on Congress, Nov–Dec. 1921. Cf. also his note on Shibli Noman, a Muslim ‘unequalled in Hindustan’ who had had dealings with ‘great rulers all over the world’. The ‘great rulers’ here would seem to be on a par with those ‘omniscient’ and ‘just’, faraway and unseen rulers who provided the inspiration for numerous peasant uprisings in Russia, India and elsewhere in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; D. Field, \textit{Rebels in the Name of the Tsar} (Boston, 1976); I. J. Catanach, ‘Agrarian Disturbances in Nineteenth-Century India’, \textit{Indian Economic & Social History Review}, III, 1 (1966).

\(^77\) Entry for 19 June 1922.
importance) that were called to enforce the boycott of foreign cloth. It is also clear from his evidence that the leaders of the Khilafat Committee in Mubarakpur were mostly members of the weaving community: the Sheikh zamindars of the qasba appear to have maintained a low profile during this period.

We have in all this some glimpses of the Mubarakpur weavers' outlook on the nineteenth-century world. This outlook differed in certain significant respects from that of the élite Muslims of the qasba but shared with it an important area of common concern. In common with exploited classes elsewhere in pre-capitalist societies, the weavers of Mubarakpur appear to have been further removed than their economically or culturally more privileged neighbours from direct political dealings with the colonial bureaucracy, and are consequently somewhat more hazy about their relations with their rulers. They were more ambivalent too in their response to the putative 'Muslim' community; more concerned about the bare problem of survival; yet in some ways more 'independent' with their reliance on the panchayat and their faith in the power of 'tradition'; and at the same time deeply concerned about the honour of the community.

78 Entries for 12 Dec. 1919, 8 Feb. 1920 & July 1921. L. S. S. O'Malley, Census of India, 1911, Vol. V. Bengal, Bihar & Orissa & Sikkim. Pt I. Report (Calcutta, 1913), pp. 462-3 explains the Chaurasi as follows: The lowest unit of caste government was the chutai, i.e. the right to sit together on a mat (or chutai) at a caste council meeting. Each chutai had a headman and other functionaries, and its area depended on the strength of the caste locally. There could be several chutais in one village or one chutai for several villages. These chutais were sometimes grouped into larger unions called Baisi or Chaurasi (consisting of 22 and 84 Chutais respectively). A Baisi could cover 10-15 miles, a Chaurasi 40-50. The jurisdiction of the Panchayat is necessarily local, but the combination of different Chutais helps to make its sentence effective over a considerable area.

79 Entry for 19 June 1922.

80 O'Malley, Census 1911, Bengal, Bihar & Orissa, Pt I, p. 461, notes that an organized system of caste government existed among most of the lower castes in Bihar but not among the higher castes. He comments further that 'none of the Musalmans group so closely to the Hindu caste system with its numerous restrictions as the Jolahas'. The Julaha panchayat, headed by a sardar assisted by a chhandar, covered 10-50 houses, its sphere usually being coterminous with a village but sometimes covering several villages (p. 489). (In Mubarakpur there appears to have been a panchayat, headed by a mehtar, for each of the muhallas of the qasba). See also F. H. Fisher, Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces, Ghazipur (Allahabad, 1883), pp. 56-7; and n. 54 & n. 78 above.
'Encounters and Calamities'

‘Ham log wahan manjud the. Yah dekhkar nibayat dil dukha’.
Translation: ‘We were present there [when the Inspector of Police, Mohan Singh, trampled a copy of the Qoran underfoot during searches after the ‘riot’ of 1904]. We were deeply wounded by this sight’.

‘Bade-bade logon ka ishara tha, aur chote logon ne yah samjha ki sarkari intizam ki vajah se kuch nahin hoga’.
Translation: ‘It was at the instigation of ‘big men’ [that the 1904 outbreak occurred]; the ‘smaller folk’ thought that nothing would happen because of official precautions’.

‘Inke intakal ka hamare badshah ko bahut bada ranj hua. Aur hamko bhi bahut bada gam hua’.
Translation: ‘His [Lord Kitchener’s] death caused very great grief to our King. It also caused us very deep sorrow’.

‘In logon ne Musalman hokar Musalman ko qaid karaya’.
Translation: ‘These people who are Musalmans are responsible for having sent other Musalmans to jail’.81

What is indubitably represented in these extracts from Abdul Majid’s diary is a consciousness of the ‘collective’—the community. Yet this consciousness of community was an ambiguous one, straddling as it did the religious fraternity, class, qasba and mohalla.82 Here, as in Ali Hasan’s account, the boundaries of the collective shift all the time. It is difficult to translate this consciousness into terms that are readily comprehensible in today’s social science—Muslim/Hindu, working class/rentier, urban/rural—or even to argue that a particular context would inevitably activate a particular solidarity. What is clear is that Ali Hasan is quite untroubled by the problems that confound the modern researcher as he moves from one notion of the collective to another through the eighty-nine pages of his manuscript.

I have suggested above that there is nonetheless a certain basic consistency in Ali Hasan’s stand. In Abdul Majid’s random notes too it is possible to discern a similar consistency; for what they speak of is a fight on several fronts for self-respect and human dignity.83 Honour

81 These quotations are taken from Abdul Majid’s diary, entries headed 29 May 1904 (first two quotations), June 1916 and 19 June 1922.
82 For the importance of mohalla loyalty in the politics of Muslim weavers elsewhere, see J. C. Masselos, ‘Power in the Bombay ‘Moholla’, 1904–5’, South Asia, No.6 (Dec. 1976).
83 Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out to me how the semiotics of insult (honour/shame) carries over from this region to the industrial city, reproducing an identical structure of riots in the Calcutta mills in the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth century.
(izzat) was inextricably linked as we have seen with certain kinds of worship, certain ritual practices; and any insult to these was unacceptable. But honour was also tied up by the later decades of this century of dislocation with the assertion of the rights of the chote log, the shedding of the degrading label of razil, and full acceptance in the equal fraternity of Islam that the Wahabis had propagated and other 'learned' Muslims now so often talked about. If the positions of all men, high and low, seemed increasingly insecure in a fateful world, these were not fates that men and women, high or low, would accept without a struggle.

