

From Battlefield to Weaving Village

Disciplining the Coast

Historians narrate the story of kings and households in the Mughal empire's peripheries through the neat sequential rhythms of high politics, partly because this is where the most commonly used sources—Persian court chronicles, diplomatic correspondence, and European travelogues—invariably lead the historian.¹ But such narratives of kingly ideologies, interelite alliances, rivalries, and collaborations, the stuff of political history, ignore the breadth of human and natural resources spread across land and sea that make empires and their agents work, an argument made by social historians of southern India for later historical periods as well.² How did elite household chiefs, subordinates of the Deccan courts that were now firmly under Mughal suzerainty, encounter actors who operated along Indian Ocean coasts? How did a moving agrarian warfront transform the lives of ordinary subjects when the imperium first extended to its farthest reaches? And finally, what kinds of artifacts help us reconstruct these alternate pasts?

To answer these questions, this chapter moves from battlefield to weaving village, turning to interstatus and intercaste negotiations that sustained state-making activities when an imperial-regional order edged toward the seas. By the 1660s, the Mughal-Deccan warfront moved to distant villages in the Karnatak lowlands, where weavers spun and wove cloth, to busy market towns in coastal provinces where merchants bought and sold commodities like cotton, silk, rice, saltpeter, and tin. Likewise, thousands of enslaved men and women were shipped from port cities like Tenganapatnam (present-day Tamil Nadu) to Jaffna (northern Sri Lanka), where vessels from Bengal, Malacca, and Aceh anchored to unload goods and people subject to inspection by officials like the havaldār or governor/port keeper, who deducted his share from the tolls levied on such commodities.

In the previous chapter, we saw how critiques of the Mughal Empire evolved in regional courts over the course of the seventeenth century. In this chapter, we reverse the lens, looking on courts and courtly actors from the vantage point of their socioeconomic interactions and transactions unfolding in a coastal economy. Elite poets like Atishi and Nusrati, sitting in the inland capital city of Bijapur, penned horizontal critiques of their coreligionist Mughal overlords, princes, and rank-holding officials, observing how imperial intervention emboldened regional household claims to political power. The stakes for defining place, community, and belonging under imperial suzerainty and during interhousehold rivalry heightened as a warfront closed in on distant coastal regions abundant in economic resources. In regions far removed from court capitals, household chiefs encountered forms of resistance from more vertical social encounters with occupational groups positioned at the middle and bottom of economic life. As this chapter will show, the meeting of an agrarian warfront with a subregional coastal economy involved negotiations wherein sultanate-affiliated household chiefs relied on existing social hierarchies in coastal economies to sustain their networks. It focuses on one of the earliest encounters of the Mughal-Deccan warfront with the southern Coromandel coast that precipitated long-term processes of regional autonomy,³ which lasted well into the eighteenth century, when independent states emerged from the processes of imperial conquest.

The chapter proceeds in two parts and includes a cast of characters whose journeys from the court to the coast are visible in a range of literary and documentary artifacts. In what follows, I move between vernacular literary traditions and the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) archives to reconstruct internal political conflicts within the Deccan sultanate of Bijapur, its competing households, and their encounters with the southern Coromandel's mercantile and weaving communities in the areas near Senji in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁴ Of these two types of materials, VOC documents, along with all the other varieties of company archives (whether French, English, or Danish), have for decades served as the basis for writing Indian Ocean history before colonialism, telling the familiar story of European expansion in Asia or its more recent avatar of European-Asian diplomacy and cross-cultural encounters in the early modern period.⁵ By contrast, textual traditions in regional Indian languages rarely make an appearance in these so-called global histories, partly because their audiences are limited to literary scholars and regional specialists.

In what follows, I go about asking a different set of questions from these materials. First, I urge (when possible) that Indian Ocean historians first read incommensurable textual genres in regional languages to open up the vastly different cultural and intellectual conceptual frameworks of precolonial actors whose roles in the political economy are simultaneously visible in European archives. Second, I build out from the long tradition in social history (and later on in postcolonial studies) of examining non-European actors and their voices in European sources⁶

by interrogating the interpolation, translation, and constitution of indigenous documentary forms in maritime archives that predate colonialism by a century. Juxtaposing vernacular texts with VOC documents, contemporary yet incommensurable materials, reveals a variety of interdependent spheres of influence—the court, the battlefield, the port city—within which households reshaped the imperial and regional states around them.

In the first part of the chapter, I reconstruct the broad political changes unfolding in the sultanate of Bijapur when the imperial-regional warfront moved toward the Coromandel coast, starting in the 1650s.⁷ Here, I juxtapose archival documents from the VOC to reconstruct the regional political economy alongside a poetic observation of political change, Nusrati's last narrative poem, called *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* (History of Sikandar, ca. 1672), composed in Dakkani. In this work, Nusrati portrays the rivalry between two contending regional households—the Miyana Afghans and the Maratha Bhonsles—who occupied center stage in imperial-regional politics in the second half of the seventeenth century. The poet deployed the conceit of the house—the *ghar*—to make sense of intimate, kindred lineages competing with each other and against the larger backdrop of regional kingship's dissolution. This poetic commentary uses tropes of difference to represent a battle between the Miyana Afghan 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan (d. 1678) and the Maratha Shivaji Bhonsle (d. 1680). As we saw in chapter 2, through the earliest deposit of administrative documents like the muster roll, both the Miyana Afghans and the Maratha Bhonsles had served in the armies of the Mughal Empire and the Deccan sultanates. In this chapter, we find these groups consolidating their autonomy from kingly power. 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan's grandfather had served under Khan Jahan Lodi (d. 1631), a five thousand-rank *mansabdār* who defected from the Mughals and fled briefly to the Deccan.⁸ The Bhonsles were one among many Marathi-speaking families that inhabited western India, ranging from warrior groups to holders of hereditary grants who held village-level positions under various Muslim rulers.⁹

Both new and old scholarship has often looked on these two groups as cultural others, framing this moment exclusively through the prism of identity and indigeneity.¹⁰ The understanding usually goes that Muslim Miyana Afghans were foreigners, while the Hindu Maratha Bhonsles were Deccanis, indigenous to peninsular India and thus the true defenders of this space against the Timurid Mughals of northern India.¹¹ However, such a simplistic modern binary was not how seventeenth-century observers themselves understood the place of these contenders in contemporary politics. As I show through an analysis of the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī*, the poet Nusrati laid out a moral definition of *ghar* to which both contenders belonged. We return to the idea of the home in this chapter, where *ghar* refers to the political category of the Deccan and includes multiple household lineages.¹² Writing toward the end of his life in the 1670s, with the dissolution of the Deccan sultanates imminent, Nusrati considered the moral stakes of the duty to

protect the house that one's ancestors had served for many generations. Judging the Miyanas' and Marathas' place within a shared ghar, Bijapur's foremost political observer never professed simplistic syncretism to suggest these social groups were not mutually exclusive; nor did he suggest that they always got along with each other. Nor, ultimately, did he claim the two groups were existential, essential opposites. The poet resolutely defined and marked their differences to demonstrate the intimate space of ghar, which multiple households had inhabited for generations and were morally obliged to serve.

In his previous works, such as the *'Alināma*, Nusrati had already reflected on the Marathas and the Indo-Africans, and how and why they belonged to the political category of the Deccan. As we saw in the previous chapter, he had thought through terms such as *watan* (homelands) and *mulk* (domains), the meanings of which were transformed radically with the arrival of the Mughals in the south. In the twilight of his career and to make sense of the place of Marathas and Afghans in contemporary politics, Nusrati expanded on these ideas with ghar or house/home, a conceptual space that undergirded the language and tropes of sectarian difference that had been common across Persianate and Indic texts for centuries.¹³ He saw the Marathas and Afghans not merely as Hindu and Muslim, but rather as two kindred rivals who belonged to the same home,—namely, the Deccan. While studies have examined how the Marathas were memorialized in contemporary Marathi-textual genres like *bakhar*, *lavani*, and *powada*,¹⁴ all these texts were part of a broader literary ecology produced alongside other contemporary genres, such as Dakkani masnavī. Together, these texts illustrate the competitive arena within which both Hindu and Muslim households in the seventeenth-century Deccan operated, seeking textual legitimation of their competing claims to political power.

The third part of the chapter then journeys with the close associates and kinsfolk of this poem's protagonists to the southern Coromandel where they encounter new social groups operating in a coastal economy. Looking at the physical features of southern India on a map, we see that the southern Coromandel is where the black and red soil regions of the Deccan plateau end (where the capital cities of the Islamic sultanates of Bijapur and Golkonda were located) at the city of Tiruvannamalai in present-day Tamil Nadu. It consists of multiple river basins, port cities, and in general a geographic heterogeneity that has shaped economic and social life for centuries.¹⁵ Flanked by the continuous mountain ranges of the Western Ghats and the discontinuous Eastern Ghats, its coastal plains run from the convergence of the eastern and western Indian Oceans at the subcontinent's southernmost district, Kanyakumari, also known as Cape Comorin. The area between the two coastal cities of Cape Comorin and Chennai encompasses multiple subcoastal regions divided by distinct bayheads and commodities produced around them, ranging from pearls and cotton to rice.¹⁶ Moving north on a map from the subcontinent's southernmost point in Cape Comorin, where the Pearl Fishery Coast begins and ends at the port city of Tuticorin, we can then



MAP 6. Indo-Africans, Marathas, and Indo-Afghans on the southern Coromandel coast, ca. 1680. Drawn by Kanika Kalra.

follow the Ramnad coast that reaches up to Point Calimere, also known as Koddaikarai. The Pearl Fishery and Ramnad coasts enclose the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Strait, which connect southern India to the Jaffna peninsula in northern Sri Lanka. Moving north from Point Calimere to Chennai lies the area between the Rivers Kaveri and Palar, which both flow east toward the Bay of Bengal where this chapter’s narrative concludes and its characters converge. Between the deltas of these two rivers from south to north lie the port cities of Nagapattinam, Porto Novo, Cuddalore, Pondicherry, and St. Thomé. All are located south of the city of Madras or Chennai, where Bijapur-affiliated households, coastal merchants, and weaving communities converged in the seventeenth century’s second half (See map 6).

