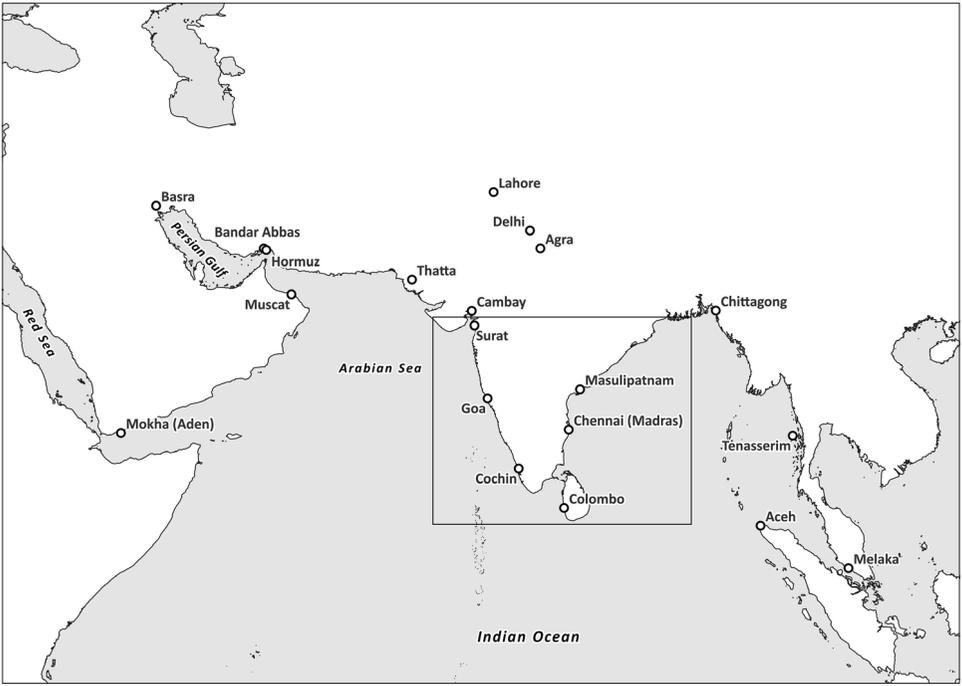


The Household in Connected Histories

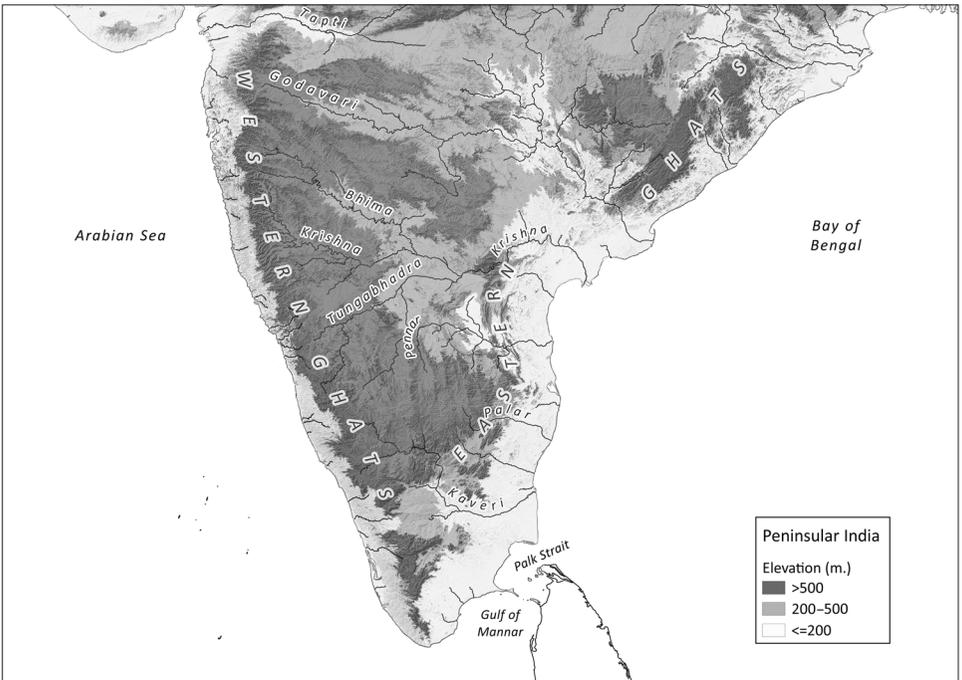
Our taxi could go no further, so we walked up the ascending path to the hill fort's entrance. Twenty kilometers north of our destination, Burhanpur, a small city in central India situated between the valleys of the Tapti and Narmada Rivers on the western end of the Satpura Hills, the winding mud road we were traveling vanished abruptly into the side of a steep hill. At a height of 260 meters, Asirgarh (fort) is the doorway to the Indian peninsula, where Hindustan ends and the Deccan begins. Before entering its enormous black gates, we turned around to take in the view—a single frame where the repetitive image of thorny *kikar* trees on the flat, beige plains of northern India gives way to a contrast of lush green against the black soil of a plateau or tableland. Looking south from Asirgarh, one place ends and another one begins.

In 1601, when Emperor Akbar finally captured this fort, thousands of soldiers in the army of the Mughal Empire—the largest political power of precolonial India—marched across the contrasting landscapes of Hindustan and the Deccan.¹ But legend has it that Asirgarh had never been taken by force; nor did it belong to any particular ruler for long. Singular, yet akin to many sites across the Indian subcontinent, Asirgarh ensconced the sediments of multiple pasts. At the fort's center is the mosque built by the Faruqi dynasty of Khandesh (ca. 1382–1601), with Persian inscriptions recording the additions built by each Mughal emperor alongside vestiges of the Holkar family of Indore, who lost it to the English East India Company in 1819. Inside what remains of the colonial cantonment lie the graves of dead British officers.

For me, the journey to Asirgarh marked the beginning of multiple haphazard itineraries over many years to make sense of what happened in the decades *after* the Mughals marched south into peninsular India. Walking across this vast



MAP 1. Mughal India and the Indian Ocean world. Drawn by Kanika Kalra.



MAP 2. Physical terrain of peninsular India. Drawn by Kanika Kalra.

landmass, tracing the relationships between the many contrasting landscapes that stretch across modern-day states from Maharashtra to Tamil Nadu, led to many places where borders of all kinds—social, cultural, linguistic, and political—were both pronounced and amorphous. For example, the tiny village of Gabbur in Raichur, a district in Karnataka where the streets buzz with the sound of Kannada, Marathi, Telugu, and Urdu, defying the linguistic boundaries of the modern-day nation-state of India. Or Gandikota, a village where the rise and fall of political dynasties, so neatly marked in official Persian chronicles, made it impossible to differentiate a fort from the landscape of red rocks in the gorge of the Pennar River in southeastern Andhra Pradesh. At the opposite end of the peninsula in the lands below the Narmada River—the geographic feature often used to mark the borders of northern and southern India—stood another famed fort, Senji, less than a hundred kilometers east from the bustling port-city of Pondicherry in present-day Tamil Nadu (southeastern India).² Here, too, one place ended and another began. The Deccan plateau's boulders gave way to the Karnatak lowlands, the coastal plains where cotton was grown, spun, woven, and then shipped across the Indian Ocean to be sold in markets from the Persian Gulf to Thailand. Asirgarh and Senji were the two hill forts that bookended the northern and southern limits of the Mughal frontier in peninsular India.

From the central plateau to riverine deltas and, finally, to the coasts of peninsular India, my itineraries across diverse ecologies went beyond stops at monumental ruins. At times, I followed the journeys of smaller kinds of discarded material evidence, the myriad objects that historians use to reconstruct the past. Such detritus, discarded reams of paper with a few lines on them sometimes stored in the niches of fort walls now housed in modern archives, describe the weathered faces of ordinary soldiers, name their fathers and forefathers, and note the places they called *ghar* or home—the cities and locales from which they hailed or the lineages they had served for generations. Or in long forgotten poetic verses that praised their bravery in battles fought across places called Hindustan, the Deccan, and the Karnatak.

The mobility of people, goods, and ideas across the physical and geographic features that mark the boundaries of northern and southern India has been a persistent feature of the subcontinent's past and present. Yet, these two parts are often imagined very differently in both popular and scholarly understandings. The relative sociocultural homogeneity of the so-called Hindi belt of the north is often contrasted with the striking heterogeneities of language, food, clothing, and regional political parties of the south. And yet, history told from the vantage of political centers such as Delhi, located in the northern plains, has shaped how the "far south" of the subcontinent is imagined and subsumed into definitions of India. In other words, delineations of the subcontinent before it was divided up by modern nation-states often begin from a northern perspective, oblivious to the peninsula's bewildering layers of languages, castes, sects, and social practices. On

the other hand, a narrative of local exceptionalism is commonly evoked to mark southern alterity from the normative north.³ As much as these popular stereotypical divides between *north* and *south* speak to the crises of modern-day national identities, they are rooted in a deep history of overlapping sovereignties and contestation between the regions that forged the Mughal frontier, long predating the invention of “India” by European colonialism.⁴ This book travels as an itinerary across the expanse of peninsular India to figure out how definitions of these spaces transformed when their institutions, personnel, and resources circulated, fusing into each other over the course of the seventeenth century.

• • •

By the year 1600, much of the globe fell under empires. These large, expansive political formations, each often under a single dynastic line that ruled over diverse subjects, managed to hold together many different linguistic, ethnic, and social groups. Empires built complex state institutions, such as the military, bureaucracy, and court, and fostered new circuits of cultural and artistic patronage.⁵ Early modern empires were not stationary. They were not fixed in any one capital city or heartland but rather moved relentlessly—from Istanbul to Damascus and Cairo, from Madrid to Mexico City, from Delhi to Burhanpur. In doing so, they generated new frontiers across distant spaces.⁶ When acquiring more territories, they were not single-handedly overrunning shrubby, blank frontiers and quickly replacing them with all things imperial. On the contrary, empires confronted challenges from preexisting political formations; they negotiated with regional power-brokers, incorporated new social groups, and improvised mechanisms for holding down tenuous conquests.