* For a different but relevant example of the importance attached to izzat by the peasants of this region, see K. Mukherjee and R. S. Yadav, Bhopur (Delhi, 1980).
Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven

GAUTAM BHADRA

History does nothing, it possesses ‘no immense wealth’, it ‘wages no battles’. It is man, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; history is not, as it were a person apart, using man as a means to achieve its own aims, history is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his aims.

Marx & Engels, The Holy Family

I. Introduction

There is a curious complicity between all the principal modes of historiography which have engaged so far in the study of the rebellion of 1857. According to S.B. Chaudhuri, an eminent nationalist historian, ‘it was the class of the landed chiefs who led the struggle against the British’, for they were ‘the natural leaders’. R.C. Majumdar, too, is of the view that taluqdar and zamindar, regarded highly by the mass of the peasantry, were responsible for the ‘origin and prolongation of popular revolt’. Eric Stokes, in his otherwise admirable work on the local background of the popular upsurge, has also

ABBREVIATIONS
ACR = Agra Commissioner’s Records. BR = Board of Revenue. 
UPRA = Uttar Pradesh Regional Archives, Allahabad. UPSA = Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow. WBSA = West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

1 This article is dedicated to Samar Sen. I am grateful to Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Gyan Pandey, Bharati Roy and Tapti Roy for their comments and editorial suggestions.
described the rural insurgency of 1857 as essentially elitist in character, for 'the mass of the population appeared to have played little part or at most tamely followed the behests of caste superiors'. The stance of radical historiography has not been fundamentally different. Promode Sengupta, a Marxist scholar, has written the history of the Great Rebellion in terms of the activities and motives of Nana Saheb, Lakshmi Bai, Bahadur Shah, etc., because these feudal chiefs were, to him, the 'natural leaders'. Even that revolutionary intellectual, Saroj Datta, a leader of the movement identified with the Naxalbari insurrection, had demanded the replacement of statues of nineteenth-century intellectuals in public places by those of Rani Lakshmi Bai and Tantia Topi. With the best of intentions, radical historiography does not appear to have opted out of the paradigm within which the bourgeois-nationalist and liberal historians operate.\(^2\)

In all these representations what has been missed out is the ordinary rebel, his role and his perception of alien rule and contemporary crisis. By contrast, the present essay tries to rehabilitate some of the rebels of 1857 who have already been forgotten by historians or scantily treated, with no more than a nod in their direction. I study four of them—a small landlord, a cultivator belonging to a substantial peasant community, a poor tribal youth and a Maulvi. These four may be said to represent between them a fairly large number of ordinary and yet complex insurgent personalities of that time. Leaders of a type very different from the well-known landed magnates, they were among those whom a knowledgable district official of Saharanpur was to describe, soon after the revolt, as 'the few active spirits who originated and organised the movement in various localities'.\(^3\)

II. Shah Mal

Shah Mal was a resident of Bijraul, a large village situated in the eastern portion of the pargana of Barout. This village was irrigated


\(^3\) H. Dundas Robertson, *District Duties during the Revolt in the North West Provinces of India* (London, 1859), p. 192.
by the Bijwara and Kishanpur rajbahas of the Jumna canal. He was a malik of a portion of the village which at the time of the mutiny was divided into two pattis, known as Kullo and Bholy or Ladura. The ‘notorious rebel leader Shah Mal’ had control only over the former. Even there he had co-sharers like Seesram and others who remained aloof from his activities, so that after the suppression of the revolt their rights were left unimpaired. The other patti, with its four thoks, also did not participate in the rebellion and ‘was in like manner ordered to be exempted from confiscation’.

The tehsil Barout, with its rich dark loam of considerable fertility and abundant means of irrigation, was regarded as the most prosperous pargana of the district. T.C. Plowden was eloquent in his report about its prosperity. The proportion of inferior land, he calculated, was ‘very small, being about 1/6 of the whole’. The area of the whole of the pargana was irrigated by the small canals from the rivers Jumna, Hindun and Krishna, which led to the cultivation of ‘profitable products’ such as sugarcane, cotton, mukka and wheat. The whole area was within the circuit of a thriving commerce. Barout, Binowlle and Sirdhana, convenient marts with linkages to Meerut, Shamlee, Kandlah, Baghpalt, Tandah and Delhi, afforded ‘ample facilities for the disposal of every species of produce’.

The population was densely settled and composed principally of Jat cultivators who were considered to be the sole masters of Chuprowlee, Barout, Katana and the upper portion of Burwana. Stokes’s description of the bhaiyachara community is quite applicable to this area. For, as the settlement report stated, there were ‘of this large agricultural population an exceptional number of petty proprietors’—indeed, only 975 zamindari mahals as opposed to 2,235 pattadari and bhaiyachari tenures. Zamindars like Shah Mal

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5 Forbes to Williams, 24 April 1862, F18/1862, MCR, UPRA.
6 DG: Meerut, p. 203.
were actually principal cultivators and had to ‘till nearly half the land themselves’.\(^\text{10}\)

In this area the village proprietors and cultivators rarely belonged to different castes. ‘As all the four proprietary castes follow the occupation of agriculture to a greater or lesser degree’, wrote Forbes, ‘it is perhaps a natural consequence that the caste of cultivators should shadow those of proprietors’.\(^\text{11}\) There was a large number of Chamars who were agricultural labourers. They were excluded from the cultivating community though they were no less numerous than the Jats. It is important to note that in the mutiny of 1857 the Chamars remained largely unnoticed.