How did Bijapuri subordinates encounter the southern Coromandel’s variable coastal and human ecology? To answer this question, the chapter considers the dealings of ‘Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan’s close associate Sher Khan Lodi (d. 1681)¹⁷ with the southern Coromandel’s well-established mercantile Sunni Shaf‘i Marakkayar, Tamil-speaking Muslims, and Tamil and Telugu-speaking upper-caste Hindu merchant communities. The latter had long served as suppliers of European companies and negotiated with them by financing capital to

regional weaving castes such as the *kaikkolar*, *devangulu*, and *sale*, who circulated across the Karnatak lowlands around the port cities of St. Thomé, Tenganapatnam or Cuddalore, Porto Novo, and Nagapattinam (See map 3).¹⁸ Sultanate-affiliated agents like Bahlol Khan and Sher Khan Lodi, who propelled the warfront into the northern Tamil country, had much in common, sociologically speaking, with the region's Tamil- and Telugu-speaking "portfolio capitalists."¹⁹ At different ends of peninsular India, these very different kinds of merchant-warrior groups had long combined their commercial, military, and political interests through the institution of revenue-farming, working at the edges of monarchical state-forms.²⁰ In some ways, the Miyanas had much to learn from the dominant social groups of the northern Tamil country who had been entrenched in the coastal economy for far longer.²¹ The episode examined in this chapter unveils the resilience, portability, and shared mutual understanding between different kinds of portfolio capitalists. These premodern elites transcended differences of region and language to preserve existing ways of doing business, which entailed entrenching inequalities and preventing social discord. To reconstruct the complex web of transactions between actors from these distinct social locations, I read their voices in Persianate documentary forms that were translated into the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) archives. Markedly different from their primary form and functions, translated indigenous documents interpolated in the VOC archives were constituted by the negotiations between regional provincial household chiefs, coastal merchants, and weaving castes, with the latter two groups having a long history of collaboration, borrowing, and conflict.²²

This chapter has two goals. First, in keeping with the book's larger objective, it moves away from canonized Persian chronicles and published European accounts, the usual suspects that historians often use to tell rise and fall narratives of political entities such as the Dutch East India Company and the Deccan sultanates, or of individual actors and various high-ranking officials in the French, Dutch, and English East India Companies. One could easily recount a straightforward narrative history about interelite machinations by sketching the serialized biographies and political fortunes of elites like Sher Khan Lodi or Shivaji. Indeed, since the early twentieth century, historians have done just that by following the truth claims of well-known early nineteenth-century Persian chronicles, such as Ibrahim Zubayri's *Basātīn us-Salātīn*, supplemented with published and translated European accounts, such as those of the French governor of Pondicherry, Francois Martin's *India in the Seventeenth Century*. But pairing these two historical genres offers only a top-down perspective of a far messier portrait. For instance, Martin's account is unsurprising in singing the praises of figures like Sher Khan Lodi and the Miyanas who were known partisans of the French.²³ While it offers great detail about interelite negotiation, where Martin's considerable disdain for Brahmins is obvious, almost entirely absent from the account is how these elites dealt with ordinary subjects whose lives were transformed in the wake of war.²⁴

Relying on Persian chronicles and published European accounts risks reifying pre-modern political power and stripping it from its broader social realities.

This chapter turns to a very different body of literary and archival ecologies to find such voices and a different vantage point. It does so by connecting the Persianate with the Indian Ocean, two historiographical fields that are difficult to put into dialogue with each other.²⁵ It brings the growing field of Persianate studies, largely limited to the analysis of literature, into conversation with well-known and old debates about caste and labor stratification along the Indian Ocean littoral,²⁶ aspects of social history that have, at times, been lost in our quest to restore the virtues of courts, kings, and other elite actors, particularly in the Deccan. Conversely, it builds on recent interventions in cultural histories of the early modern Indian Ocean that investigate the constitution of Company documents but that rarely venture to read them against and alongside the subcontinent's literary traditions generally associated with land-based political formations.²⁷ For all the claims to write imperial history in a local register, in recent studies based on European sources, the images of non-European actors and concepts are only partly visible against the more vivid portraits of the conflicts between different officials within the Company hierarchy.²⁸ Calls to write microhistories of the global can only be fulfilled by placing conceptual and philosophical viewpoints expressed in literary modes, no matter how unfamiliar and disorienting these may be for audiences in the West, alongside and against the far more legible and conventional European Company archive that has become a euphemism for the "global."²⁹ By juxtaposing literary and documentary artifacts, I reconstruct a world where solidarities between elites from vastly different cultural backgrounds and status groups were indeed commonplace. But, these moments of interelite collaboration entailed a mutual recognition of shared socioeconomic interests, renewing commitments to preserve the existing social order. The convergence of portfolio capitalists, whether Persianate Bijapuris or the diverse merchant-warriors of the northern Tamil country, required the disciplining of nonelite social groups, in this case the weavers of the southern Coromandel coast. I argue that narratives of harmony and elite sociability across lines of religion and language are only one part of how power worked in premodern Indian society. Divisions across status groups and caste were just as important in bringing the interests of multireligious and multi-ethnic elites together.

AN AGRARIAN WARFRONT ARRIVES AT SEA

In political histories, the years between the 1650s and the 1670s are often under-analyzed, usually being explained away as symptomatic of sultanate decline and Mughal ascendancy in peninsular India. And yet, the evolutionary perspective of dynastic change and kingly ideologies produced in capital cities elides what happened in the aftermath of iconic events and in relation to other historical figures

who journeyed away from these centers during this period. For instance, the Siege of Hyderabad in 1657 and the infamous defection of Mir Jumla Muhammad Sayyid Ardestani (d. 1663) to the Mughals from the Golkonda sultanate in 1655 are seen as symptoms or premonitions of the eventual decline of the Deccan sultanates in 1686–87.³⁰ However, even as Mir Jumla joined the imperial camp, he left behind an intricate network of fortified provincial strongholds, like Gandikota and Gutti in the Karnatak, which continued to thrive under other sultanate-affiliated military commanders in the 1660s and 1670s, who once again tapped into the coastal economy to finance, clothe, and feed moving armies. Shortly after the Mughal prince Aurangzeb renewed attempts to subsume the regional sultanates before returning north to fight his brothers in the War of Succession (ca. 1656–61), provincial household chiefs incorporated portions of the Karnatak into their networks, pushing their boundaries to the largest territorial extent.

The period of imperial suzerainty invigorated an old pattern of state formation in southern India when different “co-sharers in the realm,” who controlled a cache of agrarian and military resources, periodically challenged kingly authority.³¹ In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, from within this political milieu, the most sustained and durable threat to the Mughal Empire would emerge from peninsular India, the Marathas, who would subsume all other contenders. What was the political and economic landscape inhabited by the Maratha Bhonsles and their competitors, the Indo-Africans and the Miyana Afghans, between the 1650s and 1670s? In this section, I reconstruct a portrait of Bijapuri politics at two geographic endpoints: from the port-city of Vengurla on the Kanara coast of western India facing the Arabian Sea, where political changes in the capital-city were observed, to the port cities of Teganapatnam and Nagapattinam in the southern Coromandel, where these households asserted their autonomy from kingly power.

European observers in Vengurla tried to make sense of several contradictions in Bijapuri politics in this period. As Sultan Muhammad ‘Adil Shah (r. 1627–56) fell ill, his wife, Queen Khadija Sultana, referred to with the honorific “Old Queen Bari Sahiba” (*oude Conninginne Bari Sahib*), ruled Bijapur until her adopted son (*aengenomen zoone*), ‘Ali ‘Adil Shah II (r. 1656–72), grew old enough to assume the throne.³² In these interim years, she frequently clashed with contending elite households, including the Marathas, the Indo-Africans, and the Miyanas, even seeking the assistance of Mughal overlords to discipline them.

The English and the Dutch held similarly condescending views of the aging queen who lay at the center of court politics. Now in her twilight years, her wedding to Muhammad ‘Adil Shah had been celebrated and memorialized in multiple linguistic registers (see chapter 4). Representations of her regency have shaped the imagination and the misogynist undertones of both the earliest and most recent postcolonial appraisals of this queen. It is here that that we find the earliest images of the Deccan sultanates as kingdoms in decline, caught between an ineffective queen, a debauched nobility, and a feeble king,³³ the earliest echoes of which we

find in the words of the English factors Henry Revington and Randolph Taylor, who wrote in 1659:

It was belevd and told us by Rustum Jemah himself, who is much the Englishes freind, that hee should have binn sent this years against Goa, as formerly hee hath bin, but the Queene suspects him to bee her enemy, and so indead hee is; which leads Us to another subject, as worthy of your consideration as the former. The person that is cald King of this country is knowne to bee the bastard of this Queenes husband, and she, notwithstanding that, would have the crowne settled on him; but some of the Umbraures of this country, knowing him to bee spuriously begotten, will not give him homage and refuses to goe to court; and these are Rustum Jemah (Rustam Zaman), Bull Ckaune [Bahlol Khan] Shawgee [Shahaji] and Sevagy [Shivaji]; which latter lyes with an army to the no[rth] ward and commands all alongst, the cost from the upper Choul unto Dabull; against whom the Queene this yeare sent Abdle Ckaune with an army of 10,000 horss and foote; and because she knew with that strength hee was not able to resist Sevagy, shee counselld him to pretend freindshipp with his enemy; which hee did.³⁴