As many historians have demonstrated, expanding precolonial states, from the Islamic world to late imperial China, were much invested in keeping track of their subjects and resources, even if the mechanisms for doing so were not nearly as comprehensive as those of colonial or modern states.⁷ Irrespective of the nature and scope of these mechanisms, the collective scholarship of recent decades has challenged the dichotomy between the premodern vs. modern states that lay at the heart of James Scott’s classic work, *Seeing Like a State*.⁸ Mughal South Asia was no exception to this pattern. Here, too, imperial agents had to count, list, and inventory how many soldiers, horses, guns, and grain were in stock, thus devising mechanisms for organizing, categorizing, and mobilizing subject populations and an enormous breadth of resources. In doing so, early modern empires on the move fundamentally transformed how their subjects, also on the move, identified themselves, defined where they belonged, and declared certain spaces home. Precolonial states were therefore not necessarily “the enemy of people who move around.”⁹ If anything, they were invested in developing techniques to incorporate mobility into state institutions to create partially “legible state spaces” within their frontiers.¹⁰ On the Mughal frontier in peninsular India, senses of belonging to

a home or *ghar* were reconfigured just as the imperial state determined how to tie myriad mobile castes and communities into its major institutions like the army and the bureaucracy.

Between Household and State focuses on regimes of circulation and how they shaped the politics of belonging through an archivally grounded analysis of many different kinds of Asian and European literary and documentary sources. This book is the first to make sense of a fraction of an enormous documentary deposit produced by the moving Mughal frontier, reading that deposit in tandem with a range of other materials generated in the spaces between the courts and coasts of peninsular India. The book's itinerary between forts, military barracks, regional capital cities, provincial market towns, villages, and small port cities emphasizes how everything from goods and skilled labor to bureaucratic practices and kinship relations moved back and forth between different places across premodern South Asia prior to European colonization. I argue, that such patterns of circulation produced practices of social identity anchored in the household,¹¹ a key site for interlocking social, political, economic, and cultural exchanges and, above all, for shaping the institutions of empire—the predominant political formation in much of the early modern world.¹²

The patterns of circulation mapped out in this book contrast with two images of movement and migration in premodern India. The first conjures this part of the world as a timeless, fixed entity where nothing—neither people, nor goods, nor ideas—ever moved. A second image is of unidirectional movement from one place to another that accounts only for external movements to and from the Indian subcontinent, understood in terms like *influence*, *invasion*, or *migration*. In contrast to both immovability and unidirectional influence, circulation as a pattern of exchange entails moving between the same places, regions, and cities again and again, such that, over time sites develop overlaps, similarities, and codependencies. Whether the back and forth between multiple ecological and political zones of specialized laboring groups and skilled artisans, or of literary texts and social elites between courtly centers, it is now accepted that circulation was the dominant form of mobility in South Asian society well before colonialism.¹³ In each of this book's chapters, I focus on how a particular form of movement worked in a specific social site, and I reconstruct how mobile social classes encountered and participated in state institutions, particularly the army, the bureaucracy, and the court. Thus, for instance, elite literati evaluated the growth of these state structures, circulating ethical critiques of power and politics in multiple languages. Participation in regimes of circulation required social elites to sometimes transcend cultural, sectarian, and ethnic boundaries and, at other times, to harden and harness social hierarchies to entrench their networks in hinterland and coastal economies.

Lying at the intersection of household studies and connected histories, this book develops two interrelated methodological issues. First, a focus on the household enables us to examine different scales and clusters of social relations in the human

past.¹⁴ It helps us move down vertically, if you will, to the relations of elite power with other social groups. An artificial divide between the “court” and “state,” on the one hand, and between cultural history and literary studies, as well as between social and economic history, on the other hand, has reified the study of elite power in premodern South Asia. The household is a key site that collapses such divides by unveiling how a range of anonymous subjects shaped political and economic processes that have largely been understood as the reserve of premodern elites. Moving between the court and the coast, this book therefore extends the analytical gaze to rank-and-file soldiers, weavers, artisans, farmers, and slaves whose participation (voluntary or forced) in familial networks was vital to mobilizing resources for imperial power.

Second, the household also bridges two distinct transregional lines of inquiry that have decentered Eurocentric models of modernity by reconstructing connections across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East in the centuries prior to colonialism. There are two different routes, one via land and the other via sea, that are reimaged via this connective tissue in recent scholarship. On the one hand, at the center of this discussion have been the Islamic empires of the Middle East and South Asia—the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals—which endured for variable durations between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries from the Balkans to Bengal. One way to study the connections between these empires has been through cultural institutions and the shared sociolinguistic worlds of Arabic and Persian, *lingua francas* of the Islamic world that operated alongside other cosmopolitan languages and multiple regional vernaculars. In recent years, comparative perspectives on the “Persianate” have examined the shared ecumene of social elites who circulated across Iran, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, dismantling colonial and nationalist biases that artificially separated the histories of these kindred geographies.¹⁵

The other route to reconstruct connections in a world before Europe begins along the seas. Alongside elite Perso-Arabic literary and courtly circulation that connected imperial capitals, a parallel development in the period from 1500 to 1800 was the transformation of the global economy when the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic became linked for the first time in world history.¹⁶ An earlier generation of historians reconstructed the flow of commodities such as textiles, spices, and silver by drawing on the archives of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* and the world’s first transnational corporations—namely, the Dutch, English, Danish, and French East India Companies.¹⁷ The exclusive reliance on European-language archives meant that this historiography at times ended up reaffirming the teleology of “European expansion in Asia,” without any engagement with materials in non-European languages. Indeed, even the most recent iterations of this scholarship continue to rely almost exclusively on European-language sources.¹⁸ Partly, this asymmetry has to do with the paucity, accessibility, and nature of sources in non-European languages as opposed to the well-organized and preserved records of the entities that came to colonize large parts of the world.

Between Household and State intervenes between these two distinct historiographical strands that rarely speak to each other by placing the household as the link between maritime histories of peninsular India with studies of imperial and regional courts further inland. Methodologically, it contends that we take seriously, and even prioritize making sense of the cultural and moral sensibilities of precolonial actors, visible in documentary and literary genres in non-European languages first, instead of always turning to the easily accessible archives of trading companies, European travel accounts, works by missionaries, and Jesuits, either as a default or as an alibi for tracing the rise of colonialism. Within regional scholarship, this book departs from static dynastic narrations of the Mughal past centered on the city of Delhi in north India to track an empire on the move, marching across war fronts in central and southern India, the only region of the subcontinent that was never fully incorporated into the imperial realm. By linking Persianate literary and cultural worlds with the Indian Ocean littoral, from military forts and regional courts to the weaving villages of the Coromandel Coast, the book follows itinerant households—comprised of Iranians, Marathas, Africans, and Afghans—whose conflicts over matters of identity, politics, and economic power created regimes of circulation that modified senses of belonging in the Mughal world.

EMPIRE AND HOME AT THE MARGINS

The concept of *ghar* or home lies at the heart of this book. Literally meaning house, dwelling, mansion, habitation, abode, or home, *ghar* is a present-day vernacular term used to refer to the physical space of an actual building or structure.¹⁹ Perhaps its most recognizable and evocative usage comes from Rabindranath Tagore's iconic novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1916) in which the split between the home and the world outside it stood for the Indian subcontinent's place in global modernity.²⁰ While *ghar* immediately conveys a sense of returning to a space of comfort, permanence and ease, it was, in times past, and remains to this day, a place of intense contention, uncertainty, and anxiety, as the most important physical and conceptual site of intrafamilial conflict. Every neighborhood, village, town, and city in modern South Asia is riven with stories about decades-long fights over a single ancestral *ghar*, home, bungalow or *kothī*, or family properties over which a deceased patriarch's progeny battle each other, very frequently turning to the courts, at times against or alongside a widowed maternal head.²¹ Among innumerable vernacular proverbs that evoke this term, the most prevalent refer explicitly to the sense of belonging associated with the idea of *ghar*.²² Take, for instance, *ghar kā bhedī lankā dhāye* (an insider reveals the house's secrets and sinks it) or *dhobī kā gadhā, nā ghar kā nā ghāt kā*, which literally means "the washerman's donkey has no home, neither at the house [*ghar*] nor the washing steps [*ghāt*]." The latter proverb's idiomatic English translation, "a rolling stone gathers no moss," inadequately captures its contemptuous tone, which conveys a sense of judgment upon those who lack a sense of belonging or loyalty to any one side.

Ghar also mediates the most mundane hierarchies of power between state and citizen. When the modern government clerk asks an average citizen queuing up to apply for a ration card, to fill out some paperwork, or to have their ID checked, the first question will be “*bāp kā nām?*”—what is your father’s name? This is often followed by “*ghar kahān hai?*”—where is your home? While the first marks descent from a male ancestor, the second question may refer to a distant district, city, place of birth, ancestral land, or village. The crabby bureaucrat assumes from merely looking at a citizen that they likely do not belong to a metropolitan city or region. Implicit in the second question is that the citizen is “out of place” in a particular context and that everyone in the queue has come from somewhere else. The declaration of your ghar in these everyday encounters with the state captures how the experience of unbelonging for most people in the Indian subcontinent was, and still is, rooted in circulating *within* and across its dizzyingly heterogenous regions, rather than outside it. Belonging to another place, conversely, means not belonging somewhere else. The hierarchical bureaucratic interrogation of ghar captures the glaring inequalities that have driven people to move from one region of the subcontinent to another for centuries.²³

The fixity of ghar with a specific place within the modern-nation state differs considerably from the meanings of this term in the pre-national works considered in this book. Rather than being fixed in place, ghar in the early modern period referred to a shared sense of belonging grounded in the circulation of households from multiple ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds. Ghar was a continuum of relations not limited to just sociological (kin) relations nor entirely bound to one space or territory. Ghar was a fraught site of relationships within and beyond the household unit, as well as a mediator of layered political sovereignties across regions. Belonging within the vertical hierarchy of a ghar worked in tandem with the ties forged horizontally between elite households.