On the eve of the English conquest Barout was under the rule of Begam Samru. It was alleged that the Jat proprietors were unfavourably treated by a high-handed Taga minister. After the year 1836, when the English authority was established in this area, Plowden tilted the balance in favour of the Jats during the settlement. Yet the assessment remained heavy. But the Jat peasants, according to a settlement officer, withstood the demand. The progress in agriculture was substantial and proprietary rights were not transferred to any significant extent.\(^\text{12}\)

But there was a smouldering grievance against the settlement. The settlement officer faced tough opposition from the petty proprietors in Baghpät. ‘They have destroyed all their best cultivation in anticipation of re-settlement’, he wrote.\(^\text{13}\) To such petty cultivators every settlement was full of uncertainty, and they therefore regarded it with suspicion and apprehension. It was ultimately the iron fist of colonial authority that made them accept the settlement with ‘a decided reluctance’. The directives of the Board were categorical with regard to the recalcitrant proprietors of Baghpät and Barout:

If the zamindars or cultivators refuse to take pattahs and to execute caboolat at the established rates of rents for lands, in their occupancy, you will let such lands to any of the zamindars or ryottos who may be willing to undertake the cultivation of them or allow them to remain

\(^{10}\) \textit{DG:} Meerut, p. 205.

\(^{11}\) Forbes & Porter, p. 4.


\(^{13}\) Letter from Meerut Collector, 12 October 1822. BR, NWP, 2 November 1822, UPSA.
fallow; in the latter case giving the recusants to understand that in the event of their cultivation without pattahs the whole produce will be liable to be attached and brought to sale on account of the government.\textsuperscript{14}

Thus a political threat and an assertion of the coercive power of the state was implicit in the process of settlement. Its impact on popular perception cannot, therefore, be measured solely by statistics. There is some evidence in the records of the tensions and pressures generated by this process in the Baghat and Barout regions of Meerut district in the 1840s and 1850s involving, as it sometimes inevitably did, the threat, actual or real, of the alienation of land from the older proprietors and the intrusion of auction purchasers as ‘strangers’ into pattis with traditional solidarities based on long-standing communal ties.\textsuperscript{15} However, not all parts of the district which were hard-pressed thus by revenue assessment and proprietary right transfers responded to the mutiny in the same manner or to the same degree. This shows that in order to understand why an insurrection actually breaks out in a particular locality rather than in another it is imperative to look beyond the immediate context of economic loss or gain.

The rebellion of Shah Mal started as a local affair. It is stated that the people of Baoli and Barout villages were the only members of the Jat caste in that neighbourhood to rise actively against the British. Yet in its intensity rebellion had assumed an importance which was acknowledged thus by the commissioner: ‘The rebellion in the part of the district is kept up by Shah Mull of Byrout, his principal abettors being Bagta and Sajja . . . with them joined 60 villagers, who took no more part than individually swelling the ranks of the ringleaders’.\textsuperscript{16} A large number of these rural leaders were lumbar-dars. For example Jeerum, Badan and Gulab, lumbar-dars respectively of Jowhree, Jourmawa and Jafarbad, were prominent commanders in Shah Mal’s rebel force. The lumbar-dars of Barout, such as Shon Singh and Bud Singh, also cast their lot with the rebels. Out

\textsuperscript{14} Board’s Letter, 12 October 1822, BR, NWP, Proc 22, ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} For two such instances see D.B. Moorison’s Letter, 20 August & 17 September 1850, BR, NWP, Proc 59–60, UPSA; and Suit of Laik Ram vs. Govt., No. 34/1859, MCR, UPRA.

\textsuperscript{16} Sapte to Williams, 2 December 1858: ‘List of the Leaders and Instigators of the rebellion in Meerut Division Unfit for Amnesty’, F101/1859, RD, MCR, UPRA.
of the sixty persons named, no less than twenty were lumbardars who had made common cause with Shah Mal. There were also the co-sharer of the patti, i.e. hissadar Askaran, and Harjus, hissadar of Doghauta, who sided with him and ‘attacked the tehsildar of Sirdauh and village of Daha’. Hargopal of Baraut and Mehir Chand of Sirsalee belonged to the same category. But there were also men of lesser social standing, such as Caloo and Dilsookli, sons of Shyam Singh, a humble ‘Jat inhabitant of Dhokowlee’, who took command of the insurgent forces. Again, Rajee of Kandhora, and Hurthyal a Gujor of Jewahanpur, were followers of Shah Mal but do not seem to have been lumbardars or hissadars.17

Thus Shah Mal had support among the village headmen and small zamindars in the area. The term ‘lumbardars’ referred to a village headman with whom an engagement for revenue had been made. In fact many village muqaddams functioned as such in an altered context. They were elected by other co-sharers and allowed to collect a percentage of the revenue. Through them the state approached the cultivators, offered loans and received representations. However they too were subjected, like all other petty proprietors, to the severities of the fiscal demand and the process of survey and settlement. Asiya Siddiqui has pointed out how these groups were torn between the contradictory prospects of economic advancement and the loss of their sir lands. Many of them were poor or at best marginally above the level of the rest of the cultivators. On the other hand they could in opportune moments use their connections with the state to enrich themselves.18 In the days of the rebellion these groups, vexed by the state’s revenue demand and interference and propelled by their ambition, rallied around Shah Mal.

Upon the outbreak of the mutiny in Meerut on 10 May 1857 the English authority was soon ‘entirely suspended from Barout’, when ‘a number of cultivators left their fields and took to plundering and many old proprietors took the opportunity of acquiring possession of their lands’. At this time, on 12 or 13 May, the first act of open defiance by Shah Mal was ‘an attack and plunder of a large party of Brinjara [Bunjara] Merchants’. He followed this up by an attack on the tehsil of Barout and its destruction. After this he was appointed

to a subahdarship by order from Delhi. He consolidated his position during May and June, Jat villages like Baoli joining him with their cultivating populations.\textsuperscript{19} He gained further strength when the prisoners of Meerut gaol joined his forces. His rise to power was described thus by an official:

Shah Mull, a Jhat [sic] . . . by collecting some bad characters, and getting aid from the rebels at Delhi, had gradually gained strength and boldness to attack and plunder the tehselee of Barouth, then to destroy the bridge of boats over Jamuna, at Baghpur; then, with the assistance of a force of mutineers from Delhi, again to destroy the Baghpur bridge which had been reconstructed by Mr. J. Campbell and was defended by the contingent of the Jheend Rajah . . . and finally, after all these successes, to seduce the inhabitants of eighty-four villages, principally Jats, known as the Chowrassee des from their allegiance to Government and from nothing become the rebel of some importance, collecting and sending supplies to the mutineers at Delhi, and entirely stopping the direct communication between headquarters' camp and Meerut and when he was attacked had threatened to raise the whole country to the west and northwest.