It appears that the *mutabanná* (adopted) status of ‘Ali ‘Adil Shah II, which the English called here “spuriously begotten,” as such unrecognized in Islamic law, was partly brought into question to delegitimize this succession in Bijapur and make the case of Mughal annexation of the Deccan. However, to counter these claims and resist Mughal pressure, Bijapuri chroniclers, although silent on the identity of ‘Ali’s birth mother, went to great lengths to publicly acknowledge Khadija Sultana’s adoption of and deep affection for the infant ‘Ali II three days after his birth, which was sufficient to legitimize the adoption.³⁵ While the English spoke of Bari Sahiba contemptuously as a “mercenary Queene,” the Dutch, on the other hand, although grudging the exorbitant costs and scale of arrangements needed for her sea voyage, were convinced that facilitating this powerful and renowned queen’s passage to Mocha would make them famous not just in Golkonda but also in other Muslim kingdoms like Hindustan and Persia.³⁶ At the same time, they blamed her *geldsuchtig fantasien* (money-minded fantasies) for the unrest and instability in Bijapur and its inland regions.³⁷ In April 1661, the Dutch resident at Vengurla described what was happening at Bijapur court to the governor general Joan Maetsuycker, as recruitment negotiations and preparations were made for Bari Sahiba to set sail for Mocha (on the Red Sea coast of Yemen).³⁸ Anxieties swelled about what would happen in Bijapur after her departure with predictions that troubles with Shivaji, who had recently held captive the English captain Henry Revington in Danda Rajapur, would resurge.³⁹

Before she set off for Mocha, Khadija Sultana made numerous overtures to mediate between Shivaji Bhonsle, Bahlol Khan Miyana, and Siddi Jauhar Salabat Khan, but none of her attempts succeeded because, as the Dutch saw it, no one had any genuine feelings toward nor did they trust each other (*waer wel een vrede maer met geen oprecht gemoet alsoo malcanderen niet vertrouwen*).⁴⁰ Given that

the relationship with her adopted son 'Ali 'Adil Shah II was a subject of constant intrigue, the queen sought on numerous occasions to neuter threats made to him by contending with household chiefs through both violence and negotiation. In a detailed observation of the relations between the Bijapur crown and its contending households, the Dutch reported on what happened in the aftermath of Siddi Jauhar Salabat Khan's siege at Panhala fort against Shivaji in 1660. As they put it, these strange happenings and great changes in Bijapur's government were difficult to put into writing (*'t vreemt gewede en de grote veranderinge in dese tegenwoordige regering binnen dit ryck zijn nauylck op 't papier te brengen*).⁴¹ While Shivaji was seen as a troubling rebel, a dirtbag (*een kwele rebel/een vuilenroep*), and as a free-standing leader (*de vrijbovensten*)⁴² whom the lords of the kingdom were trying to defeat, it was not entirely clear to VOC observers what to make of the positions of military household chiefs such as Siddi Jauhar and Bahlol Khan, whose rapid movements from court to coast they observed:

Salabat Khan desires to get an increased portion of power in Bijapur. He says he will set off for Kanara and that he wants to blackmail Venkatapa Nayak to get forces and money from him in service for the kingdom. However, Bahlol Khan, who is an important enemy of Salabat Khan, tried to discourage this plan completely, saying to the king that he himself could serve as a way to scare off the *nayak* at least in Bankapur, which has a large fort, and where a flourishing trading city lies. Bahlol Khan is also in charge of this city. He advised the king to stay in Bankapur until this whole situation came to an end, ensuring him that he would earn at least four lakh *pagodas*.

The king attempted to appease Salabat Khan, but Bahlol Khan warned him not to do so. Bahlol Khan's reasons give more credibility to the king. Even though he did not fully side with either, the king considered their proposals for a long time. Salabat Khan noticed that the king had no intention to do what he proposed. For that reason he returned to his previous lands, unhappy that the king did not give in to him. We have not heard any further news about where he is residing now. The above-mentioned king 'Ali 'Adil Shah is advancing with an army toward Bankapur and Kanara, but Bahlol Khan along with his followers wanted to catch up with his Majesty, to welcome him, and explain to him all the necessities. However, when the king arrived the army was attacked from the fortress, and they tried to seize power in Kanara. The king had to hide himself and was greatly shocked.

This has made the king resolve to turn back to Bijapur; we hope to get to know soon what will happen. There are strong rumors that Bahlol Khan was actually the one who set up this attack from the fort, in revenge for the death of his brothers who had been murdered by the queen [*de geruchten lopen sterck dat Bullolchan dit verraet, tot revengie van zyne breedere doot, die door toe doen van de Coninginne vermoort is, in 't berck gestelt heeft*].⁴³

Queen Khadija Sultana's departure from Bijapur was, therefore, timely, strategic, and very likely even dangerous. The voyage was undertaken in the wake of her plot to murder the Miyana brothers on the one hand and the infamous episode of sending Afzal Khan to kill Shivaji in 1659 on the other. Some years after she was

gone, on November 5, 1664, the forlorn sultan 'Ali II described receiving the news of his mother's well-being from Governor Cornelis Speelman, as "the opening of my heart with joy like a rose that opens at dusk" (*zijnde mijn hart van blijdschap open gegaan gelijk een roos inden avont stond doet*).⁴⁴ Such words of filial devotion contrast with the main objective of 'Ali II's letter, which was to admonish Bahlol Khan Miyana and his associates, who had reached the port city of Teganapatnam. In his letter, the king assured the VOC that he had ordered Bahlol Khan and his associates to be in their service. He urged Bahlol Khan to ensure that his port keeper and all other Muslim captains maintain peace with the Company, so that commerce would improve in the area.⁴⁵ Indeed, the king's pleas fell on deaf and defiant ears. In the next ten years, until the late 1670s, the Miyanas would carve out their autonomy by expanding their interests on both land and sea, in Bay of Bengal shipping and in controlling the production of cloth in areas around Senji.

But the Miyana Afghans were hardly unique in looking out at the seas. Before they arrived in the Karnatak, the Maratha Bhonsles had already sought ways to establish themselves in the hinterlands of the port cities south of Madras. Members of all these households found themselves split between two subregions in a position to negotiate directly with the king in Bijapur in the Deccan proper at one end, and the various post-Vijayanagara *nayaka* states in the Karnatak. While Shivaji stayed near the hereditary lands of the Bhonsles near Pune (present-day Maharashtra, western India), his father Shahaji (d. 1664) moved between Bangalore, Tanjavur, and Madurai during the 1650s.⁴⁶ Reports from the factory of Vengurla recounted Shivaji's invasion of Bardes (a district north of Goa) in 1667, where recalcitrant *desais* refused to acquiesce and accept the authority of the Bhonsles.⁴⁷ Following in their footsteps, 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan and his kinfolk, based at first in Miraj and Bankapur (central Karnataka), described as a great trading entrepot, would incorporate the southern Coromandel's port cities of Teganapatnam and Porto Novo in the late 1650s. At the same time that Shahaji began raiding the nayakas of Tanjavur and Madurai in Tamil country, Bahlol Khan laid siege to the port city of Teganapatnam after taking over Porto Novo. Trade in these port cities came to a standstill, where the Bijapuris, both Miyanas and Bhonsles, were seen as unwelcome guests (*een schraepende gast*). Rumors circulated that the nayakas of Tanjavur and Madurai, deeply suspicious of each other, were entirely unwilling to combine their forces to oust the Bijapuri household chiefs from Senji province. The 1650s to the 1660s were marked by rapidly shifting alliances, with Shahaji regularly raiding Tanjavur and the Madurai nayaka contemplating whether to come under the protection of Bahlol Khan.⁴⁸ Observing that the Madurai and Tanjavur nayakas were unwilling to ally with Shahaji to oust 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan from Senji, VOC officials noted that trade might return to normal despite low-level fighting remaining constant in the region.⁴⁹

As these interhousehold rivalries moved from Bijapur in the Deccan into the southern Coromandel, new demands and pressures transformed the coastal

economy. As inland wars raged near Tanjavur and Nagapattinam, the price of rice, which was produced and shipped into the southern Coromandel's port cities from Bengal and Orissa, skyrocketed.⁵⁰ Another significant outcome of the Mughal-Deccan wars was the slave trade across the Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar, which, along with textiles, became particularly important to sustain the warfront in the Coromandel, emerging as one of the most profitable ventures, not just for the VOC but also for Bijapuri and later Mughal-affiliated subordinates who taxed slave purchases in the Coromandel at a much higher rate than other goods.⁵¹ Periodic wars and small-scale conflicts produced a feedback loop that regularized the supply of slaves from the Karnatak lowlands. With more frequent famines, people died or fled the region. In 1661, when Shahaji Bhonsle was left in the Karnatak to occupy Tanjavur, the whole area was depopulated, leaving the port city of Nagapattinam desolate:

With continuous destruction of the land, people flee every day, this war will need time to come to a natural end, before things can go back to normal. The main and only advantage of these troubled times in this province is the slave trade. Because of these internal wars near Nagapattinam, a large number of slaves have arrived. Both groups are taking prisoners of the enemy and selling them on the market, who are then taken to Jaffnapatnam.⁵²

On June 25, 1661, it was reported that around 3,695 slaves died of hunger before they could be shipped to Jaffnapatnam. From this same shipment, some were skilled weavers, including entire enslaved families—men, women, and children from weaving castes—were sold and shipped to establish cloth production areas in Jaffnapatnam (in northern Sri Lanka) that would be exclusively controlled by the VOC.⁵³ As early as 1654, the Bijapuri Indo-African Khan Muhammad had stipulated the terms of VOC trade in cloth, indigo, saltpeter, tin, and grains in the lands near Senji, subject to a tax of 2.5 percent, while the purchasing of enslaved men and women was taxed at 15 percent. Any enslaved person who fled would be arrested by the local *kotwāl* (*cauterbael*, police chief) and promptly returned to the VOC.⁵⁴ From the enslaved displaced by war and famine to the imports of nonprecious metals like tin, and Coromandel's prized export trade of cotton textiles—household chiefs sought to control the movement of commodities that not only fed, clothed, and armed imperial-regional armies, but also financed their day-to-day expenses. This coastal ecology was very different from what we saw in chapter 2, the resource-scarce regions of the northern Deccan, where Mughal soldiers had first encamped in the first few decades of the seventeenth century, in the landlocked arid districts of Khandesh, Berar, Aurangabad, and Telangana.