Ghar, derived from the Sanskrit word *griha*, was an enduring concept in pre-modern South Asian texts and societies. Through late Vedic texts such as the *Grhya-sutras* (ca. 800 to 500 BCE) that laid out norms for the performance of domestic rituals, Jaya Tyagi has shown that the notion of griha referred to a house’s physical structure, relationships between members of the household, and their social linkages to larger communities outside it.²⁴ The display of rituals such as marriage, birth, and death within one griha signaled participation in wider communities, or transactions with new lineages and with other more extended *kulas* (lineages). Here, griha is not necessarily place-bound, so much as a conceptual space of social ties that produce the householder and his multiple linkages.

The two senses of ghar as a home, house, dwelling, abode, and habitation *and* as a single cell, receptacle, groove, channel, or drawer convey that it is a singular entity that functions as part of a larger unit or whole.²⁵ Where do we find the concept of ghar in later centuries, particularly in Islamic South Asia? The equivalent Persian word *khāna* has a range of meanings, including house or dwelling, on the one hand, and compartment or partition, on the other. It is the latter meaning of

khāna that is used today in common Hindustani parlance, along with the term for family and household, *khāndān*.²⁶ In political histories of northern India, one way of making sense of this term has been to examine how the Mughal dynastic line and the royal household created mechanisms for incorporating high-ranking nobility into imperial service as loyal *khāna-zād* (house-born) servants.²⁷

Moving beyond the northern Indian plains, the Mughals also transformed senses of belonging to a ghar elsewhere, linking it with place-bound concepts such as *watan* (abode, homeland, residence, dwelling or country) and *mulk* (domains). In peninsular India, where monarchical sovereignty was weak, generational service under an itinerant lordly household remained the fundamental form of political organization; the declaration of one's house indicated an occupation tied to years of service under a patriarchal head. Belonging to a ghar was a privilege. The Mughal state tapped into the circulation of different social groups as a resource for governing across regions, working with invocations of ghar to organize, identify, and count its new subjects and resources.²⁸

In seventeenth-century sources, we may deduce three meanings of ghar. First, the idea of ghar was tied to the subcontinent's most important social category—*jāti* or *qaum* (translated as caste or sub-caste[s])—that is, endogamous social groups that determined how people married, ate, lived, worked, interacted, and distanced themselves from each other. Rather than understanding it as a timeless, fixed, and stationary category, scholars have shown how *jāti* evolved and intersected with ghar to form the basis of social mobility and circulation in particular contexts and time periods.²⁹ Ghar was the fundamental socioeconomic resource or unit that members augmented and preserved by consolidating occupational status or control over a range of property rights over generations.

Second, ghar may also be understood then as the smallest unit upon which more transregional, bigger concepts such as *watan* and *mulk* could depend. Like these transregional Arabic terms, ghar also did not refer to a bounded geographic territory.³⁰ Like the term *watan*, which signaled multiple referents of place and lineage, vernacular terms that transmitted senses of belonging were also fundamentally tied to occupation, taxation, and institutions of resource management common across the Islamic world.³¹ Thus, in the subcontinent, households with *watan jāgīr* (hereditary patrimonies) had stronger ties to specific places, villages, and towns where they had a home or ghar for centuries and held onto particular bureaucratic offices for multiple generations, thus mediating the state's reach and control over distant resources. This meaning of ghar is most visible in administrative documents.

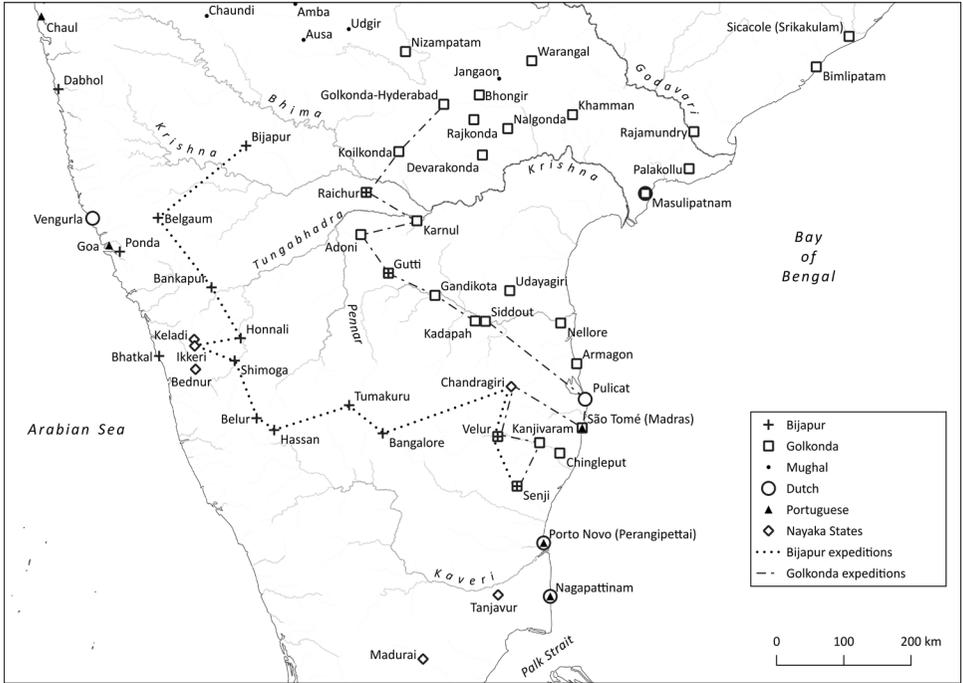
A third meaning can be found in literary representations where ghar can refer to a bounded political category and encompasses more than one household. For example, the Deccan is referred to as a ghar in literary works, as a broad region to be protected by the multiple lineages that had served in it for generations. It was from this conceptual terrain that the most sustainable political threat to Mughal imperial supremacy—the Marathas, the paradigmatic political formation at the

intersection of household and state—emerged in the eighteenth century.³² This book is a synchronic portrait of the preceding decades, usually dismissed as a messy interregnum bracing for the rise and fall of proper, fully formed dynastic kingdoms, when the multiple entanglements of *ghar* began mediating state power.

Grounded in a tradition of social history, the household moves us toward a less romantic, nostalgic vision of premodern political formations and elite power, whose connections with nonelite communities, be they soldiers, weavers, poets, artisans, or peasants, are often presumed but rarely explained. So much of Mughal history is Delhi-centered and focused on the greatness of individual glamorous emperors while the historiography of the Deccan sultanates of the south focuses only on the court. What imperial and regional politics meant to the lives of those beyond the court remains far less articulated. The household offers a site to measure the reception of an empire, where alliances, feuds, and material exchange created new forms of affinity, belonging, *and* social exclusion.

This book rejects primordial identity as the singular and most important lens through which we write about power and politics in premodern South Asia. At the same time, the cross-societal entanglements of household power push against the idea that the world before colonialism was some sort of *kumbaya*. We may move away from viewing precolonial state and society through opposite lenses as either largely syncretic and pluralistic with all social groups living in perfect harmony *or* as inherently and essentially discrete, sectarian communities always at odds with each other. That is, one of the main goals of this book is to examine political relationships between precolonial “Hindu” and “Muslim” familial lineages in a single, mutually constituted analytical frame. Instead of either assuming timeless premodern affinities or focusing on a single ethnicity, linguistic, or religious group, the household recalibrated state power irrespective of identity. In other words, measuring the degree of “indigeneity” or “foreignness” in Iranians, Turks, Afghans, Rajputs, and Marathas to retell “a history of hatred” is the least interesting question to ask about social elites and power in premodern South Asia.³³ By examining how these ascriptive social identifications formed in the first place through established institutions at work on the margins of empire, we see how the precolonial state incorporated patterns of mobility and circulation, thus linking lineages of service to definitions of caste and community. Instead of fixating on ethnic factionalism as a timeless phenomenon, historians of the Deccan, in particular, may want to learn from studies of the gendered household in other parts of the subcontinent that have long uncoupled premodern identity from static meanings of place, sect, and language.³⁴ Extending the analytic of *ghar* unlocks how nested connections constituted through regimes of circulation forged a multivalent politics of place across peninsular India.

Before considering this book’s historiographical and methodological stakes in further detail, I first map the political and social landscape of Mughal South Asia at the turn of the seventeenth century in the following section. I begin by



MAP 3. Deccan sultanates in the Hyderabad-Karnatak. Drawn by Kanika Kalra.

contrasting the top-down rhetoric of absolute opposition between the imperial north and regional Sultanates of the south with a bottom-up approach of how contending households anchored themselves in these states and produced overlapping and layered sovereignties across these regions. Through this discussion, my goal is to mark how *ghar* and its aforementioned multivalent meanings—as a socioeconomic unit, as a volatile site of intrafamilial conflict, and as a political category of belonging—were constituted by regimes of circulation integral to the everyday work of imperial institutions.

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE, DECCAN SULTANATES, AND THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Nearly seventy years after the Central Asian prince Babur (d. 1530) established the Timurid dynastic line, founding the Mughal Empire in northern India, the renowned historian and courtier Abu'l-Fazl (d. 1602), writing in 1596, looked toward the subcontinent's southern half. He castigated the Muslim rulers of the south as “ingrates” who rose up in rebellion much too often while, at the same time, he observed that this “vast territory is like another Hindustan” (*ān mulk-i wasi' ke hindūstān-i dīgar ast*).³⁵ Abu'l-Fazl articulated the coconstitution of these

inseparable parts, which was also echoed in the work of the Bijapuri historian, Muhammad Qasim Firishta (d. 1620) in his early seventeenth-century chronicle, *Gulshan-i Ibrāhīmī* (Garden of Ibrahim), when he looked northward in the opposite direction and he too embedded the Deccan within Hindustan.³⁶ In a time of continuous military conflicts and political competition, marking the alterity of the north from the south, and vice versa, would become common across Mughal and Deccan court chronicles throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, thereby establishing a trope that obscured the shared mechanisms of rule and overlapping arrangements of power that developed between these two regions.