Another official wrote of him as ‘a Jat of the Mavway tribe, Governor of the purgannah of Barout with the title of Rajah’ whose control ‘of this and three and four purgunnahs on the left bank of Jumna . . . enabled the people and garrison of Delhi to live during the siege’.\textsuperscript{20}

These reports underlined the importance of a local leader who, unlike Walidad Khan, was not distinguished by lineage, but proved to be no less of an obstacle to the counter-insurgency operations. His first act of rebellion was the ‘plunder and pillage’ of the tehsil of Barout and the bazaar of Baghpur, visible symbols of authority and wealth. In this he was by no means atypical. But, more than many others, he developed a supra-local perception of power and forged an alliance beyond his own area. On his own he sent emissaries to Delhi to make contact with the rebels there. Allah Dyah, son of Nubee Baksh, a Baluchi of Baluchpara, was appointed an officer by Shah Mal and sent to Delhi ‘to get help and to bring men to fight’ against the English. Wazir Khan, the thanadar of Baghpur, also sent

\textsuperscript{19} Sapte to Lowe, 6 December 1858, MCR, F19/1859, UPRA; R.H.W. Dunlop, \textit{Service & Adventure with the Khakee Ressalah or, Meerut Volunteer Horse, during the Mutinies of 1857–58} (London, 1858), pp. 45–6; \textit{DG: Meerut}, p. 201.

an arzee to the emperor for the same purpose. Mehtab Khan, son of Noor Khan at Baghpat, was yet another contact. These men had ‘friends at Delhi and presented him before the King and it was consequently through these men that Shah Mall was pointed out as a man likely to benefit the rebel cause’. He disrupted the lines of communication between the English forces, mobilized the villages within his own territory, and otherwise made himself essential to the Delhi rebels for whom his area came to serve as a strategic rear and supply base. In return his authority was recognized and legitimized by the emperor. The danger of such supra-local linkages between a local insurgent and the seat of rebellion in Delhi was not lost on Dunlop, who wrote in some alarm: ‘Unless some vigorous measures are taken to assist our friends and punish our foes, we shall be totally deserted by the mass of people, those still faithful to us are becoming disgusted at our apparent apathy, and the mutiny and rebellion of today may become a revolution’.

However, not all the villages in that area were in favour of Shah Mal. Before the counter-insurgency operations began in mid-July, Williams reported that ‘many of the Jats had declared they would not assist him [Shah Mal], on the contrary would help in capturing him’. Dunlop mentioned a Rajput village, Deolah, and another called Burka, both ‘friendly to the English’, as having been under a threat of attack from Shah Mal. In fact Newal Singh, a Rajput of Deolah, acted as the principal guide and informant to Dunlop’s volunteer force as it moved against Shah Mal on 15 July 1857. Both Deolah and Hussaodah paid their kists to the government. Shah Mal had taken exception to this and intended ‘to attack and plunder the village’ with a force of 3,000 insurgents. How close he was to executing this plan was found out by the English when on 17 July they captured the village of Bussowadah (Bussoud), inhabited by Mussalman Juggars, and discovered 8,000 maunds of grain, wheat and dal in a ‘large store house collected for the Delhi rebels’. Shah Mal had taken shelter in this village the night before and escaped just in time. Government troops put all men to the sword and destroyed all arms, while ‘two ghazees from Delhi continued fighting desperately

21 Source as in fns. 16 & 17 above.
22 Dunlop to Hewit, 28 June 1857, PP, p. 894. Also Sapte’s list and report as in fns. 16 & 17.
24 Dunlop, Khakee Ressalah, pp. 87, 99 & 93.
in a mosque’. But Shah Mal’s authority was so pervasive that the Deolah people refused to touch any of the captured provisions ‘for fear of Shah Mal’s vengeance’. The case of Francis Cohen provides yet another instance of selective violence against the allies of the English. Cohen, a tehsildar under Begum Sumru, was ‘a Christian and acted a Christian’s part’ in giving shelter to some fugitives from Delhi. For this he was punished by the Gujars and the followers of Shah Mal who ‘plundered him of 7 and 8000 rupees worth of property’ and took him prisoner, ‘releasing him on a ransom of 600 rupees’.

Shah Mal had transformed the bungalow of an officer of the irrigation department around the Jumna canal into ‘a hall of justice for himself’ and thus appropriated the office of the sarkar for the exercise of his own authority. He also set up a parallel network of intelligence to which Dunlop was obliged to pay a tribute when he wrote: ‘The excellence of the intelligence received by the rebels on all occasions proves them to have had many friends amongst those not committed to rebellion’. As we have noticed, Shah Mal managed to slip away from a surprise attack on Busoudh. After his death ‘on his person was found a letter from Salek Ram and Lal Muin’ who held undivided shares in the village of Paininga. They had apparently warned him of the impending operation against the insurgents and given details about the strength of the army on the basis of information ‘picked up . . . in Meerut’. These persons were caught and hanged as spies. ‘These treacherous rebels and spies hanging about the Magistrate’, wrote the commissioner, ‘found out the intended attack on Shah Mull and strength of detachment and communicated the intelligence to him. The consequence was that the small detachment of 129 men had to fight thousands for hours and nothing but most determined courage saved the party from destruction. The spies were condemned and executed’. It was with ‘agents’ like these that Shah Mal built up an organization at the nerve centre of the district authority. They moved in the night from village to village to rally the people against the English, as Dunlop

26 Petition from Francis Cohen, 18 October 1858, F48/1858, BR, MCR, UPRA.
27 Dunlop, Khakee Ressalab, p. 119.
28 Sapte’s report, 19 February 1858. Confiscation of Estates, class iii, entry no. 125, F105/1859, MCR, UPRA.
was to recall later. In practice, they functioned as an arm of the rebel authority, helping it to distinguish friends from enemies and defend itself from attacks by the latter.