Bijapuri-subordinates in the Karnatak, whether Marathas, Indo-Africans, or Afghans, all tapped into preexisting economic networks to increase their autonomy from monarchical authority and the royal household, which was of little relevance on the coast. Two of the most prominent families—the Maratha Bhonsles

and the Miyana Afghans—operated between the ends of a warfront that stretched from Bijapur to Cuddalore, alongside others such as the Indo-Africans Siddi Jauhar Salabat Khan (d. 1665) and Nasir Muhammad (d. 1680).⁵⁵ All these groups attempted a shared set of strategies, ranging from frequent raids and sieges, the implementation of tolls at choke points across land and sea, monopolies on the movement of certain commodities, and the standard practice of using one European power against the other to compete with each other.⁵⁶ The twin viewpoints of their activities near the capital city versus the southern warfront unveil the markedly similar ways that provincial household lineages functioned, irrespective of their ascribed sectarian, linguistic, or cultural identities. The Miyanas were following the same mechanisms with which the Bhonsles had combined their longer presence in the western Deccan with new opportunities for political autonomy as military commanders in the Karnatak. Indeed, as the next section's examination of a literary text will show, these two groups appeared more alike, kindred, and coeval even to contemporary observers than our modern-day minds would like to imagine. It is not as if cultural differences between the Miyanas and Bhonsles were not observed at all. On the contrary, contemporary observers marked, exaggerated, and emboldened these differences by using absolute contrasts of good versus evil, loyalist versus betrayer, and of those who were one's own and those who became strangers. All these striking binaries were subordinate to an ethical and moral concept of a shared home/house or ghar, to which these rival households belonged.

RECASTING HOME: MIYANA AFGHANS AND MARATHA BHONSLES IN DAKKANI VERSE

If we were only interested in rise and fall narratives, we could consult reams of archival documents from various European trading companies to index the claims of previous historians and fill gaps to build thicker narrative histories. But, when all is said and done, what did these political and economic changes mean to contemporary observers in the seventeenth century? How did they make sense of the place of Miyana Afghans and Maratha Bhonsles in the Deccan? To answer this question and to reconstruct the affective frameworks of the material conditions described above, I now turn to a very different body of evidence, which we encountered in previous chapters, martial works in Dakkani, the Deccan's pan-regional literary idiom. The text under consideration is Nusrati's last work, the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* (History of Sikandar, ca. 1672), which sought to capture this complex political moment.

Before proceeding to its content, first, a word on the text itself. Rising linguistic and religious nationalism of the early and mid-twentieth century and disciplinary divides have heavily shaped the print history of Nusrati's *Tārīkh-i sikandarī*. The historicity and politics of these representations, as I will show, are difficult

to subsume under a modern binary of perpetual harmony or hostility between Hindus and Muslims. While Anglophone and Persophone historians and literary scholars have largely ignored the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī*, it has had a long and contentious afterlife in regional scholarship within the subcontinent in the highly politicized fields of Urdu, Hindi, and Marathi studies, where its historicity continues to be discussed to the present-day.⁵⁷ As a rare text closest to the earliest part of Shiva-ji's career, it captivated a generation of twentieth-century vernacular scholars who were deeply invested in finding, editing, and processing manuscripts. Its numerous editions in the twentieth century were an outcome of sharing materials among Hindi-, Marathi-, and Urdu-speaking scholars across India and Pakistan.⁵⁸ And yet, as the disagreements expressed in the introductions to the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* make clear, the text offered slippery grounds for settling scores on contentious questions about sectarian, ethnic, and linguistic origins that plague the two modern nation-states today. The text was understood by neatly categorizing its language, script, and form, according to modern sectarian identities, with each edition raising the question of where and to whom the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* belonged. For instance, the literary scholar Suresh Dutt Awasthi, emphatically claimed it for Hindi studies by extracting Nusratī's use of Sanskrit *tatsama* words throughout the poem. As was a common practice among modern scholars seeking the earliest origins of Hindi and Urdu,⁵⁹ Awasthi brushed aside questions of *lipi* (script, in this case, the use of Perso-Arabic) and the poem's rhymed couplet form (*masnavī*), according to which, he claimed, the text had been miscategorized as belonging to Urdu studies. Script and form, he argued, were less relevant than the quality of the poet's language.⁶⁰ Further, disciplinary divides between historians and literary scholars have led to disputes about the historicity of such martial works, which are often seen as the domain of literary scholars who studied them for their aesthetic and literary conventions alone. In contrast to Persian chronicles, Nusratī's various works do not offer the modern historian clear dates, events, and neat sequential narrations; for this reason, they were seen as mere addenda to what was already known about political history.⁶¹ For our purposes here, the first step in making sense of the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* is to decouple its historicity from the politics of the postcolonial present and the rigid modern disciplinary divides that separate literature from history.

The debates among polyvocal scholars in the twentieth century show how the stories from these texts are received, not just in academic circuits, but in popular culture, film, theater, and television today. The contrasting silence on the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* within Anglophone and Persophone circles, the cloister of professional history writing, versus its prevalence, wide circulation, and visibility in regional-language intellectual circuits, speaks to the divergent social settings in which history and collective memory are produced in South Asia.⁶² It should come as no surprise that vernacular texts such as the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* that transcend the divide between history writing and memory have reached much broader audiences than

Persian-language texts, both then and now. This gives us more reason not to dismiss them as outside proper forms of writing history but to study them for making sense of place, community, and belonging in premodern South Asia.

The politics of place at the heart of the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī*, which preoccupied the text's polyphonic twentieth-century editors, articulates a mode of belonging impossible to fit into modern-day searches for origins and territorial notions of space and sovereignty. As I show here, the text both reifies categories of difference and then collapses them completely, testing received definitions of "Deccani" versus "foreigner," rendering moot the age-old question of who belonged and who did not belong. Nusrati located the antagonism between the two protagonists—'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan and Shivaji—in a shared foundational idea of home, house, dwelling, habitation, or ghar that fitted into larger spatial concepts such as city (*shahr*), village (*gāon*), dominion (*mulk*), and homeland (*watan*). He upheld and highlighted the differences between members of this ghar. At the same time, he saw these antagonistic members as inextricably linked, morally bound to protect, conserve, and reproduce a space that their lineages had inhabited for generations. The semantic field of relevant terms for place and community in the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* illustrates a house defined by relationships built on shared activities amongst its members, not merely by blood or ascribed sectarian, linguistic, and social identities. The poet deploys an identarian language to construct contrasting portraits of self and other, of Afghan versus Maratha, which are all contained within the idea of the house. He used the concept of ghar to make sense of overlapping regional and imperial sovereignties. Nusrati asked—what did it mean to belong to peninsular India, a space that had been the ghar inhabited by so many different kinds of communities at a time when its internal limits were being contested and redefined?

For an answer to this question, let's first lay out the standard political narrative about the 1670s. The *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* is intriguing not because it proves something about what we already know about the rise and fall of court factions in the Deccan sultanates in this decade. Rather, it holds the reader's attention for all the well-known truths it censors and all the historical figures it excises, inverts, and caricatures! Along with Bhushan's *Shivrajbhusan* (ca. 1673) in Brajbhasha, the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* is part of a larger ecology of texts when nascent household lineages sought to claim and construct new narratives to project themselves as righteous rulers in the 1670s.⁶³ As we saw earlier, already in the 1650s and 1660s, kingly authority had largely receded, and household lineages occupied center stage in Mughal-Deccan politics. By the time of its composition in the early 1670s, shortly after the death of Sultan 'Ali 'Adil Shah II (d. 1672), a struggle unfolded between the Maratha Bhonsles, the Indo-Africans, and the Miyana Afghans in Bijapur.⁶⁴ As we saw earlier in VOC records from Vengurla and Nagapattinam, members from each household were split between the capital city of Bijapur in the Deccan and recently acquired holdings in the Karnatak. The Indo-African brothers Khawas

Khan, Ikhlas Khan, and Nasir Muhammad (all sons of the aforementioned commander Khan Muhammad, who was murdered in late 1658)⁶⁵ rallied against Bahlol Khan Miyana, his uncles and sons, and a close associate and well-known figure, Sher Khan Lodi, who had moved down to Cuddalore in the late 1650s.⁶⁶ The Maratha Bhonsles moved between their hereditary holdings near Pune, with Shivaji and his half-brother Ekoji engaging frequently in conflict around Tanjavur.⁶⁷ Nasir Muhammad and Sher Khan Lodi fought a months-long war to control the southern Coromandel in 1676.⁶⁸ Shortly thereafter, Shivaji would decisively defeat Sher Khan Lodi, after the latter's master 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan died in 1677.⁶⁹

Throughout the seventeenth century, a common strategy for these provincial household chiefs was to use the Mughals by offering them the Deccan as a bargaining chip to oust the other. When 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan had the Indo-African Khawas Khan executed in 1676, the latter had been negotiating with the imperial overlords to cede Bijapur's territories to them.⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, in 1677, Bahlol Khan would himself make the same offer to cede Bijapur to the Mughals to help defeat Shivaji.⁷¹ After Shivaji's coronation in 1674, the Miyanas would lose their possessions in the Coromandel, with figures like Sher Khan Lodi submitting to Shivaji and retiring to the court of the nayakas of Ariyalur.⁷² But these well-known political maneuverings, which trace how the Marathas won and the Miyanas lost are neither discernible nor verifiable in a text like the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī*.⁷³ The more salient question that this representation raises is what did these individuals—'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan and Shivaji—and the categories they purportedly represented (Afghan versus Maratha/foreigner versus Deccani/Muslim versus Hindu) mean to contemporary observers?