This opposition framed the rivalry between the expansionist Sunni Muslim Turko-Mongol Timurids of northern India and the five smaller Turkoman regional Deccan sultanates, with both Shi‘i and Sunni kings ruling for variable lengths of time across the period comprising the ‘Adil shahs of Bijapur (ca. 1490–1686), the Qutb shahs of Golkonda-Hyderabad (ca. 1496–1687), the Nizam shahs of Ahmadnagar (ca. 1490–1636), the Barid shahs of Bidar (ca. 1538–1619), and the ‘Imad shahs of Berar (ca. 1529–1574), all of which emerged from the peninsula’s first Muslim dynasty, the Bahmanis (ca. 1347–1527).³⁷ The periodic Shi‘i inclinations of the ruling monarchs of these southern sultanates and the influx of émigré Central Asian elites resulted in strategic alliances with Safavid Iran to deter the Mughals, creating a web of triangular political and diplomatic relations.³⁸

Despite being under Mughal suzerainty in the seventeenth century and after the effective defeat of Ahmadnagar in 1626, two of the regional sultanates, Bijapur and Golkonda, endured into the late seventeenth century. It wasn’t until 1636 that the Deccan sultanates officially ceded territories to the Mughals by signing a deed of submission or *inqiyād-nāma*, whereby they recognized the overlordship of the Mughal emperor.³⁹ The decades after this event have long been dismissed as ones of decline and decay, yet they also present a series of contradictions.⁴⁰ For example, in the subsequent fifty years after accepting Mughal supremacy, the regional Islamic sultanates would also reach their largest territorial extent when they extended beyond the central plateau and into the Karnatak, the Kaveri River delta, and the coastal lowlands along the Indian Ocean littoral. Here as well, the Mughal-Deccan warfront encountered the political successors of the Vijayanagara Empire (ca. 1336–1565), the *nayaka* states of Madurai, Tanjavur, and Senji in the Tamil zone and Ikkeri and Mysore in the Kannada-speaking regions of peninsular India.⁴¹

Throughout the seventeenth century, the Mughals fought a war of attrition and there were constant disagreements among members of the royal household about the ethics of subduing coreligionist Muslim rulers of the south and about the difficulty of extracting revenue in that region’s much more unwieldy and variable ecology.⁴² Attempts to incorporate the peninsula invigorated a familiar and very

old pattern of politics wherein social elites from different sociological and cultural backgrounds affirmed their independence, undercutting imperial and regional monarchs by accumulating resources along the coasts, away from court capitals.⁴³ In many different parts of peninsular India, where monarchical forms of sovereignty had long been weak,⁴⁴ the introduction of imperial institutions simultaneously facilitated a drive toward regional centralization under elite households from a variety of caste, regional, and linguistic backgrounds. This pattern of an elasticity between monarchical sovereignty and elite social groups continued in the Deccan sultanates, well-illustrated for the preceding Vijayanagara Empire, and also conditioned Mughal imperial presence in peninsular India.⁴⁵

These two parts of the subcontinent shared some broad features, such as the common religion of the ruling dynasts, Islam, and a cosmopolitan language, Persian, but they had different degrees of social diversity. Persian was the shared language of literary production and governance under the Mughals in the northern Indian plains and it intersected with other rich literary traditions of Sanskrit, Braj, and Awadhi in court.⁴⁶ In contrast, in peninsular India, three linguistic layers had developed by the seventeenth century. These consisted of Persian at the very top, the language of elite courtly literature and bureaucracy. It was followed by a second layer of Dakkani, a regional vernacular form of Hindawi or early Urdu, written in Perso-Arabic script and used across the southern sultanates. Dakkani's historical antecedents went back to the Delhi sultanate's (ca. 1206–1526) expansion toward the southern Indian peninsula in the fourteenth century.⁴⁷ Persian and Dakkani coexisted alongside the peninsula's rich literary traditions in regional vernaculars such as Marathi, Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, and Malayalam.⁴⁸ A range of sectarian and religious communities made up the subjects of Indo-Islamic states, ranging from followers of various Sufi orders to Vaishnava, Jain, and Sikh communities across northern India to various Shaiva, Vaishnava, Jain, and Buddhist sects in peninsular India.⁴⁹

Looking outward, peninsular India's political geography was inexorably tied to the seas, whereby political centers located in the drylands of the central plateau or tableland had long sought control over "shatter zones" or "secondary centers" along major riverine conjunctures as well as those tied to more fertile areas of rainfall along the Eastern and Western Ghats of the peninsula that connected to port cities along the littoral.⁵⁰ Looking westward to the Arabian Sea, in the first half of the seventeenth century, elite households from the Bijapur sultanate enmeshed themselves in economic networks along the Konkan and Kanara coast (across the modern-day states of Maharashtra, Goa, and Karnataka). Looking eastward from the sultanate of Golkonda, this expansion was at first in the northern Coromandel (north of the Krishna River, from Masulipatnam to Bhemunipatnam in modern-day Andhra Pradesh).⁵¹ In the second half of the century, the Mughal-Deccan frontier converged toward the southern Coromandel (south of the Krishna River toward the Kaveri River delta, stretching across southern Andhra and northern

Tamil Nadu), which was the center of weaving and textile trade across the Bay of Bengal.

Shortly before the Mughals established themselves in the northern plains in the third decade of the sixteenth century, another set of actors had arrived in South Asia via the Indian Ocean—namely, the Europeans, starting with the Portuguese who conquered Goa on the Konkan coast, seizing it from the sultanate of Bijapur in 1510.⁵² For centuries, many different communities had sought access to the peninsula's key commodities—black pepper and cotton textiles—tying all political formations in this diverse region to the maritime routes of the western and eastern Indian Ocean. This maritime orientation was unlike that of northern India, where the Mughals first expanded in the Indo-Gangetic plains and only later turned their attention toward the seas. The Mughals acquired the prosperous port city of Surat after conquering Gujarat in the late sixteenth century in the west and Bengal in the east in the early seventeenth century. Over the course of the next few decades, these frontier zones between the Portuguese Empire in Asia and the Mughals, along with their various satellite states, produced an uneasy relationship between “unwanted neighbors,” as elucidated in the work of Jorge Flores.⁵³ The Portuguese were eventually eclipsed by the world's first transnational companies that brought a peculiar and new form of sovereignty into the Indian Ocean, the company-state.⁵⁴ The English Company, founded on a charter issued by Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) in 1600, first attempted to enter the subcontinent via Gujarat. The Dutch formed the VOC (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie) or the United East India Company in 1602, which made its way first to the eastern Indian Ocean via the Coromandel coast and only much later tapped into the western Indian Ocean around 1621.⁵⁵ This book's chapters begin right at this moment in the seventeenth century's first half, when the Mughal army, after defeating the Ahmadnagar sultanate, first occupied the northern Deccan in the 1620s. The remaining two sultanates accepted imperial overlordship and began expanding toward the Indian Ocean littoral, and the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English negotiated their operations along the Konkan, Kanara, and Coromandel coasts with the powerful itinerant households affiliated with the regional sultanates of the south and Vijayanagara's successor states.⁵⁶

The cast of characters here stay within the seventeenth century, a period that holds a contradictory position in both historiography and popular imagination. While some view it as mere extension of the age of absolute monarchs in the sixteenth century, at the other end, late Mughal historians often skip hurriedly over it to explain the momentous changes of the better-studied eighteenth century. Neither an addendum to or a continuation of a preceding golden age in the sixteenth century nor the precursor or cause of decline in the subsequent one, the seventeenth century's overlapping and contested sovereignties are now being made sense of on their own terms across different parts of the early modern world.⁵⁷ Scholars addressing the vantage point of different provinces in seventeenth-century India

have thus emphasized the need to make sense of how regional politics shaped imperial state-making.⁵⁸

OVERLAPPING SOVEREIGNTIES AND CONTENDING HOUSEHOLDS

By contrasting the top-down rhetoric of an absolute opposition between the imperial north and the Sultanate south with a bottom-up portrait of household participation in the day-to-day workings of early modern states, this section provides the reader with a prelude to the messy social worlds of different households reconstructed across the book's chapters by bringing together both literary and nonliterary sources generated by "court" and "state," a dichotomy I address in the introduction's last section.

Disputes over the definition of political boundaries and military resources could not disentangle the codependent and overlapping sovereignties of the Timurid Mughals of Hindustan with the Turkoman dynasties of the 'Adil shahs of Bijapur and the Qutb shahs of Golkonda in the south. Alongside a begrudging admiration of the Mughals, southern chroniclers often referred to their northern competitors as emperors descended from Timur (*bādshah-i timūri nizhād*), or scaled them down derogatively as the emperor of Delhi (*bādshah-i dihli*) or the king of Lahore (*shāh-i lahūr*), or referred to them simply through the ethnic marker of "mughal" or Mongol, which the Mughals themselves never used.⁵⁹ Similarly, the domains of Hindustan (*vilāyat-i-mughal / mughal hindustān*) were depicted as a distinct and delimited space that lay north of the River Narmada, to which Mughal soldiers often withdrew after confrontations with regional armies.⁶⁰ Political turncoats and military renegades traversed different layers of border and threshold (*sarhad-i-mamālik*), seeking protection under a rival political regime.⁶¹ But the problem of military retention and desertion was acute in a region where elite households in the neighboring sultanates were also expanding recruitment just as Mughal troops began to encamp across forts in the erstwhile regions of the Ahmadnagar sultanate (ca. 1490–1636), north of the River Krishna.⁶² In the very heyday of imperial expansion in the seventeenth century, peninsular India became the epicenter of the empire, with the political-military campaigns in the southern centers becoming sites of improvisation where heightened centralization was constantly mediated by nonimperial state forms.