In the period of the pacification campaign, the government considered it 'fair to make a distinction between those who joined the rebels at Delhi and Rohilkhand and those who joined with any upstart who took the occasion of authority weakened by a military revolt and a contest of supremacy raging in the neighbourhood to strive for independence'. And by placing Shah Mal and his followers in the latter category, the officials helped to emphasize the political character of his revolt. References to 'the authority weakened by the military revolt', to 'a contest for supremacy' and 'striving for independence' were all indices of that politics as seen from the standpoint of the rebel's enemies. Among the latter, Dunlop, a shrewd observer, had noticed 'various symptoms' showing 'how rapidly the neglect of this part of the district had led to the belief that the British rule had terminated for ever'. And as the battle for Delhi continued and the fate of the court, which had provided support for Shah Mal, hung in balance, 'the people of the district', said Dunlop, were 'in a fever of excitement to know whether "their raj" or ours was to triumph'.

The distinction made in these reports between the two contending authorities, 'their raj or ours', speaks of an awareness that went beyond the calculus of economic gain and loss and related to a concept of power. However, there are some other aspects of this struggle on which these official statements do not throw much light. How did Shah Mal emerge as a leader over these individual villages? In the contest for supremacy that was raging in the countryside, how was his supremacy established? These are questions which no historian on peasant insurrections can ignore. Indeed, two historians, Eric Stokes and Ranajit Guha, have tried to answer them in their works.

In their respective discussions of Shah Mal both underline the elements of solidarity and their limits in the insurrection. Stokes locates the basis of solidarity in 'factional alignments'. These alignments took the form of local groupings involving both territorial

29 Dunlop, Khakee Resalalab, p. 95.
30 Lowe to Muir, 30 November 1858. List of the Confiscated Estates of Zillah Meerut. F105/1859, MCR, UPRA.
31 Dunlop, Khakee Resalalab, pp. 97, 127.
and kinship units, such as tappas and khaps, many of which were bitterly hostile to each other. Thus Barout was the centre of the Salaklai Jats who, under the leadership of Shah Mal and Suraj Mal, were actually in the process of renewing their old feuds against the neighbouring Ghatwal Jats. It was such clan and territorial linkages as well as the tradition of old feuds which, according to Stokes, contributed to Shah Mal’s success in rallying a number of villages.\textsuperscript{32} Guha argues that ‘the role of territoruality as a positive factor behind rebel mobilization’ was clearly demonstrated in the massive jacqueries triggered off by the mutiny. To him the notion of territoruality includes both geographical and social space. In citing numerous cases he puts the emphasis on local dimensions of the targets of rebel attack. This localized character of the rebellion also drew its sustenance partially from the ‘revolt of particular ethnic masses’. The very nature of the distribution of castes and clans in an area helped to spread as well as limit an insurgent movement to a particular zone or particular castes. He cites the case of Shah Mal as a typical Gujar rebellion which ‘convulsed the north-western district of Uttar Pradesh’. Its specific Gujar character was underlined by ‘their attack on the Jat villages, who behaved notably in support of law and order’.\textsuperscript{33}

There is much truth in both these arguments. In fact there was intense fighting between Jats and Gujars in this area during the mutiny and this rivalry determined, to an extent, loyalty and enmity towards the government. The Gujar village at Seekree, about sixteen miles from Meerut cantonment, took an active part in the disturbances and began to encroach on the land of other villages. The combined forces of three Gujar villages, Seekree, Nugla and Deosa, defeated a force of Jats ‘who commenced collecting at the important village and bazaar of Begumbad for the purpose of defending themselves’. The incident took place on 8 July before the arrival of the government forces to save the ‘loyalist’ Jats. The victory of the Gujars was possible because ‘they were better armed, less divided among themselves, more habituated in the acts of violence’.\textsuperscript{34}

Here is a clear case of clan alignment and rivalry. But Shah Mal’s mobilization cut across these alignments. Although he was himself a

\textsuperscript{32} Stokes, pp. 17–18.
\textsuperscript{34} Dunlop to Meerut Commissioner, 11 July 1857, \textit{PP}, p. 883.
Jat—and his successors and next in command were his own relatives—the Gujars rallied around him. His army included villagers of various castes. In fact Dunlop, the leader of the counter-insurgency force, found it difficult to decide whether a village in this area was hostile or friendly, irrespective of the caste or clan of its residents. Thus two hostile villages, Chouparah and Jafarbad, both deserted on the approach of his troops, were inhabited respectively by Taga Brahmins and Muslim Jaggars. Bussoudah, where Shah Mal had his stock of grain, belonged to the Jaggars. 'A goojur village', Bichpooree, 'had taken an active part in all Shah Mall's misdoings'. Dunlop mentioned a sipabi who deserted his ressalah for Shah Mal's army because he was a Musselman.\(^{35}\) Again, the people of the Gujar village, Ahehra, were prominent in an attack on Cohen and actively assisted Shah Mal in all his operations, including the plunder of Barout and Baghput and the destruction of a vital bridge.\(^{36}\) Suraj Mal sought help in the Jat village of Sirsalle, while the rebels from Mullurpore, who were willing to join Shah Mal, were said to have been led by 'one old white-bearded sikh'.\(^{37}\)