The *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* was, partly, an exercise to make the Miyanas legible to contemporary competitors and elite audiences. This heroic portrait of a nascent household was made in Dakkani, instead of Persian, to affirm the Miyanas' rightful place in panregional politics. The portrait of the political economy that I sketched at the beginning of this chapter shows the tumultuous relationship between the Miyanas, Indo-Africans, and Bhonsles and the Bijapur sultan 'Ali 'Adil Shah II and his mother, Bari Sahiba, with the latter making numerous attempts to discipline all these households. When Nusrati composed the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī*, the Miyanas' claim to Bijapur was shaky and made amid intense political and economic competition. As stated above, rumors had been circulating that the queen had one of the Miyana brothers killed.⁷⁴ At the same time, in the Karnatak, the Bhonsles first and the Miyanas next began carving out autonomous domains by drawing on coastal resources along the southern Coromandel. It is not at all surprising that given the uncertain place of the Miyanas in Bijapuri politics, the poet so frequently evoked the ethos of *ghaza* (holy war), fashioning Bahlol Khan as a *ghāzī*.⁷⁵ In scenes on the battlefield when in dialogue with his soldiers, Bahlol Khan deployed the language of holy war (*ghaza*), martyr (*shahīd*), and apostate (*murtadd*). Such evocations positioned the Miyanas as defenders of the Deccan vis-à-vis the non-Muslim Bhonsles as well as

the region's competing Muslim households like the Indo-Africans Siddi Jauhar Salabat Khan (d. 1661) and the brothers Khawas Khan (d. 1676), Ikhlas Khan, and Nasir Muhammad (d. 1680), some of whom fiercely opposed the Miyanas.

The *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* refers obliquely to the aforementioned historical events, and it is not worthwhile to simply mine this text for already well-known facts. For example, although it portrays the Battle of Umrani in 1673, fought between 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan and the Maratha commander, Pratap Rao,⁷⁶ the latter historical figure does not appear in the poem at all. Instead, his master, Shivaji, occupies center stage. The poem consists of seven chapters, the titles of which are in Persian, while the chapters contain Dakkani narrations of events. Each chapter includes portraits of a series of assemblies, from the court, the city, to the battlefield, where the poem's hero—'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan—receives honors, mounts his horse, and consults with a gathering of his army's advisors, military commanders, and soldiers, before finally going off to war. The poet uses devices such as absolute contrasts and insults to create a binary between the hero, 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan, and the villain, Shivaji Bhonsle. He deploys aggressive and playful language, but underneath this discourse of rivalry and absolute otherness simmers the problem of deep familiarity, intimacy, and cohabitation between these two protagonists who shared much in common, including a sense of belonging to the same ghar.

The poet opens by evoking the omnipresence of God in the *hamd*, laying out the reasoning, time, and place of the work's composition.

*bahan hār hai jis zamīn par jo khūn
bahe kiyūn nā huve sabab kuch zabūn*

the land in which blood flows
to speak, of the reasons that it was shed,

...

*kahan hār yū Tārīkh-i sikandarī
lage jis kī guftār yūn sarsarī*

I say this history of Sikandar
with such brevity of speech

*sahas hor āsī par jo the tīn sāl
kare yek men bar sab zamāne ne hāl*

one thousand eighty three
on a moment in that time

*jo mulk-i dakkan men huā shāh-i nau
libās āp duniyā kare tāzah nau*

when the new king came to the throne
in the Deccan kingdom, the world adorned itself anew⁷⁷

Images of gratuitous violence, blood being spilled on land, heads being crushed on the battlefield, entire cities burnt to the ground, reservoirs and lakes filled with the dead, were typical of the *razm* topos and its sensorium. But these images were not just poetic exaggerations; they also reveal Nusrati's broader concern with and lament for the human costs of war. To make sense of war's repercussions, the poet accorded a range of meanings to spaces of belonging such as *ghar*, *mulk*, and *watan*, and what it meant to lose them. *Mulk-i dakkān* in the above verse, for instance, refers to the kingdom of the Deccan, where the child king Sikandar 'Adil Shah had just ascended the throne of Bijapur (r. 1672–86). In other scenes, *mulk* could be decoupled from kingship and have other meanings such as realm, region, and dominions.

The politics of place that lie at the heart of the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* also speak to the role of Nusrati's oeuvre, more broadly, in the larger literary transition between Persian and Urdu. Sunil Sharma has traced changes in classical Persian poetry with *shahr-āshob* elements, originally an appellation for a beautiful beloved in a lyric poem, which could include praise for an idealized city and its kingly patrons. This later turned into the *shahr-āshob* (the disturbed city) poetic tradition of classical Urdu of the eighteenth-century when poets lamented and satirized the Mughal Empire's political decline, offering bleak images of urban life.⁷⁸ Nusrati's work sits in the middle of these two literary moments and provides a bridge between Persian (celebratory) and Urdu (morose) cityscapes. He begins by first praising the city of Bijapur, which was both a *jogī kā math* (ascetic's monastery) and the *shahr-i islām* (city of Islam) and then contrasts it with a portrait of loss, and the city's unrelenting destruction and desolation. Locating Bijapur in the larger spatial unit of *watan*, the poet grieves the destruction of its neighborhoods and that his own homeland had become a stranger to the world (*nagar sut chaliyā be jatan / huā jag kon bigānā apnā watan*).⁷⁹ He addresses the reader/listener as a metaphorical traveler, taking them through sites of destruction in progressively larger urban scales going from neighborhood (*nagar*) to small settlement (*basti*) to city (*shahr*), located in broader conceptual units, starting with the house or *ghar* and moving to *mulk-i dakkān/mulk-i hindustān*, dominions of the Deccan/Hindustan, which are paired as two distinct entities.

According to the poet, the actions of and relationships between kindred people caused the destruction of a shared space of belonging, the house. Nusrati has a charge sheet, of sorts, listing the morally questionable actions of those around him. Excessive greed that caused houses to disintegrate (*hawās thī jo har kun kon ghar ghar judā / ke honā shahī ke apen kad khudā*) (covetousness in each split house from house / each considered himself king and God alike).⁸⁰ Here, *ghar* is identified as singular household units that together constitute a unified whole. The image of the house could refer to a physical space under threat that needed to be defended with one's life (*jo sevāt pade ghar peh mushkil sabab / to jiyūn kharch kar ghar yū rakhna hai tab*).⁸¹ Similarly, multiple dominions were understood

relationally, from the Deccan to Mughal Hindustan, as they together partook in experiences of war and violence. For instance, the poet painted an image of a smaller, empty ghar or house, lying unadorned and uninhabited in a desolate mulk. Placing the dominions of the Mughals within a larger community of mulk, Nusrati thus laments that there were no means to buy lamps for the house (*mughal kā mulk te uste aisā ujād / divā lāne kā nayīn hai jiyūn ghar ko chār*).⁸²

The relationship between words for spaces and words referring to people comes to the fore when Nusrati sets up contrasting portraits of the two protagonists—Bahlol Khan and Shivaji. The poet explains that each *nasl* or lineage was morally tied to the house owing to its generational service. The poem's first battle scene begins by inverting the reality of Bijapuri politics. In this image of a gathering with his ministers and courtly elites, Bahlol Khan is showered with praise and adulation by some of his archrivals, including the Indo-African Khawas Khan, whom he had murdered shortly thereafter.⁸³ Khawas Khan acknowledges that Bahlol Khan's lineage and renown are spread across transregional kingdoms and cities from the Deccan to Delhi:

*dharyā jab te nawāb nāmī te dāb
khatā khān bahlol khānī khitāb*

the weight of his name became apparent
he whose title was Bahlol Khan

*dakkan ke tū yek mulk kā hai vazīr
vale dil men dehlī ke nayīn tis nazīr*⁸⁴

you who is a minister of one of the Deccan kingdoms,
but, its known that there is no one like you even in Delhi

Multiple terms identify the title of Bahlol Khan with a lineage (*nasl*) and *ajdād* (ancestors), who were dispersed across Hindustan and the Deccan. Noting the bravery of three generations of the Miyana household, Nusrati thus writes:

*tun potā hai us khān bahlol kā
na thā hind men mard tis tol kā*⁸⁵

that you, who are the grandson of that Bahlol Khan
who no other man in Hindustan could match

Generational service was one criterion for any lineage's claim of belonging to a ghar. But this service could be reason for both praise and trenchant criticism, as it was tied to the enduring idea of eating the salt of one's master (*namak halālī*). Shivaji's lineage, like Bahlol Khan's, was also famous across these dominions but for all the wrong reasons. According to Nusrati, the problem with Shivaji was not that he was a congenital other, but that he was considered a kindred or relative (*apan/apein* or one's own—that is, someone who belonged to the same, shared ghar). The poet marks him as a fellow kinsman destroying the very

house that had nurtured him, referring to the long service of the Bhonsles under the sultanates:⁸⁶

*ke jis ghar te jikoī badyā ho ange
pachen tod ne phir vahī ghar mange*

the very house from where he has risen,
breaking that very house from the back

*ziyān kār kon kuch na us sūd hai
padyā ghar to apein bhī nābūd hai⁸⁷*

there is no profit in bad deeds
if the home breaks, even one's own become no one

Generational service placed a moral obligation on members of the ghar to serve and protect it. Lineages could be of two kinds, those that were loyal and those that had a history of mistrust and betrayal. Nusrati evaluated the place of the Miyanas and the Bhonsles vis-a-vis the Bijapur crown, evoking the familiar dyads of loyalty and betrayal, virtue and dishonor, believer and nonbeliever, which he had also utilized in his earlier work, *Alināma* (ca. 1665). Unlike the previous work, the *Tārikh-i sikandarī* was composed at a moment when regional sovereigns were no longer relevant. Nusrati overcame the challenge of creating a portrait of the Miyanas, as defenders of the ghar in the absence of a king by placing them in undeniable proximity to and intimacy with the Marathas who belonged to the same house.