When the empire began expanding its limits beyond the Indo-Gangetic heartland, new groups were drawn into becoming "Mughal," bringing imperial practices into dialogue with regional circulation regimes and senses of ghar or belonging tied to a lineage of service. There was a fundamental difference in the way the royal dynastic line related to elite social groups in the imperial north versus in the southern sultanates. In peninsular India, military-aristocratic orders and hereditary officials maintained troops at their own expense to mobilize in times of war.⁶³

The vast majority of fighters under these household chiefs were mercenaries with variable levels of control and ownership over their own weapons, horses, and food.⁶⁴ Unlike Mughal Hindustan, the Deccan sultanates did not have an elaborate *mansab* ranking system nor an ideological structure that tied distinct elite lineages to kingly power.⁶⁵ In the period of Mughal suzerainty, we see the fusion of these two imperial and regional state forms, which was also heightened when patriarchal heads of household faced shortages of resources, disputes within their families, and new incentives for joining up with different masters or entering the imperial ranks.

What did this tension in the seventeenth century between layered sovereignties and the improvising of empire look like from the bottom up? Which households enabled and extended the premodern state's reach? Often concerned with explaining the endpoints of events or the final outcomes, historians have outlined the rise and fall of the sultanates, Mughal expansion in the Deccan, and the ascendance of the Marathas and Indo-Africans to verify the seventeenth century's political turbulence in terms of absolute concepts of alliance-making.⁶⁶ My purpose here in zeroing in on a sample of the documentary evidence is twofold: (1) to trace out different social actors' definitions of *ghar* and how they marked its uncertain terrain of belonging; and (2) to identify which regimes of circulation impinged on the day-to-day transactions between household(s) and state.

Documentary evidence in Persian provides vignettes of two types—high-caste, hereditary village-level officials and nonhereditary, military-aristocratic lineages—circulating back and forth between regional capitals, forts, and provincial towns, deploying a common set of strategies to harness state power. In a detailed study of one *watandār* (holders of hereditary patrimonies) Maratha household, the Jedhes, A. R. Kulkarni has shown that these lineages were likely to fight each other in the battlefield, remaining loyal in service to a particular master rather than falling neatly into ethnic camps, rarely uniting to protect the *watan* as a whole.⁶⁷ Furthermore, to one-up and compete against one's own kin required drawing on “the family feud as a political resource,”⁶⁸ whereby members had to link their *ghar* with networks of other lineages, regardless of whether they were one of their own kind or not.

From urging cultivators to till the lands and requesting the right to tax inland market towns to resolving irate complaints about relatives and disciplining forest communities to clear strategic forts, these day-to-day tasks anchored different lineages of service to state power. When the Mughal war front first moved into peninsular India, evocations of *ghar* or *khāna* tied Maratha, Indo-African, Turko-Persians, and Afghans into a web of relations with imperial and regional states. This was not a neat, mutually exclusive hierarchy of administrative labors divided between hereditary Hindu upper-castes and Muslim émigré elites;⁶⁹ on the contrary, the evocations of *ghar* as a socioeconomic unit and a political category embodied the internal fragility of these ethnic and sectarian categories.

We may extend these arguments to trace one example of a household feud from the 1640s to the 1660s in order to show how its members partook in the Mughal frontier's overlapping sovereignties. In this instance of a ghar in turmoil, Kedarji Khopade, son of Narsoji, a *desai* (hereditary chieftain) of the areas around Rohida fort (present-day Maharashtra state), deplored the *harām-zādagī* (wickedness, villainy, rascality, illegitimacy) of his cousin Khandoji Khopade, son of Dharmoiji. Both Kedarji and Khandoji were identified as *wārisdār* (heirs) who coshared official duties and responsibilities for governing areas around the village of Utroli. The Khopades were one of many elite Maratha *watandārs* of the Maval, a region of twelve valleys on the eastern side of the Sahyadri Mountains, in Bhor, south of the modern city of Pune, whose support had long been critical for reigning kings and emerging political contenders.⁷⁰ Starting in the 1640s, Kedarji's primary points of contact were the nonhereditary officials appointed to the transferable position of *havaldār* (literally, custodian or person in charge or governor of a port city, appointed directly by the sultan) who, in turn, reported on the activities of the hereditary officeholders to the king.⁷¹ Sultan Muhammad 'Adil Shah (r. 1627–56) of Bijapur noted that subjecting a devoted and loyal servant like Kedarji, a *halāl-khor* (faithful, loyal), to such tyranny was unjustified (*in chunin ziyādatī shudan munāsib nadārad*). Thus, on November 4, 1650, one havaldār, Sankaraji Banaji, was urged to punish the wicked cousin Khandoji and help the loyal Kedarji right away.⁷² Still, five years later, the family dispute remained unresolved when cultivators and peasants from the area journeyed to the court with complaints about the injustices of Khandoji. At this point, the king threatened to transfer Kedarji's *deshmukhī* (chieftaincy) to someone else if he failed to rein in his kin, holding him responsible for the actions of Khandoji.⁷³

While most of the correspondence offers a viewpoint from the perspective of the court, we also hear from the beleaguered head of household, Kedarji, whose words were likely spoken to a scribe in Marathi and interpolated in an undated lengthy Persian *'arzdāsh*t or written petition. Kedarji began by laying out the financial strains on his khāna or ghar, going to great lengths to explain that he was "the eldest of nine brothers and had a large house(hold) (*az in nuh kas birādarān in kamīne birādar-i buzurug wa khāna-yi buzurug dārad*), for which he had to spend the entire amount of the cess (*nān-kār*) on the household's expenses, including those of his defiant cousin.⁷⁴ He added that his annual income was barely enough to keep up with the maintenance and development of the villages and towns, deliver revenues to crown officials, and give a share to each of his brothers. While his ghar was under these material constraints, Khandoji Khopade, with the backing of two Indo-African havaldārs and the ascendent Maratha Bhonsles, was misusing various sources of revenue generated through *in 'ām* (rent-free lands) granted to the Khopade family. Recently, Khandoji had looted a village, destroying and stealing property, killing three cultivators, and injuring about ten to twelve people. With exasperation and fear, Kedarji noted that his ten to twenty mounted horsemen did

not stand a chance against his relative's master, Shivaji Bhonsle (d. 1680), with his four-thousand strong cavalry. So, for the time being, Kedarji, along with his sons, decided to escape with life and limb intact. Closing with formulaic phrases that appealed to the sultan as the giver of justice (*dād*), he ended his letter with wishes for the state's continued longevity.⁷⁵

Khandoji was not one to keep quiet and so he sent two of his men to the court to speak with the sultan. In turn, Kedarji warned the king that those people were telling all lies (*ān tamām khilāf wa durogh ast*) and that he should not believe their false speech (*zabānī ghair wāqī'a*). He urged that Khandoji be ordered to present himself to the court, in front of the king and the entire *qabā'il* (household), to settle these matters once and for all. On March 9, 1660, a *farmān* renewed Kedarji's appointment as *desai*, including a list of all the villages and forts under his purview, the market towns where he could collect necessary taxes, and his right to extract forced labor from villagers (*rābtī-yi begārī*), though this likely did not stop his cousin from wreaking havoc on the cultivators and residents around Rohida.⁷⁶ This renewed commitment was contingent specifically on Kedarji stepping up to support the Indo-African military commander Siddi Jauhar Salabat Khan, who had recently agreed to lay siege at the Panhala fort in the western Deccan, against the Bhonsles, in exchange for an appointment in Karnul in the Karnatak, in the southern war front beyond the central plateau.⁷⁷ Households with stronger ties to place could reign in their defiant kinfolk if they offered soldiers for the campaigns of itinerant military households circulating between two ecological zones at the northern and southern ends of the Mughal frontier. From the perspective of these minute negotiations, then, the Mughals, Marathas, and Indo-Africans all begin to appear as contingent categories, not necessarily motivated by a principle of absolute alliance-making but by much more prosaic concerns of beating out one's extended kin over the rights to control a ghar.

What do we make of this microportrait of one household's evocations of this concept in a moment of crisis? For Kedarji, the house(hold) was an entity with constant material and economic needs, with one too many mouths to feed. Hardly a static site of natural and durable bonds, the one thing constant in it was vehement disagreement over how to use its resources and the circulation of its members to mobilize resources. A ghar's internal dynamics necessitated forging crisscrossing relationships with other familial formations with different occupational functions in the state. The possibility of villagers, cultivators, and laborers fleeing from agricultural lands or traveling to the regional capital to relay their grievances required the patriarchal head to ensure social order, which was being disrupted by his own kin. The circulation and mobility of subject populations was both a resource and a threat that bound the interests of different ghar together. Although entrenched in a specific region, the ghar of watan-dārs like the Khopades was interlinked with larger networks of other groups such as the Indo-Africans, who were mobilizing resources dispersed across two connected ecological zones, the Deccan and the

Karnatak. At the lowest levels of governance, patrimonial power did not exist as an ideal type with a straightforward link between the sultan-head of household-subjects.⁷⁸ The agency of patriarchal heads was often circumscribed, limited, and contingent on a range of circumstances. The internal politics of a ghar compelled household chiefs to constantly seek alliances across religious, caste, or kin divides, at times to force compromise on their subjects or to sustain their grip on offices over generations, a pattern that chapters 3 and 6 of this book will illustrate.

Finally, Kedarji's small trials also speak to the third meaning of ghar or khāna explored in this book—namely, as a political category with far more elasticity than how we conceptualize social identities in the postcolonial present. The web of relations within which Kedarji's household was embedded is reaffirmed by literary representations of seventeenth-century politics. Whether Indo-Africans, Marathas, or Central Asian émigrés, the different social groups we see performing the daily tasks of the state in documentary genres also constituted the changing moral and ethical meanings of ghar under the penumbra of empire.