A clue to the logic of these wide-ranging solidarities may be sought in the notion of 'Chowrasee Des'—a term which occurs again and again in Shah Mal's messages. Williams talked of an attempt made by the rebel leader 'to seduce the inhabitants of eighty-four villages, principally jats, known as Chowrasee Des, from allegiance to government'. The villagers from Burka advised Dunlop to fly 'as fast as possible . . . as the whole of Chowrasee Des was being raised by Shah Mall'. On the night before the latter's fateful confrontation with the volunteer forces, his emissaries were reported to have 'traversed every village of Chowrasee Des, calling all who could bear arms to assist them and declaring that Shah Mall would meet the pale-faced invaders of his territory on the morrow and annihilate the entire party or die in the attempt'. And after his death Sajjaram tried to rally the Jats of 'Chowrasee Des', while it was to all of 'the Chowrasee Des' that Dunlop addressed his proclamation calling on them to surrender.\(^{38}\) Thus the messages of in-

\(^{35}\) Dunlop to Meerut Commissioner, 26 July 1857, PP, paras 6–8, p. 886; Dunlop, Khakee Ressalah, pp. 95–9.

\(^{36}\) Sapat, 8 July 1858, F8/1858, RD, MCR, UPRA.

\(^{37}\) Dunlop, Khakee Ressalah, p. 91.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., pp. 95, 99–100, 108; Dunlop to Meerut Commissioner, 26 July 1857, PP, p. 887.
surgency and counter-insurgency were both transmitted on a common wavelength.

Chowrasee Des offers us a rare glimpse into rebel perception. ‘Chowrasee’ or ‘eighty-four’ refers to a tract of country containing that number of villages in the occupation of a particular tribe.\(^{39}\) It is a notion associated with clan settlements and the spread of kinship linkages over an area among Jats as well as the other castes in Uttar Pradesh. The very fact of the growth of hamlets from original villages and their establishment by junior members of particular clans at the time of their expansion in an area might have led to this notion. Each of the principal clans of the Jats in Meerut—the Gathwalas, the Baliyans and the Salaklain—had its claim to an area comprising eighty-four villages. That area would first be demarcated by the khaps. The khap itself was a unit comprising villages, most of which were linked with each other by people claiming common descent from the original settlers. Such descent groups formed their own thokes based on lineages and tried to restrict the transfer of proprietary rights among themselves. When these thokes organized themselves into a council for common action, it took the shape of the khap. The khap was named after the dominant caste and clan, but did not exclude other clans within the village when a common decision was taken. A khap could be divided into smaller units like ganwands. But its jurisdiction was said to extend over eighty-four villages or the Chowrasee, although the actual number could in fact be smaller. For example the Balian khan had its jurisdiction over no more than fifty-four villages, twenty-four having been depopulated and ‘conquered’ by the Pathans. Yet the area was still called the ‘Chowrasee’ of the Balian khap. It was thus that clan settlement corresponded to territorial space.

Equally important was the persistence of the notion of Chowrasee Des in collective memory. Thus, in Pandit Kaha Rambhat’s eighteenth-century chronicle of the Jats of this area, political action against outsiders and resistance to the oppression of the state since the time of the Delhi Sultanate are often traced to decisions taken at

khaps, council meetings. Baraut, in this chronicle, was mentioned again and again as a place where the panchayat met to decide upon measures which would be obeyed by the various clans and villages. Baoli and Sirsauli were the other villages in which such councils resolved on actions against the sultans and the Mughal rulers. Whatever the reliability of this chronicle, the fact remains that by the late eighteenth century the Jats of this area were thinking in terms of political units like khaps and describing their memory of common actions in the past in terms of those units. The names of the villages which were prominent in the chronicle were also important centres of rebellion. In the 1830s Elliot noted the existence of the Chowrasee ‘in almost their pristine integrity’ among the Jat and the Rajput communities. He recognized ‘the ceremony of the binding of the turbans’ as an important source of prestige and respectability for the headmen of the khaps by the members of the Des. Later, decades after the mutiny, other administrators too were to acknowledge the persistence of the notion of designating particular areas called Des by the Jats. Thus Shah Mal’s appeal for the defence of Chowrasee Des against the intruders relied both on lineage and tradition to make itself understandable to the people of his locality. For they were aware of the tradition of common action against the state even in pre-colonial days. It was therefore possible for the rebel leader to summon to his aid the collective memory of a territorial space over which he could claim to wield an authority hallowed by tradition. And by the same token the English force could be identified as trespassers (‘pale-faced invaders’) violating the sanctity of Chowrasee Des, the country of his ancestors and his clan.

What emerges from our discussion is that there were various levels in the mobilization for rebellion. At a primary level a notion of community organized along ethnic settlements and an aversion to the encroachment of an alien power into this territorial unit determined the domain of rebel authority. However, that space was not a mere geographical notion. It was embedded in a collective consciousness, sustained by clan memory and history, to which the rebel appealed. However, in this type of mobilization it was by no means certain that each village belonging to the khaps would join the rebellion. As has been noticed above, Shah Mal, after his escape from Busodh, collected his forces by ‘raising village after village’, and sixty villages were said to have ‘individually’ joined his forces (although many of them withdrew as soon as the victory of the En-
lish was imminent after the fall of Delhi). However, the other thokes of Shah Mal’s own village remained aloof. Dunlop, during his counter-insurgency operations, noted how some of the villages were hostile and others were vacillating or friendly.\textsuperscript{40} Thus he found Deolah and Hussaoadah docile enough to pay up the instalments of revenue due to them, while Bulaynee prevaricated, and the Gujar village of Bichpoorie, which ‘had taken an active part in all Shah Mall’s misdoings’, was considered so hostile as to deserve destruction. And, again, the village Burka was friendly, while the neighbouring village Manee Ghat, ‘where Shah Mall and some of his principal dacoits were assembled’, was certainly not so. Any single factor such as faction, feuds, clan or caste would therefore not explain the variations in rebel mobilization. An understanding of the latter must also take into account the perception of conflicts and alliances by the participants themselves in terms of their own codes and the transformations of symbolic relations within that code.