Like he did in the *Alināma*, he turned once again to the moral binary of *namak halālī* versus *namak harāmī* to locate Bahlol Khan and Shivaji's shared place in the house. In the absence of a king, the moral obligation for staying true to one's salt or *namak* was no longer tied to a lord or master, but to the remembered pasts of each lineage, its renown, and its reputation in the realm. While Bahlol Khan put his life and wealth on the line to do great deeds and always sought to eat the king's salt (*bade kām par kharch apas jān-o-māl/mange nit namak shāh kā khāne halāl*) and was the true claimant of Delhi (*ke hūn dil men dihlī kā mein da 'wa-dār*), Shivaji was someone who had learnt to eat *harām* since birth (*sikhīyā hai janam charke khāne harām*) and the one who harbored thoughts of breaking the house (*dharyiā yū jo ghar todne kā khayāl*).⁸⁸ A common, shared sense of belonging by the Miyanas and Afghans to the house may explain why the poet hardly used any words signifying the ethnic or linguistic profile of these two groups throughout the poem. Both the common Hindustani terms *pathān*, which refers to Afghans as a group, and the term *ghanīm* or enemy, which was frequently used to refer to Marathas in Indo-Persian texts, are used sparingly throughout the composition.⁸⁹ Rather than distinguishing them through these ethnographic terms, the poet judges them through a common rubric of loyalty, placing them on an equal footing to protect the integrity of their shared ghar.

In the poem's final battle, Bahlol Khan speaks to his troops, instructing them on the art of war by drawing an analogy of Deccan politics with the Mughal War of Succession a momentous event memorialized across multiple literary traditions of the subcontinent.⁹⁰ By drawing parallels between regional and imperial politics, Nusrati once again reaffirms the inherent kinship between Bahlol Khan and Shivaji, even as he casts them as polar opposites. This chapter of the poem begins with the hero Bahlol Khan addressing his soldiers affectionately as friends (*yārān*), evoking a spirit of camaraderie and friendship among his soldiers (*har yek dīl men yārī ke guftār ache*) on the battlefield.⁹¹ Listening to the fears about Shivaji among his troops, he calls upon them by evoking a famous incident from the Battle of Samugarh that had unfolded on May 29, 1658, between the Mughal princes Aurangzeb (d. 1707) and Dara Shikoh (d. 1659).⁹² According to Nusrati, Shivaji was the equivalent of Aurangzeb while Bahlol Khan stood for the figure of Dara Shikoh. This correlation would seem bizarre not just to modern-day readers, but probably to seventeenth-century listeners like the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb himself, who had long considered Shivaji his mortal enemy. Nusrati deliberately inverted and inserted this analogy to reaffirm the kinship between the Miyanas and the Marathas. Recounting the memory of this battle, Bahlol Khan exhorts his troops:

*sune soche nawāb yū bāt kahe
ke tumnā kon yārān yū māālūm hai
ke dārā kon ā shāh-i aurang son
padī thi ladāyī so sondal ke jiyūn
athā shāh dārā jo hātī savār
padiyā jiyūn ghaluliyān kā chondhar te mār
na liyā tāb utar gaj tarang jiyūn chadiyā
lagyā fauj kon tab ke khāssa padiyā
huī pal men us dhāt lashkar kī mod
ke nayīn lad sake phir kabhī fauj jod*

upon hearing this talk, the Nawab thought and said,
oh, friends! for you all know

that Princes Dara and Aurangzeb
had gone to war with their armies

when Dara was riding his elephant
surrounded by canon on all sides

unable to withstand, he dismounted his elephant
that particular moment cost his army

in a flash, the tide turned against his army
never again would it come together to fight⁹³

Dara Shikoh had descended from his elephant at the Battle of Samugarh, and his troops mistook his fleeing elephant as a sign of the prince's death. This tactical mistake flipped the battle's outcome in prince Aurangzeb's favor.⁹⁴ Reference to this famous tipping point from a recent battle was more than just a lesson in military strategy; it was also a means of illustrating the correspondence and moral similarity between different sets of political players across the Deccan and Mughal Hindustan. But, crucially, by comparing political competition between princely brothers within the Mughal dynastic line to the Deccan's households that did not share blood, language, or affinal ties, Nusrati constructs a bond between the Miyanas and Bhonsles grounded in their service to the same house or ghar. Through such an unbecoming analogy, he casts the Miyanas as the Deccan's rightful defenders against the claims of an intimate opponent like Shivaji, whose family had been equally, if not more, entrenched in service to regional sultans.

To sum up, then, what is the significance of the *Tārīkh-i sikandarī*? As a pre-modern text that lives today, like its Marathi and Brajhasha counterparts, it is debated among scholars who write in Indian languages and their vernacular reading publics in the subcontinent. By contrast, in Persophone and Anglophone scholarly spheres, the text is largely invisible. However, in both scholarly worlds, its historicity and the question of belonging falls into an easy binary of communalism versus syncretism. Rather than rationalizing premodern actors' actions, freezing the frame on a resolutely contradictory representation of difference rejects both paradigms, where premodern actors are either never motivated by divisions of sect, caste, and language or they are completely and only driven by them. The *Tārīkh-i sikandarī* collapses the fixed meanings ascribed to political identities. The poet emphasizes the ubiquitous and enduring concept of ghar, which held together different social groups in a single arena of competition, bound by generational service. The text answers the perennial question of who belongs and who does not belong in unexpected ways, by both marking the social differences between groups and then collapsing these binaries within the spatial concept of the house.

The material stakes sketched at the outset of this chapter show how the dissolution of regional kingship and the rise of household lineages depended on the exploitation of new economic resources, connecting the drylands of the northern Deccan plateau with the rich cotton- and rice-producing regions of the Karnatak coastal plains. In the second half of the seventeenth century, southern India's political landscape was awash with deeply familiar and intimate political rivals. Nusrati observed the changes wrought by Mughal overlordship on the sultanates, which resulted in more autonomy for aristocratic-military-agrarian households, a familiar pattern in peninsular India. He commented on the conflicts between soldiering groups such as Afghans, who had circulated in the armies of northern and southern India vis-à-vis warrior-peasant groups who held a combination of hereditary village-level occupations and official military positions such as the Marathas, who had a much longer presence in the Deccan. Nusrati saw the two groups as political

kin united by their generational service and judged them through a common moral standard of the obligation to protect their ghar.

But, interelite rivalries, memorialized by court poets and chroniclers, are only one leg of a much longer journey that connected the Deccan to the wider Indian Ocean world. Right around the time Nusrati composed the *Tārikh-i sikandarī*, the kith and kin of Bahlol Khan and Shivaji had already begun venturing toward the Coromandel coast, subsuming post-Vijayanagara nayaka polities and acquiring new territories where they encountered an unfamiliar set of economic networks and resources—namely, myriad social groups that made possible freight trade of tin, rice, and participated in the production of textiles that were shipped across the Bay of Bengal. Bahlol Khan Miyana would send his close associate, Sher Khan Lodi, down to the southern Coromandel from his initial posting in Bankapur to Valikondapuram, twenty-five miles from the port city of Cuddalore or Tege-napatnam. Similarly, aside from his father in Bangalore, Shivaji's half-brother Ekoji—someone our poet Nusrati spoke of with great admiration—was sent by the Bijapur sultan to oust the *nayakas* of Madurai from Tanjavur in 1676.⁹⁵ The region that fell under these Bijapuri subordinates, south of the city of Chennai (Madras) and north of Koddaikarai or Point Calimere, was not a blank frontier, but encompassed multiple competing occupational groups who had long mediated relations between inland polities and various European companies.⁹⁶

How did these coastal communities encounter Bijapur-affiliated actors seeking new resources to sustain the Mughal-Deccan warfront and with whom they shared very little in common culturally? As the subsequent discussion will show, Bijapuri subordinates found their political and economic interests converging with and, at times, tamed by the coast's dominant mercantile groups. By supporting preexisting fault lines of caste and status in the littoral economy, realigning with the mercantile elites of the northern Tamil country was key for securing their growing autonomy from kingly authority in the Deccan and shaping the Mughal Empire from the Coromandel coast.

AN ACT OF KINDNESS OR WEAVERS' REVOLT?

Before we delve into the minutiae of an episode that unfolded in the 1660s and 1670s between Bijapuri subordinates, regional merchants, cotton weavers, and the Dutch and French East India Companies in the southern Coromandel, it's worth laying out the stakes of this discussion. One of the foremost questions that confronts historians of premodern India is how the subcontinent's vibrant political economy was subsumed by the English East India Company in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, thus paving the way for European colonialism.⁹⁷ The textile industry has often been the battleground on which this debate unfolds.⁹⁸ Historians locate the moment and causes of decline in the Indian subcontinent before or on the eve of European conquest, when relationships between textile producers,

merchants, and the state transformed.⁹⁹ Much of this modern historiography draws on the English East India Company and its well-preserved records across India to answer the question of economic decline.¹⁰⁰ The role of both precolonial merchants and political elites, as well as the question of whether or not they aided or abetted the rise of European companies, is of significance to this debate.¹⁰¹

Vijaya Ramaswamy was one of the first historians, in her now classic study *Textiles and Weavers in Medieval India*, to connect the social worlds of weavers in the centuries before colonialism with larger political changes.¹⁰² She did so by examining the earliest (and most difficult) set of Tamil and Telugu inscriptional evidence from medieval south India. Ramaswamy unearthed references to taxes levied on both merchant groups and head weavers (members of the community who had risen to become intermediaries) or both. She showed hierarchical relationships within and across these groups, arguing that production came to be controlled by the figure of the “broker/middleman,” who would then later become henchman for European companies, preserving their and his own economic interests while impoverishing producers.¹⁰³ While recognizing a palpable shift in these group’s social relations from the heyday of the Vijayanagara Empire in the sixteenth century to the era of the English and Dutch companies, Ramaswamy hinted that changes in social stratification, whereby head weavers rose among weaving castes, emerged owing to a combination of new factors. The growing demand for new kinds of textiles, technological shifts, and changes in state patronage of trade particularly occurred because of the expansion of the Islamic sultanates of southern India into the northern Tamil country in the second half of the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁴ The moment of cross-status group and intercaste conflict I examine in this final section picks up this puzzle by turning to how Persianate elites, subordinate to the Deccan sultanates and the Mughal Empire, dealt with weaving castes and intermediary mercantile groups involved in the southern Coromandel’s textile trade.