In popular discussions today, the seventeenth century is often held up as a point of origin, of sorts, to which modern-day anxieties about religion, language, and regional identities can be traced. To name just one example of the polarizing narratives associated with this century, we need look no further than the famed rivalry between the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (d. 1707) and the Maratha warrior Shivaji, used today to naturalize categories such as “Hindu” and “Muslim.” And yet, in the eyes of the poet Nusrati (d. 1674?)—one of the most prominent observers of this period and a character who appears across this book's chapters—the problem with these two figures was grounded, above all, in a deep history of familiarity rather than in fundamental, essential, and irreconcilable differences. To this political poet, ghar was a moral rubric through which he gauged the actions of all households—whether émigré Turko-Persians, Afghans, Indo-Africans, or Marathas—admonishing them equally for sinking the name and fame of their houses (*dubāyā āpas nām-o-nāmūs-o-ghar*). Lamenting the decline of monarchical power in the seventeenth-century Deccan, Nusrati would observe that the home had caught fire from two sides (*dikhiyā do taraf te lagi ghar ko āg*).⁷⁹ The intrafamilial feud of Khopades was thus nested within a larger sense of ghar as a political category to which multiple cosharers belonged all the while contesting, disputing, and disagreeing with each other. Subsequent chapters of this book will consider a continuum of literary and nonliterary evidence to reconstruct the messy entanglements of the household form and how its regimes of circulation harnessed wider cross-sections of society within the premodern state.

But before starting our journey across peninsular India, let's turn to the book's methodological and historiographical stakes. In the following section, I evaluate the twin historiographies of the northern and southern halves of the subcontinent, where the category of the state is often posited against that of the court, an artificial binary that collapses when studying the household form through a connected

histories approach. This dichotomy also shapes the pervasive theme of elite factionalism that unites the twin historiographies, which I also unpack in the next section by drawing on comparative critiques that urge studying the constitution of social elites through *practices* of social identity across the premodern world (rather than as a pre-given, absolute, and primordial value assigned to communities).

BEYOND COURT AND STATE IN MUGHAL SOUTH ASIA

Although some scholars may try to feign reinvention, first monographs are, in some ways, an homage to or a reflection of our training, bringing into collision lessons learned from a long list of teachers. This book is no exception. It began because I started searching for the place of households in connected histories.⁸⁰

The household, the basic building block of a society, is commonly defined as a stationary unit with a fixed number of occupants, grounded in place. Is it possible to examine this everyday sociological category through the practice of connected histories—that is, by reading sources in multiple languages from vastly different linguistic, geographic, and philosophical worlds, often used to reconstruct histories of global diplomacy, mobility, and transregional interactions? The foundational unit of the household constituted larger *jāti* formations, the subcontinent's most salient form of social hierarchy.⁸¹ It is worthwhile, then, to ask this question: What is the place of household and caste mobility in recent scholarly paradigms that emphasize transnational, interregional connections as the Persianate, Persian cosmopolis, or Eurasian interactions in the era before the nation-state? A short answer could be, there is none!

But, as the subsequent chapters will show, the story of how elite households participated in and transformed the imperial frontier reveals the connected histories of circulation across much smaller, more proximate geographies.⁸² It offers a picture of mobility across much shorter distances and itineraries, or what Kären Wigen has called “pattern interactions” or “cross-cultural isomorphisms,” in this instance of caste and household moving between multiple ecological zones.⁸³ Households in circulation within the peninsula, whether from Khandesh to the Kanara and Konkan coasts or from Telangana to the southern Coromandel, shift our attention away from much larger-scale horizontal movements between two similar sites to vertical encounters across different hierarchies of power. Studies of diplomacy have shown exchanges between major courts and capitals, between Delhi, Isfahan, and Istanbul. Or, covering movement across even larger distances, from the viewpoint of the European factory on the coast, historians of “European expansion in Asia” reconstruct the familiar story of European agents from Lisbon, Amsterdam, and London, as well as their encounters in the Indian Ocean.⁸⁴

The earliest explorations in connected histories (before it became a thing) had, indeed, shown the utility of working across the archives of courts and states, illuminating smaller geographies of circulation, attuned to formations of caste and

household at the edges of imperial states or in their “shatter zones.”⁸⁵ And yet, the household has not been the subject of connected histories in the way that dynasty continues to capture the imagination of global historians. The terms *dynasty* and *family* remain two ends of an uneasy tension in our modern imagination of both present and past political forms, constituting various definitions of the entity called the state.⁸⁶ A line of rule based on descent within a family, a group of people with a common ancestor, is seen as an entity with arbitrary rules, nepotistic, informal, lacking structure, and held together by affective ties. In contrast, for the historical past, the dynastic form and establishment of rule under a single (usually) male ruler is seen as a fully-realized political model from which all others are a deviation (stateless, tribe, chiefdom, and various other terms imply the opposite of monarchy). According to this model, the four levels of ruler, dynasty, court, and realm have defined the basic features of kingly authority throughout human history.⁸⁷ In this top-down perspective, then, the king figure is synonymous with the state, a model that has long been unsettled by scholars pointing to different institutional arrangements and innovation possible within patrimonial power.⁸⁸

This study of the intersections of household and state power and how they shaped regimes of circulation in the Mughal frontier resonates with work done by other scholars on the family and the improvisation of empires. Historians of many different parts of the world have shown that early modern empires amassed resources through a wide web of networks across distant regions, particularly through relations with the most basic unit of social organization, the family or household, which remains less examined, partly owing to a naturalism assumed inherent in this category.⁸⁹ One study has detailed the strategies that military households deployed to meet their obligations to the Ming state (ca. 1368–1644), building a bottom-up perspective on how imperial power worked at an everyday level.⁹⁰ In a similar vein, earlier studies on the Ottoman Empire’s Arab provinces illuminated the administrative strategies of military households in integrating the imperial order into regional politics. More recently, combining (central) Ottoman Turkish and (provincial) Arabic materials shows how provincial literatis’ networks of kin and friends created sensibilities that helped forge a cohesive imperial identity.⁹¹ Further afield, the family remains a key site for examining how core moral concepts like honor enabled urban households to maintain local ties while serving the monarchy in sixteenth-century Granada. The role of the family and the specific practices of patrimonial power in merchant capitalism, too, have been illuminated across early modern Europe.⁹²

Historians of comparative Islamic empires, particularly when evaluating post-Mongol Eurasia, have also contested this linear progression from prestate/kinship to kingly power in a few different ways, particularly when studying elite warbands and their mechanisms for incorporating new groups.⁹³ By examining Persianate historical writing for its discursive practices, Ali Anooshahr has shown how Turko-Mongol groups invented origins and traditions necessary for establishing

dynastic power, unraveling a continuous tension in how aristocratic lineages forged the early Mughal state.⁹⁴ In the eastern Islamic world, recent work on Safavid urban history points to the household or family as the most productive site for writing the social history of time periods identified as so-called golden ages when getting past the king figure is difficult, partly owing to the kinds of sources we have available. Rejecting simplistic, linear change-over-time chronological narratives and idealized definitions of norms of comportment (*adab*), Kathryn Babayan understands the seventeenth-century household anthology as the key site where imperial discourse and proscriptions were received, critiqued, and contested, putting the household and the state into dialogue with each other.⁹⁵

Echoing historians of comparative Islamic empires, scholars working across different periods and regions of South Asia have posed compelling questions from a range of unconventional sources to analyze the household as a site for social history. Place-based histories of greater Rajasthan (in northwestern India), in particular, have been at the forefront of understandings of caste, clan, and definitions of community. Tanuja Kothiyal and Divya Cherian thus urge building histories of the state from below, going beyond the dynastic line and supra-households such as that of the Mughals, while also emphasizing the need to study premodern social power in terms of its inherent inequalities and hierarchies.⁹⁶

Studying the period of the Mughals, and Islam's expansion in South Asia more broadly, so often synonymous with a neat line of dynastic rulers, often entails displacing the study of the household to its outer edges. Thus, in a rich and generative recent volume on the household in the subcontinent across time, the household within Indo-Islamic political formations remains absent.⁹⁷ The family is either examined through archaeological evidence or through normative texts that governed gender relations in the ancient and early medieval periods *before* Islam (roughly before 1200 CE.) or *after* the Mughals in the eighteenth century during the early colonial period when regional lineages forged independent successor states and we typically begin accounting for the household's role in state power.⁹⁸ By examining the household role's in the intervening seventeenth century, this book attempts to answer the call that "an adequate understanding of South Asian society requires us not only to bring the state back in; it must bring non-Hindus back in, too," even though it is no longer fashionable to prioritize the state as an object of analysis.⁹⁹

Scholarship has come a long way since Sir Jadunath Sarkar's diagnosis of the Deccan, the central plateau of peninsular India, as the "Spanish ulcer of the Mughal empire." And there have been considerable advances beyond examining Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's (r. 1658–1707) personhood and grudges against the south, or locating the cause of imperial decline in the incorporation of southern nobility, or validating Mughal success at collecting revenue in the newly conquered provinces.¹⁰⁰ One way to work beyond the south as a foil for the north, a trope shared in all the aforementioned works, is to investigate the long history of

borrowing and cohabitation that brought the institutions of northern and southern Indian states to mirror each other.

A renewed interest in social history has taken Mughal scholarship usefully beyond the court to the streets of Delhi and the provinces of northern India to examine elite power through popular sovereignty as represented in literary sources, on the one hand, and through a microhistory of law as visible in the documents of a family of landlords in Malwa, on the other.¹⁰¹ Collapsing the binary between courts and states by examining both literary and documentary evidence, reconstructions of the public sphere and political culture in Mughal north India set aside the search for change-over-time narratives.¹⁰² Going outside the capital city of Delhi, we see that variations between the ideals depicted in chronicles and actual uses of social categories have also been carefully observed in work on the changing profiles of *zamīndār* (rural potentates) within regions in the imperial heartland, showing the utility of comparing regional documentation against ideal taxonomies drawn from court chronicles.¹⁰³ All these works on north India call for a history of reception going beyond idealized representations of imperial discourse, power, and values in ruler-centric court literature.