On this was grafted the authority of Delhi. Jat clans have earlier been known to seek adjustment with the power in Delhi. In our case both Shah Mal and the rebel force at Delhi needed each other. Each was aware of the other’s strength and importance. And this recognition was overlaid with an intense hatred of alien rule. The Meerut commissioner noticed how even after Shah Mal’s death some of his followers continued to show ‘the bitterest animosity against us’, how ‘in order to show their hatred’ they dug and ploughed up the ‘made road as a Feringhee institution’, while, according to Stokes, the Jats of Lagoswar and the Chauhan Rajputs of Khair, despite their traditional hostility towards each other, combined in ‘their hatred to British rule’.\textsuperscript{41} This hatred was a rubric that was ever present in the rebellion of Shah Mal, and was more clearly focused in the events following his death.

The elimination of Shah Mal was important for the reduction of Delhi. The government ‘had promised a reward of 1,000 rupees for the apprehension or head of Shah Mall’.\textsuperscript{42} In July the counter-insurgency operations against him ran into a massive resistance from ‘a large crowd of armed men seven thousand in number’, and to an official who witnessed it all it appeared as if ‘the whole coun-

\textsuperscript{40} Dunlop to Meerut Commissioner, 26 July 1857, \textit{PP}, p. 886.

\textsuperscript{41} Williams’ comments on the Amnesty List, F101/1859, MCR, UPRA: Stokes, pp. 192–4.

\textsuperscript{42} Williams’ Letter, 7 August 1857, \textit{PP}, p. 885.
try was rising; native drums, signal to the villagers to assemble were beating in all directions and crowds were seen to be moving up...’ Dunlop, who led these operations, was forced to fly from ‘Black Douglas Shah Mall’ and remarked ruefully that ‘flight from villagers, in whatever numbers, was rather a shock to dignity’, for the ‘sundry flowers of the rhetoric in which the Hindooastani language is rich... were gracefully accorded to me by Shah Mall’s men’. He narrowly escaped from the charge by Bhagta, the rebel’s nephew, and was chased up to Barout. There, in an orchard south of Barout, the Khakee Ressalah—as the volunteer force was named—and the followers of Shah Mal fought a pitched battle in which the rebel leader was killed.\textsuperscript{43} The private who killed the rebel gave a vivid description.

I saw, in the distance, two horsemen armed with spears flying from us as fast as their horses could take them. I put spurs to my horse and overtook them after a chase of two minutes. The horseman nearer to me whom I never for a moment imagined to be Shah Mall dropped his sword at that time, but still retained his spear, the folds of his turban were also trailing on the ground.

The soldier twice shot him in the back. ‘But recovering himself at a moment when I never fancied he could have risen, he took me at a disadvantageous turn and wounded me in two places’. The second wound might have proved to be fatal, ‘had I not suddenly held the spear which he was driving with all his force at me and just at this moment Azeem Beg, Sowar came up, thrust him with his spear on which he fell swearing and abusing the sowar’.\textsuperscript{44} His body was hacked to pieces and the head severed by the order of Parker who recognized him.

Now the head of Shah Mal, the rebel leader, became a symbol. To the English this was a great victory and that victory needed to be demonstrated. The force marched through the area with two symbols of power and authority. As Dunlop wrote:

\begin{quote}
We carried on a small silken Union Jack as the banner of the Volunteers and on this occasion an ensign also, in the shape of Shah Mall’s gory head stuck on a long spear. The last was necessary, to prove to
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{44} Tonnochy to Tyrwhitt, 20 July 1857, \textit{PP}, p. 888.
the country people who knew the sternly resolute features of old ruffian well, that their leader was really dead.\textsuperscript{45}

To the rebel, Shah Mal's head was a symbol of defiance, an object of honour. There were 'sundry reports of a meditated attack by Rajputs and others to recover Shah Mall's head'. Dunlop's army was under constant threat from insurgents led by Suraj Mal and Bhagta, who were raising the countryside. 'We were followed down to the ford by a large body of Mawee Jats who hoped they might find an opportunity of taking the head of Shah Mall from us', wrote Dunlop. The rebel died but the rebellion continued. Shah Mal's successors refused to surrender and sided with the rebels in Muzaffarnagar, Rohilkhand and Awadh.

III. \textit{Devi Singh}

Devi Singh, a village rebel of Tappa Raya in Mathura, had in his biographer his principal enemy, Mark Thornhill, magistrate of Mathura, who wrote the biography for future generations 'as illustrative of native habits and of the condition of the country at that time'. But the political implication of rural rebellion was not altogether lost on even such a biographer. 'Dayby Sing's career was brief and in its incidents, rather ludicrous', wrote Thornhill; 'it might have been otherwise. With as small beginnings Indian dynasties have been founded. He was the master of fourteen villages. Runjeet Sing commenced his conquests as lord of no more than twenty-five'.\textsuperscript{46}

Devi Singh's brief and 'ludicrous career' is important for us because in his rebellion there was no outside intervention or mediation. It was entirely the affair of a peasant community of a small area. Raya, which was included in pargana Mat until 1860 and thereafter in pargana Mahaban, was a busy market town at the centre of a group of villages. It followed the usual pattern of Jat settlement in this area. Raya itself had no arable land. But it was considered 'as the recognised centre of as many as twenty-one Jat villages which were founded from it'. The very name of the town was derived from that of its founder, Rae Sen, the ancestor of the Jats of Godha clan.