In what follows, I show that precolonial political elites were not unique in drawing on preexisting inequities to further their own interests, even if their means for disciplining other social groups were far more restricted and circumscribed than what came much later under the English East India Company in the eighteenth century. Bijapuri households aligned themselves with regionally dominant mercantile groups, forming networks that cut across differences of language, caste, and region to discipline artisans in a coastal economy. All these elite actors had successfully combined the advantages of revenue-farming with commercial interests to strengthen their autonomy from monarchical forms. European companies had long negotiated with these famed indigenous portfolio capitalists to establish their operations across the Indian subcontinent. Often heralded as the harbingers of early modernity in South Asia and hailed for moving across multiple political and ecological boundaries, these elites also had to consolidate control over human and nonhuman resources to accumulate wealth. Cementing existing hierarchies

strengthened their networks and undercut the monarchical state forms they were nominally affiliated with at the intersections of the sultanate and nayaka worlds.

In some ways, then, the alignment of Bijapur-affiliated Miyana Afghans with Tamil- and Telugu-speaking merchants of the southern Coromandel in the 1670s was part of a longer pattern. Even in the 1640s, after the fortunes of the Chandragiri kings waned, the Telugu-speaking Balija merchant and the VOC chief broker Chinanna Chetti established himself as a close aid of the Golkonda sultanate's most prominent Iranian courtier, Mir Muhammad Sayyid Ardestani (d. 1663), who had a variety of investments in diamond mining, textiles, and tin trade across the Bay of Bengal.¹⁰⁵ The artificial separation of the Deccan sultanates and the nayaka kingdoms belies the fact that their political economies were strikingly alike, as were the structural relationships of mercantile and military households to kingly power in them.

In 1672, the French East India Company acquired a settlement in Pondicherry, south of which lay the ports of Devanampattinam or Teganapatnam, and Porto Novo, which had fallen under Bijapur in the 1640s and encompassed inland textile-producing regions previously held by the nayakas of Senji.¹⁰⁶ More than a decade before the French, the Dutch East India Company had taken the port city of Nagapattinam from the Portuguese in 1658, supplementing their more well-established ports of Masulipatnam and Pulicat, which were located in the northern Coromandel coast and which fell under the authority of the Golkonda sultans.¹⁰⁷ The southern Coromandel region was notable because of the relative autonomy and resilience of non-Company traders, whether those were the Maraikkayar Muslims or independent Indo-Portuguese merchants, a pattern from the late sixteenth century that remained the norm even in the period under consideration, irrespective of the fortunes of political dynasties.¹⁰⁸

In areas south of Point Calimere, Tamil-speaking Maraikkayar Muslims affiliated with the Marava Setupatis of Ramnad, along the Fishery and Ramnad coasts, had allied with the Dutch to counter the Portuguese-Parava alliance.¹⁰⁹ The Maraikkayar Muslim commercial elites traversed multiple linguistic registers, particularly with their use of Arwi or Tamil written in Arabic script.¹¹⁰ In the second half of the seventeenth century, this mercantile community circulated in regions north of Point Calimere, where they ran operations alongside Telugu- and Tamil-speaking Hindu merchant intermediaries. To the chagrin of Dutch observers, non-Company actors with investments in trade endured in the areas north of Nagapattinam up to Madras. For the VOC, this subregion remained a volatile source of profits, even when its administration was transferred to the government in Ceylon.¹¹¹ Here, Bijapur subordinates such as Sher Khan Lodi, serving under Bahlol Khan Miyana, established their household (*huijshouden/huijsheid*) and close associates (*maagschap*) in the village of Valikondapuram, where they had to deal with established local merchants and weaving populations who had long operated in the littoral economy.¹¹²

If we are to take representations in published European accounts at their word, we might get the impression that there were no underlying frictions between Bijapuri subordinates, such as Sher Khan Lodi and local merchant groups, to say nothing of the weaving communities concentrated in the cotton-growing districts around Coimbatore, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, and Tirunelveli. Indeed, this is certainly the portrait we get from the first French governor general of Pondicherry, Francois Martin (d. 1706), whose account can easily be mined to narrate straightforward biographies of several of the figures discussed in this chapter such as Shivaji, Sher Khan Lodi, and others. In June of 1676, when the French requested that Lodi seize a ship that had arrived at Teganapatnam from Manila, Martin wrote, "I was myself doubtful as to whether my proposal would be accepted. Sher Khan prided himself on keeping his word. He was particularly careful with merchants in this respect being desirous of attracting them to trade in his territories."¹¹³ And in June 1678, when Lodi's defeat by Shivaji was imminent, the French governor lamented:

The master of Ariyalur received Sher Khan with his customary warmth and hospitality. Ekoji and the other Hindu princes offered to take him into their service, but he rejected their proposals as they did not appear to enjoy his confidence. Sher Khan was the only person who could have upheld the authority of the Moors of Bijapur in these parts. He was respected by the local people. Had he possessed sufficient forces, he may have been able to teach a lesson to all these Hindu rulers.¹¹⁴

Martin's observation of the kindness extended by the nayakas of Ariyalur to Lodi was unsurprising, as was the French governor's lament for the waning fortunes of a crucial ally who had enabled the French Company to acquire its first settlement at Pondicherry. But these words of praise raise unresolved questions about Lodi's dealings and circulation beyond elite circles. Why did Bijapuri subordinates like Lodi have to be "particularly careful with merchants"? And who exactly were "the local people," whose lives were transformed by the incorporation of Bijapuri military elites, such as the Miyanas and Maratha Bhonsles, into the southern Coromandel?

To answer these questions, we need to turn to the years that led up to the siege of St. Thomé in September 1674. St. Thomé, in the southern Coromandel, was the town where the fabled tomb of Saint Thomas the Apostle was located. The Golkonda sultanate took it over from the Portuguese in 1662; given its importance to the Catholic church, the French Company sent Admiral De la Haye to take over this city in 1672.¹¹⁵ It was the only other port city that the French acquired; however, they would soon be ousted from it by the Dutch who then handed it over to the Golkonda sultan in 1674.¹¹⁶ It was in the middle of the negotiations with the French over St. Thomé that the Dutch captain Martin Pit and his secretary Nicolas Ruijser were sent to visit Sher Khan Lodi on February 15, 1674.¹¹⁷ The details of this twenty-three day journey, covering short trips between many villages, towns, and

port cities over a distance of a hundred and twenty miles, recorded the day-to-day conversations with Lodi, along with translations of many of his letters and the responses of other port officials and local merchants. It also included the highly sought-after documentary outcome of these negotiations—three original *qauls* or deeds of assurance from Lodi, along with their translations—which assured that the French would be forbidden from transporting more weapons and ammunition into Pondicherry and St. Thomé.

By the 1670s, the Miyanas had tapped into the trade of multiple commodities, especially the import trade of tin from Pegu (in southern Burma), selling this everyday metal along inland routes dotted with markets that went north toward the Deccan. In addition, they transported rice along the Coromandel coast and, above all, engaged in the production and then the export of textiles from this coast to Southeast Asia. Sher Khan Lodi ensured the movement of commodities from coast to court; his other responsibilities included policing disruptive Europeans—the French in Pondicherry, the Danes in Tranquebar, and the Dutch in Nagapatnam. While preventing drunken brawls between squabbling French and Dutch messengers was not at all difficult for Lodi, matters at sea posed an altogether different challenge.¹¹⁸ Along the coast, Miyana shipping was caught between the standoff between the French and the Dutch over St. Thomé.¹¹⁹ In one letter to the VOC, Sher Khan Lodi complained that among the ships belonging to his master Bahlol Khan, which sailed to and from Malacca, one had been forbidden from returning to Porto Novo. Lodi explained that Bahlol Khan suffered losses as the ship had to stay in Malacca through the winter; he implored the Dutch governor to send a letter for its return.¹²⁰ The ship's *nakhoda* or captain, a certain Khan Mahmud, an associate of Bahlol Khan and Sher Khan Lodi, had purchased the ship in Malacca, in defiance of the VOC. To continue pushing Lodi to abandon the French, the Dutch held back Miyana ships coming into Porto Novo and Teganapatnam from Malacca.¹²¹

When the Miyanas first arrived in the lands near Senji, questions immediately arose as to which groups fell under their authority. After protracted negotiations with the Dutch, Sher Khan Lodi would issue a *qaul* to limit French presence in St. Thomé, copies of which were sent to his archrival, the governor of Senji, Nasir Muhammad, as well as to the Danes in Tranquebar, the English in Madras, and the local merchants of Porto Novo. Nasir Muhammad's father, Khan Muhammad, had granted the VOC terms of trade in the lands near Senji. Sher Khan Lodi's *qaul* did not list very specific clauses about the terms of trade, nor was it accompanied by any supporting document from the Bijapur sultan to affirm its validity. While Lodi was identified at the outset as the great governor of the portion of Bijapur's inland areas and as the *havaladār* of the trading city of Porto Novo, (*groot Gouverneur van een deel der beneden landen van Visiapour en den Habalbaar der Coopstadt Porto Novo*), within the *qaul* we do not find terms to clarify his affiliation or status as a representative of the Bijapur sultan. Lodi thus directly addressed Anthonio

Paviljoen, governor and director of the Coromandel coast. The *qaul*'s first part consisted of a description of events in the recent past, the first two sieges of St. Thomé, the visit of Captain Pit and Secretary Ruijser to Valikondapuram, and where things stood at the moment. The rest of the document listed Lodi's promises about what actions would be taken to oppose the movement of French ships, preventing them from acquiring new war supplies in Pondicherry and letting them keep what they already had in store while stopping the Dutch from transporting war supplies via his lands. Lodi concluded his *qaul* with phrases of placation and promise to not break his word (*dat ick belove naar behooren te zullen achter voegen zonder dat daar aan in het minste niet zal gebreeken*).¹²² The document was reproduced and identified as "his written commitment [*schriftelijk verbetenisse*] via the Caul, as they call it, in their style of writing and described in the Tamil language [*na haar stijl van schrijven en beschreven in de Malabaarse taal*]."¹²³ While the written form in Dutch attested that it followed the *qaul* template, the document's content was orally transmitted, not in Persian but in Tamil and Telugu. Sher Khan Lodi spoke in the first person as himself in the *qaul*. His promise was mediated by multiple scribes and translators, working at the intersections of vastly different chancery practices and linguistic worlds. We may imagine the double mediations this document underwent before taking its final form in the VOC archives. Lodi likely had scribal staff proficient in Persian, Tamil, and Telugu who narrated and explained these official orders to Company clerks. In its writing and content, it held together the politics of repute that Francois Martin had spoken of, and a recent memory of the fragile relationships that Bijapuri subordinates like Lodi had forged with the local merchants and weaving communities of the regions near Senji.