The historiography of the Deccan sultanates has also, in recent years, witnessed an efflorescence across many disciplines, ranging from the study of court culture and literature to political history. Multiple museum exhibitions and recent monographs have addressed the place of Deccan sultanates in the Islamic world, turning to the question of their diplomatic ties and cultural exchanges with the three gunpowder empires—the Timurid Mughals of India, the Safavids in Iran, and the Ottomans in the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁰⁴ One interdisciplinary project has combined monumental architecture and landscape archaeology with textual evidence to reveal the continuities of southern India's political systems at the intersections of Arabic and Sanskrit literary worlds in the sixteenth century. By incorporating material culture, Richard Eaton and Phillip Wagoner underscored shared patterns of elite power and the role of secondary cities or “shatter zones” in defining sovereignty in the Deccan, a conclusion also reached in the aforementioned early collaboration of Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam earlier in the Nayaka world.¹⁰⁵ In addition, Richard Eaton has also written a synthetic pan-Indian political history, building on the argument about the salience of a shared cultural cosmopolis.¹⁰⁶

Drawing on this idea of a cosmopolis, the Persian language has become the primary agent in recent political and intellectual histories of the Deccan. For example, by exploring Persian texts beyond ruler-centric chronicles that take the court as the primary site of sociability, Emma Flatt has illuminated ethical modes of living and courtly disposition based on the cultivation of esoteric, scribal, and martial skills in the period before 1600, prior to Mughal hegemony.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, Roy Fischel's recent political history draws on Persian chronicles to examine origin narratives and kingly ideologies in the period prior to imperial incorporation,

affirming the tropes of opposition between a local identity in the face of imperial conquest.¹⁰⁸ In contrast to the rich tradition of accounting for state-society relations in early Mughal scholarship, as well as Abhishek Kaicker, Nandini Chatterjee, and Farhat Hasan's recent calls to return to social history in Mughal north India and forego the search for golden ages, the court remains the more privileged site of studying the Deccan sultanates.¹⁰⁹

In part, the focus on court-centric literature stems from the tendency to assume a lack of accessible documentary evidence in and about the southern sultanates. And yet, it is exactly in this contradictory period of Mughal suzerainty and purported decline that the Sultanates produced the largest deposits of Persian documentary genres (which offered us a window into the trials of the internal strife in the Khopade household), emulating imperial bureaucratic practices in the very writing of their materials at the moment when elite households were driving processes of regional centralization.¹¹⁰ How regional Islamic sultanates actually worked on a mundane, day-to-day level, or how their bureaucracies, armies, and administrations changed in the wake of a growing imperial occupation remains unresolved. We must turn west to the historians of the Maratha Deccan in the eighteenth century to understand everyday systems of governance that exercised social power in peninsular India and helped shape categories such as caste and household.¹¹¹

Recent calls to move away from studying "states" and "state-formation" to "courts" and "courtly societies," particularly for Persianate Islam and culture, do so at times without accounting for the sub-continent's basic form of social organization—*jāti*—a variable that defies boundaries of the socioeconomic versus those of religion, culture, and language. To live well in a part of the world as unequal as the Indian subcontinent, social elites have always had to go out and fight wars, besiege cities, monopolize roads and rivers, stock rice and grain, increase cultivation, and control natural and human resources. In doing so, multireligious and multilingual elites encountered a range of other noncourtly social groups in agrarian and coastal economies. To be sure, in the era before nationalism, members of elite households transcended differences of language, region, kinship, and sect, but they did so without disturbing hierarchies of caste and status across different regions. In this book, the cantankerous itineraries from the capital city of Bijapur to the port of Devanampattinam (identified as Teganapatnam in VOC documents) collapse such binaries to reveal the coconstitutive and interdependent spheres of state and court, at the intersections of which premodern power worked. To bridge the divides between the court and the state, this book's chapters are also an experiment with method and discipline, connecting social history with literary studies and historical sociology.

Finally, using the analytic of *ghar* bridges the divide between court and state, which has generated a corollary fixation on the ethnic composition of pre-modern social elites, shared across the twin historiographies of the north and south. The

roots of who was a foreigner and who was not in peninsular India ultimately lie in colonial ethnography, which assumed a fixed, static definition of pre-modern India, as I have argued elsewhere.¹¹² Historians categorized Mughal and Deccan subimperial elites (and their subjects) in terms of their distance or proximity to a pre-conceived notion of “Indianness.” These definitions of belonging derived almost exclusively from Persian chronicles, which follow interelite high politics with the ruler at its center, with little or no mention of social groups beyond the court.¹¹³ Frozen chronicle representations, however, do not reveal much about the valence of labels used for precolonial social groups or whether or not these groups earnestly believed in their purported identities; nor do they reveal how those further down the social ladder may have understood such categories. This book follows from the earliest generation of historians who studied a formidable range of archival sources beyond the official chronicle to show how ethnic identities of elites were hierarchically understood and in what manner they played prescribed functions in the imperial state.¹¹⁴ It builds on this tradition, however, by attending to the constantly shifting meanings of *ghar* and its role in creating new definitions of becoming “Mughal,” rather than with a fixed definition of this capacious entity that continues to cast a long shadow on practices of social identity present, even today, in this part of the world.

SOURCES AND ORGANIZATION

This study relies on a range of sources in Persian, in the panregional idiom of Dakkani, and in Dutch, along with a smaller number of sources in English and Portuguese. At various points in this introduction, I have echoed a critique of the Persian court chronicle, the paradigm of the Persianate, and Indo-Persian historiography more broadly, as the single most utilized body of sources used to write about the Mughal past and shape historical memory in the subcontinent for centuries thereafter.¹¹⁵ These official chronicles had a strong, linear chronological frame, and notions of universal time were usually compiled in political centers and authored by immigrant first- or second-generation Persian clerical elites. Their audiences were a small circuit of users, listeners, and readers of Persian. In contrast to the chronicle form, the much larger body of Persian documentary sources generated by the Mughal occupation of peninsular India are the least examined sources from the seventeenth century, and I put them in dialogue with a range of other materials. These documents are a window into the everyday interactions of the Mughal bureaucracy with people beyond the court, the social space of Persographia as Nile Green has called it, where Persian functioned alongside many different writing systems and oral spheres across the subcontinent.¹¹⁶

The focus here on synchronic convergences within the seventeenth century rather than a neat, evolutionary change-over-time narrative stems from the desire to generate an interdisciplinary conversation on a thick yet disparate spread of

literary and nonliterary multilingual materials produced in this period.¹¹⁷ Specialists of non-Western premodern societies have long confronted bodies of evidence that defy modern disciplinary boundaries and force us to rely on multiple methods for reconstructing worlds before Europe.¹¹⁸ How and why should the literary specialist of a regional vernacular read heroic verse about a historic battle alongside a bureaucratic document that tells us about the salaries of the soldiers who fought those battles, likely only studied by the social historian? By doing a simultaneous reading of such polyvocal sources, this book affirms the radical equality of literary and nonliterary ways of being, emphasizing the need to inhabit both in order to reconstruct the precolonial past. It shows that the “worldmaking”¹¹⁹ of literary sources was anchored in political and economic alliances and tensions in ways for which neither literary scholars nor economic historians readily account. The book moves between imperial and regional capital cities and multiple ecological zones—from the arid, drylands of the central plateau to both the southwestern and southeastern coasts of peninsular India—in order to show how microhistories of a region can have deep connections with debates in global history.¹²⁰

Much recent work on the north and south of India has shown that Persian texts were one among many linguistic traditions that circulated within and beyond courts, emphasizing the utility of supplementing this transregional language with textual materials in other languages.¹²¹ Contributing to this conversation, I turn to *masnavī* (narrative poems in rhymed couplet form) written in Dakkani on martial-heroic themes that comment on the politics of the Mughal frontier and the transformations of *ghar* or senses of belonging in the seventeenth century. The longer narrative form of the *masnavī* allowed poets to develop parallel scenes, divergent contrasts, and the dramatization of many different events and figures, making it more conducive and accessible than other stricter and shorter Perso-Arabic forms such as *ghazal* (love lyric).¹²² As the oldest living scholar of these two poetic forms in Dakkani Urdu, Mohammad Ali Asar, has shown, *masnavī* was the preferred form among literati across the Deccan sultanates, although *ghazal* also grew here from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. By contrast, in northern India, after the eighteenth century, *ghazal* remains the better studied and canonized poetic form of classical Urdu studies.¹²³

Many regional histories on the periods from 1500 to 1800 have recently made the case for making sense of similar premodern martial works in a range of literary and oral traditions that help collapse the easy association of premodern languages with fixed notions of identity.¹²⁴ Dakkani or proto-Urdu¹²⁵ occupies a curious position in studies of regional languages in early modern South Asia. From its very inception in the fourteenth century, circulation across the north and south was integral to the evolution of this tongue, which continued in the eighteenth century when southern poet innovators working in this panregional idiom moved

northward.¹²⁶ Rather than fixing it into clichés about local identity, sources in this language offer fertile ground for further collapsing the exaggerated divide between the north and south.

Scholars point to Dakkani's role in Sufi households that adopted it in order to spread Islam in southern India. Others have looked at its distinct adaptations of Perso-Arabic forms such as the *ghazal*.¹²⁷ Like Urdu of all varieties, Dakkani is based on a dialectal base situated between Panjabi and Khari Boli Hindi.¹²⁸ By the seventeenth century, Islamic sultanates of the south were broadly, spatially identified with different linguistic territories with regions of Kannada-speaking 'Adil shahs of Bijapur, Marathi-speaking Nizam shahs of Ahmadnagar, and Telugu-speaking Qutb shahs of Golkonda. Dakkani occupied a panregional position, presiding over and across all these sultanates of peninsular India, below Persian but above regional vernaculars. Despite scholars having undertaken painstaking, decades-long work in regional universities on the literary history of this language before the eighteenth century, many questions remain regarding its role in shaping modern Urdu, which is often only associated with northern India.¹²⁹ For the purposes of the social historian and this book, I engage with a modest slice of these literary materials from the seventeenth century, particularly when political poets evoked the idea of *ghar* in this language to capture the fusing of the north and south alongside senses of belonging under Mughal rule.