It was the Jats of this clan who were the dominant cultivators of this area.\textsuperscript{47}

The most visible symbol of authority in tappa Raya was an old fort built by Jamsher Beg and renovated by Thakur Daya Ram of Hathras in the early nineteenth century. The latter's control over this area ended with his subjugation by the English in 1817. Still, his family continued to be the dominant magnates in this area and the loyalty of Thakur Govind Singh, his son, in 1857 helped the house to recover much of its old position.\textsuperscript{48} During the mutiny Tappa Raya had a police station and tehsil. But more important than that, it was dominated by the Baniyas. Janaki Prasad, Jamuna Prasad, Matilal and Kishan Das were leading mahajans who lived in this town. It was their masonry houses that were 'the most conspicuous buildings in that place', and a 'large orchard of mango and Jaman trees, twenty-two bighas in extent, that adorned the tappa was planted by Kisan Das'. Gokul Dass Seth, who headed a list of prominent mahajans made on the eve of the mutiny, lived in Raya, as did Nanda Ram, head of the rising Baniya family in the region.\textsuperscript{49}

The region around Raya was not as fertile as that of Barout. The soil varied in quality and irrigation was carried on from wells rather than from canals.\textsuperscript{50} The Jats were the largest group in a population devoted exclusively to agriculture. In Mahaban pargana, which included tappa Raya and its villages, the Jats cultivated in the 1870s 22 per cent of sir lands and 35 per cent of the area as occupant ryots and tenants-at-will. From the malik Jats to the tenant Jats they cultivated 58 per cent of the entire area between themselves. Each clan had settled in a compact area: the Rayat had their holdings in Sankh, the Dusar in Sonai and the Godhe in Raya.

The very history of village settlement and the nature of holding had strengthened the community and clan feelings. 'It would seem',

\textsuperscript{47} F.S. Growse, \textit{Mathura, A District Memoir} (third edition, 1883), pp. 401–2. All the three editions of this work have been used in this essay and references will be made hereafter by the author's name followed by a numeral in parenthesis to indicate the edition used: e.g. Growse (3), p. 86. R.S. Whiteway, \textit{Report on the Settlement of the Mutra District} (Allahabad, 1879), p. 33.

\textsuperscript{48} Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North Western Provinces of India, vol. viii, \textit{Mutra}, pt. i (Allahabad, 1884), p. 132. Hereafter Statistical, etc.


\textsuperscript{50} Drake-Brockman, pp. 278–9; Growse (2), p. 86; Whiteway, p. 32.
wrote a settlement officer,51 'that all the Jat share-holders... are really or theoretically descendants of one man, the original founder of the estate. As his descendants increased and the cultivation around the old site grew, so new colonies of shareholders planted themselves in hamlets near their fields separating off their cultivation but still retaining their share in the ancestral Khera'. Nowhere was 'this tendency of the Jat caste to find new offshoots from the parent village as the community grows while at the same time the interest in the parent site remains undiminished' better illustrated than in Raya and Sonai.

Raya had twenty-four estates, covering nearly 12,000 acres. There was a group of older settlements comprising fourteen villages called Chaudah Taraf. The others were its offshoots. The history of the adjoining tappa, Sonai, with its town, Ayra Khera, had similar features. It was the recognized centre of eighteen villages. Nain Sin had established the khera, and it was his sons and grandsons who founded the surrounding villages after their name and became the owners of new settlements. But the bazar of Ayra Khera remained the joint property of the clan and their joint permission was necessary for the establishment of any new shop. It was obligatory too that all members of the clan should gather at the Phul Dal festival in the month of Chait. All of the arable land was occupied by the members of Godha subdivision of the Jats.52

Thus in this area community or clan-feeling sustained itself by a close correspondence between landholding and clan-settlement. It also had tradition, memory and customs to feed on. The khera, 'often an uninhabited site', but 'still remembered as the one that threw out separate villages as colony',53 was the most visible symbol of a common origin, and attachment to it as the joint property of clan leaders the expression of a primordial solidarity. Each area had its dominant clan, which again had a local village or town to look back upon as the place which their common ancestor was said to have founded. Thus, tradition combined with the concentration of proprietorship in the hands of a particular clan to generate a consciousness that would express itself in any collective action such as an insurrection.

51 Whiteway, p. 39.
53 Statistical, etc. p. 136.
The land tenure was a bhaiyachara in perfection. By the 1830s the estates had been minutely subdivided into the various pattis and it was the pattidars who mattered most to the settlement officers. The pattidars were differentiated in terms of ownership. Some could own more than 500 bighas of land whereas others did not have more than sixty. In the twenty years before the mutiny, however, the relations between pattidars and bistwadars had come under strain. Stokes has argued that the revenue demand of the state as well as the administrative arrangements connected with the settlement operations were major factors which caused this strain. The settlement operations, for instance, were aimed at determining the precise ownership of each sharer, although, as J.G. Deedes, the officer on the spot in tappa Raya and Sonya pleaded with his superiors, ‘an undivided patti or an undivided property in land’, however ‘foreign to all European ideas of property’, was ‘well understood by the people themselves’, and therefore ‘to make an individual family quarrel and divide their patrimony’ could ‘not tend much to the advantage of the society’. But the Board insisted on the recording of rights as joint proprietorship under ‘the name of the managing and ostensible member of the family’ and decided to change the village measurement to a new standard because such a measurement, they thought, would be ‘correct and therefore more satisfactory to all’.

The inflexibility of the settlements operations was compounded by the heavy revenue demand. In his report on the settlement in tappa Raya Deedes referred to ‘the over-assessment and the resultant mortgages by which the government demand was provided for’. As the revenue demand was in many cases levied ‘with little reference to the capabilities of the estate’, its obvious result was ‘in driving away the proprietary cultivator of the soil and eventually the loss of government is much greater than would have been incurred by granting relief in time, to say nothing of individual misery which has been caused by the numerous and repeated transfers’.

54 Deedes’ letters, 1 December 1831, 4 February 1832. BR, NWP, 8 March 1833, Proc 43, UPSA.
55 Macsween to the Board, 9 August 1832, BR, NWP, 8 March 1833, Proc 44, UPSA; Deedes to Macsween, 26 November 1832, BR NWP, 8 March 1833, Proc 47, UPSA. On measurements in Raya and Sonya, see Macsween’s letter, 31 December 1832 & Deedes’ letter, 5 December 1832, BR, NWP, 8 February 1833, Proc 65–70, UPSA.
56 Settlement of Tappa Raya, Deedes’ letter, 4 February 1832, ibid.