From port cities, villages, and bazaars along the littoral, this book reconstructs provincial household economic activities through the Dutch East India Company's archives (VOC), a body of sources often used to recount the story of diplomacy, courtly interactions, and European-Asian encounters. *Between Household and State* instead uses this European archive to reconstruct the story of inter-Asian exchanges, revealing the complex mechanisms through which indigenous elites transcended differences in language, sect, and caste to preserve existing social inequities and to maintain hierarchies in the Indian Ocean economy. In contrast to published European travel accounts and the more well-known records of the English East India Company, partly because this entity would eventually come to rule as a colonial power over the subcontinent, the Dutch materials from the period before 1700 are underutilized and less examined. Finally, in addition to juxtaposing Dutch documents against textual traditions in regional Indian vernaculars, *Between Household and State* examines how indigenous documents were translated in this European archive to reconstruct the voices and stories of inter-Asian interactions.

Each chapter of this book focuses on a single sociospatial context, reconstructing particular regimes of circulation and mobility, which were central to configuring the meanings of *ghar* at the intersections of household and state power. I examine particular sites in each chapter as windows onto the temporal and spatial conjuncture of circulating relations and processes. Regimes of circulation and

relations of belonging worked differently at different levels of scale, a fact that enables zooming in and out of specific clusters of social relations in each chapter. Rather than being a linear itinerary from point A to B, this book moves back and forth across the expanse of peninsular India, across different sets of scales between court and coast. Each social site illuminates the household's role in shaping the meanings of home or *ghar*, an everyday concept of belonging that was recalibrated through routine encounters in precolonial India's largest empire.

In chapter 2, the book opens at the military barrack, where we examine the first form of circulation—the movement of armed men and animals who interacted with different kinds of bureaucratic workers, scribes, clerks, and state inspectors. The act of identifying the itinerant soldier, verifying his *ghar* or home(s), was the building block of the process of becoming Mughal. From an interconnected network of military barracks in the south-central provinces (present-day Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra), I foreground the materiality of early modern states, reconstructing the day-to-day interactions of military circulation that tied the common soldier in service (*naukarī*) under various households to the state. Turning to the labels that classified people according to various identification of *ghar*, along with labels for lineage, language, occupation, and region, the chapter unsettles the meanings of ethnic terms such as Irani, Turani, Turk, Rajput, Maratha, Afghan, Deccani, and Habshi.

This chapter shows that, in a manner that was akin to other early modern empires, Mughal institutions emboldened and schematized social hierarchies to enhance the state's coercive capacities. This chapter's bottom-up exploration of the bureaucratic encounters that produced new notions of social identity contributes to the book's larger contention that precolonial identifications were neither fuzzy nor fluid.¹³⁰ Moving armies and their personnel brought the institutional mechanisms of northern and southern India closer to each other. As a greater variety of social groups, some more legible than others, came under the purview of imperial procedure, scribes generated a spectrum of labels to make distinctions between them. In a layered war front, greater centralization required improvisation on and incorporation of pre-existing regimes of circulation to form pansubcontinental institutions of military recruitment that could incorporate subjects constantly on the move. From this foundational discussion of the first regime of circulation in military barracks, where bureaucratic encounters shaped the meanings of *ghar*, we move to other social sites, including the court, regional capitals, market towns, and port cities.

In chapter 3, we travel with one of the most prominent elite households that first negotiated with the imperial overlords encamped in the northern Deccan. Through Persian administrative documents, vernacular narrative poems, and VOC archives, the chapter examines a southern Iranian Shi'ī émigré's confrontations with a Shaivite Kannada-speaking warrior chief while simultaneously facing opposition from his own son-in-law and other extended kin embroiled in

different nodes in the agrarian hinterland around the Konkan and Kanara coasts in southwestern India (present-day Maharashtra and Karnataka). Here, I examine intrafamilial conflicts and the circulation of relatives dispersed across small market towns and entrepôts. To compete with their own kin, elite political players strategically used Europeans on the coast—namely, the Portuguese Estado da Índia and the VOC—to consolidate their control over the agrarian hinterland. At the same time, increasing pressure from the Mughals in the north brought into focus the fundamental role of hereditary village-level occupational groups, such as accountants and headmen. This chapter demonstrates how ties of service between different types of precolonial households unsettles our present-day understandings of ethnic and religious difference, often conceived along the neat binary between Hindu versus Muslim. The intrafamilial feud between a father-in-law and son-in-law or between rival siblings from a lineage of village accountants over resources were strikingly alike and analogous across different sectarian and ethno-linguistic groups.

In chapters 4 and 5, we turn to the circulation of culture—its producers, representations, and politics—in the social site of regional court capitals (Bijapur and Hyderabad-Golkonda in the present-day states of Karnataka and Telangana). These chapters consider the cross-pollination of political commentaries in two languages, Persian and Dakkani, and how multilingual literary representations therein conveyed changing senses of belonging to a ghar under imperial occupation. Chapter 4 explores the theme of cultural circulation, using multilingual literary representations for the analysis of bonds that crossed lines of gender and status. Starting at the site of the adorned palace, it reconstructs the marriage of an itinerant regional queen and the movement of her literary entourage across regional capitals. Poets, free and enslaved, produced images of celebration and bonds of relatedness that political historians usually skip over as irrelevant to politics. I argue that ghar lay at the center of literary representations that memorialized different modalities of kinship in court politics, whereby poets and participants evoked the home as an idealized space that could be built based on marriage, slave patronage, or fosterage. In Persian chronicles such as the *Muhammadnāma* (The book of Muhammad, ca. 1646), *Hadiqat al-Salātīn* (Garden of sultans, ca. 1646) to vernacular narrative poems such as *Mezbānināma* (The book of hospitality, ca. 1633), regional literati conceptualized ghar as both a site of volatility and contention that disrupted monarchical power and, concomitantly, as a space of celebration, consumption, and hospitality where new aristocratic lineages anchored themselves into royal authority. This chapter argues that the patronage bonds between those depicted and those who produced poetic representations saw ghar as a site where divisions of gender, status, and class were crossed to articulate a politics of belonging in the shadow of empire.

Comparing changes over the course of the seventeenth century, chapter 5 turns to the transformed senses of belonging to a ghar as observed by poets in the

regional capital city who observed the evolution of imperial rule. I juxtapose the work of a émigré Iranian poet writing in Persian and a regional Deccani poet writing in Dakkani Urdu, both of whom composed narrative poems in the regional court of Bijapur (present-day Karnataka), where they formulated similar critiques of empire. It reconstructs how the Mughals were perceived by two different kinds of Muslim poets who, under the patronage of provincial households, observed their imperial neighbors with a mix of awe, mistrust, and suspicion. This chapter traces what changed about household power and the critique of empire from the first to the second half of seventeenth century by examining two martial poems, Hakim Atishi's *Ādilnāma* (The book of 'Ādil, ca. 1628) and Nusrati's *Ālināma* (The book of 'Ali, ca. 1665). These invectives elucidate the fragility of imperial and regional kings and sectarian identities in precolonial South Asia. Here, through multilingual literary representations, I show how poets took political positions on household patronage, collapsing solidarities of religion and a simplistic imperial versus regional binary. Both poets' criticisms of the Mughals were less about asserting an exceptional regional or Deccani identity and more about reflecting on the limits of monarchical power and age-old threats to it from familial formations.

In chapter 6, the book's final itinerary lands at the Mughal frontier's southernmost limits on the Coromandel coast (southern Andhra Pradesh and present-day Tamil Nadu) in southeastern India, where members of provincial households sought new alliances that cut across sectarian, linguistic, and caste lines to discipline the littoral economy. It considers representations of ghar as a political category in the seventeenth century's final decades, when multiple household lineages—Indo-Africans, Miyana Afghans, and the Maratha Bhonsles—competed for political power, with the latter eventually posing the most sustained and viable threat to Mughal supremacy. Moving away from the well-rehearsed story of sultanate decline and “elite factionalism,” the chapter once again shifts our attention to the competitive socioeconomic arenas inhabited by multiple households in coastal areas where regional kings were of little relevance. Its first part returns to ghar and its shifting meanings as a political category in the poet Nusrati's final work, *Tārīkh-i Sikandari* (The history of Sikandar, ca. 1674), which represents the rivalry between two prominent households, the Miyana Afghans and the Maratha Bhonsles.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, we find these intimate enemies, emerging from the same political ghar in the Deccan, extending their networks into the social and economic life of the eastern Indian Ocean littoral. The interelite competition that we see in chronicles and poems did not take place in a vacuum within the world of courts alone. Marathas, Miyanas, and Indo-Africans were engaging with economic networks of merchants, artisans, weavers, and European trading companies. Intrafamilial conflict and interelite household competition was enmeshed in larger processes of proto-industrialization, the growth of

markets across the world, creating transactions and encounters between new social groups.¹³¹ Elite households drew these preexisting networks and resources across two interdependent ecological zones, the Deccan and the Karnatak, strengthening their autonomy from monarchical power. This chapter interrogates the underlying mechanisms of interelite alliances within the coastal economy, which simultaneously depended on disciplining weaving communities and sustaining existing hierarchies of status and caste in a coastal ecology. Restoring the social order took precedence over absolute principles for upholding notions of identity and community.

The conclusion considers the afterlives and memory of seventeenth-century tensions between the household and the state in the early nineteenth century. It examines Munshi Muhammad 'Azimuddin's *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī* (The history of Dilir Jang, ca. 1839), an eclectic Persian-Urdu-English "family history" that was produced for the recently exiled Miyana Afghan Nawabs of Savanur (in the Haveri district of present-day Karnataka). Many such hybrid texts were produced in the early nineteenth century when such little kingdoms, descendants of martial households that had carved out their autonomy from Mughal and Deccan sultans in centuries past, were now increasingly beholden to the authority of the British East India Company. The chapter examines how the author of this polysemic text constructed a genealogical past, reproducing documents to and from company officials to assert the competing claims of his exiled patron, Nawab Dilir Khan Dilir Jang Bahadur, and his intransigent nephews, nieces, and sisters-in-law, all of whom were staking a claim to Savanur's now much-reduced fortunes. Engaging with the distinct modes of memorializing familial versus dynastic pasts, the conclusion grapples with the question of why, at distinct moments of colonial modernity, family was obscured and dynasty underscored, thus, radically transforming how we remember the landscape of familial and kingly sovereignty in South Asia today.