Before turning to the politics of Lodi's *qaul*, it's worth digressing to first understand the purpose and functions of this document type. Whether in the context of the Sultanates or the nayaka kingdoms of the Kannada and Tamil-speaking regions, maritime historians have mined thousands of such *qaul* for their content to mark changes in commercial and political relations, but without any reflection on this interpolated documentary form's purpose and content across southern India's multiple linguistic registers.¹²⁴ One function of the *qaul*, which Prachi Deshpande recently examined in the context of the Marathas, was to deal with issues of land and agrarian resources.¹²⁵ Definitions of the term *qaul* and its auxiliary document types can be found in Persian and Urdu scribal manuals that were continuously in use as late as the nineteenth century, particularly under the Nizams of Hyderabad (r. 1724–1948) who, like the Marathas, inherited sultanate and Mughal-era bureaucratic practices.¹²⁶ A word of Arabic origin, *qaul* literally meant speech or utterance (*bāt, sukhan, bachan*), or acknowledging the fact of an agreement; in plainer terms it could also mean "dictated by" ('*an qaul*).¹²⁷ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, two separate definitions of this term endured. One definition of *qaul* was a written document issued by an authority for a temporary grant of land that was being prepared for cultivation (*qaul ek*

wasīqah-yi kāghazī ka nām hai jo mu'ta-yi muqtadir kī jānib se ek ghair mustaqill 'atā kī nisbat zamāne-yi salf mein likh diyā jātā thā).¹²⁸ When ruling kingdoms changed, qaul could be continued or annulled—it was common for the signatures of previous grantors to be erased from the document and previous arrangements broken. Under the Hyderabad Nizams, the inherent volatilities and uncertainties of the agrarian qaul were even recounted in popular lore—it was said that any person to whom this document was issued often rode their horse facing backward to make sure that another individual was not following them with a different qaul in hand, annulling their own!¹²⁹

In the seventeenth century, as the Mughal warfront subsumed territories in northern and western Deccan, many Persian qaul were issued in the name of hereditary officials, the village accountants and headmen (*deshpande*, *deshmukh*), to continue agrarian relationships and functions they already had under the Deccan sultans.¹³⁰ With standard phrases, these documents described the conditions—for instance, that these lands had been conquered and what should be done—that said groups should continue to cultivate their own lands (*mahal wa makān-i khudh ābād būdeh*) and make an effort to increase cultivation (*talāshī numāyand ke zirā'at wāfir shavad*).¹³¹ Offering the assurance that no one should destroy these areas, it affirmed that, as per regulations, the villages' tax-exempt status granted in previous times would continue (*bar dīhā-yi in 'ām-i deshmukhī az qadīm ast beqarār ābād numūdan*).¹³²

A second use of the term *qaul* was in the context of treaties identified as *qaul wa qarār-nāmeḥ*, *ahad-nāmeḥ* or *tah-nāmeḥ* concluded between various powers, such as the Nizams with Tipu Sultan of Mysore, or with the Marathas and the English East India Company, descended from similar earlier iterations in the seventeenth century that recorded the fact of diplomatic or political negotiations.¹³³ The countless seventeenth-century qaul translated into the VOC's archives inherit elements of these two divergent functions, the agrarian deed of assurance regulating relationships with the state and the treaty between individuals and states. Coastal qaul held onto its agrarian predecessor's inherent volatility, what Deshpande calls "the fragility of the *kaulnama*'s assurances," handed out amid the uncertainties of military conflict and shifts in political power in port-cities and their hinterlands where multiple sovereignties overlapped and collided.¹³⁴ The role of mercantile communities, which are not always directly visible in the agrarian version, are very much apparent in maritime qaul.¹³⁵ Mercantile groups shaped the relationships between agrarian state-affiliated agents such as Sher Khan Lodi, who were seeking out ways to tap into the profits of cloth production in the southern Coromandel. The efficacy of a qaul that would regulate commercial and diplomatic ties on the coast depended on the support of mercantile groups and their preexisting relationships with cultivators and craftsmen. In light of these broader definitions and functions of the qaul, the translations of this document type found in the VOC archives begin to make sense. The question of Lodi's reputation among regional

merchants that the French governor Francois Martin had raised can now be examined through his relationships with merchants and weavers that underlay the qaul of 1674.

Not long after it was issued, a flurry of correspondence followed Pit and Ruijser's visit to Valikondapuram, discussing whether the qaul was being followed by all parties, along with accusations and counteraccusations of each side not honoring its word.¹³⁶ Lodi, various officials of the VOC and the Danish East India Company, and local merchants went to great lengths to affirm its validity across the three port cities of Porto Novo, Teganapatnam, and Nagapattinam. But the motives for doing so were far less clear. Part of the problem lay in the divergent understandings of what the qaul's objective was, what it was meant to do, and what was at stake for each party involved. In one letter, Sher Khan Lodi balked at the Dutch governor's incessant requests to throw an addendum into the qaul. The governor wanted Lodi to add a clause to send his own guards out to spy on the French in Pondicherry. Irrate at their request, Lodi reminded Anthonio Paviljoen that the qaul was no less than a formal agreement to which new points could not be added on a whim long after it had been issued with a fixed set of terms.¹³⁷ Besides, he pointed out that putting the two embittered and quarreling nations (the French and the Dutch) in one place would only lead to more problems. If something went wrong, the Dutch governor would then "blame me for this fighting and aside from the blame, this would give me a bad name" (*de onlust en beschuldiging van zijn Edele op mijn zal comen, buiten mijn schult aan moeijte ende een quadienaem zoude geraaken*).¹³⁸ He added that nothing new could be learnt about what the French were up to, apart from what his associates in Teganapatnam were already reporting. The qaul was more than enough to prevent the French from acquiring supplies.

Part of the insecurity, as the two visitors Pit and Ruijser articulated, stemmed from the VOC's anxieties about the Miyana household's well-known partisanship toward the French. They observed how the household's position stood in stark defiance of regional sultans who had been generally favorable toward the Dutch for decades. Lodi, in particular, was not only fond of the French but believed they would do great things with their future power in the East Indies as they were known for their progress in Europe (*hij de Franken zeer genegen was, die hem groote dingen van haar toekomst macht in Oost Indien ende haar progresse in Europa had die genaamt*).¹³⁹ However, as we noted earlier, the Miyanas' inclination toward the French had more to do with their troubled relationship with the queen-regent of Bijapur, the wife of Muhammad 'Adil Shah (d. 1656) and the princess of Golkonda, sister of 'Abdullah Qutb Shah (d. 1672), Khadija Sultana. The queen had departed for her sea voyage to Mocha on a Dutch ship, shortly after conspiring to murder one of the Miyana brothers, part of her many attempts at disciplining defiant households, whether the Maratha Bhonsles, Miyana Afghans, or Indo-Africans.¹⁴⁰

But the Bijapur sultan and his mother were of little relevance on the coast. Here, Bijapur's sovereignty itself was represented and dispersed among its competing

households, which sought to control forts and ports across the Karnatak. As such, they were one among many other contenders, including diverse communities of merchants who had their own recent experiences of operating at the edges of kingly authority. The most significant response to Lodi's qaul came from a collective of coastal merchants hailing from communities that had served as intermediaries between European companies and the nayaka polities of the northern Tamil region and in southern Andhra long before the arrival of Bijapuris.¹⁴¹ Captain Pit and Secretary Ruijser met with the merchant collective the morning after their visit with Lodi in Valikondapuram, giving them a copy of the qaul. Together, this collective then sent a letter affirming their decision to support Lodi's injunctions against the French. The merchant collective was diverse and multiethnic.¹⁴² The multireligious and multilingual profile of the names in this collective indicates the convergence and mobility of a range of mercantile communities at the intersections of the Tamil and Telugu-speaking regions, north of the Kaveri River delta, circulating along the southern Coromandel coast. It included Muslim Tamil-speaking Maraikkayars, with personal names in Arabic and status titles to indicate *periya* (great) and *pillai* (son/child of a king) in Tamil—for example, Periya Nayina (Nia) Pillai Maraikkayar. Status titles were granted to prominent individuals by rulers—for instance, to the Maraikkayars by the Setupatis of Ramnad when they took on important roles on the Madurai coast in areas south of Point Calimere.¹⁴³ In the second half of the seventeenth century, Marraikayyar Muslim merchants moved their operations all the way up to Porto Novo and Teganapatnam. Venturing further north, they drew on their long experience dealing with European companies on the Fishery and Ramnad coasts to fill roles as translators and scribal intermediaries between the VOC and Bijapuri officials in port cities north of Nagapattinam. Indeed, a copy of Lodi's qaul was also sent to a certain Sayyid Marraikkayar, who was regarded as an important scribe in the city of Porto Novo.¹⁴⁴ Alongside the Maraikkayars, the merchant collective consisted of Tamil and Tamil-speaking Hindu merchants, similarly identified with status titles such as *reddi*, which might indicate village headmen or land-holding agricultural subcastes along with the broad term for merchant communities in south India, *setti* or *chetti*.¹⁴⁵ The list of names in this merchant collective concurs with what Cynthia Talbot has argued regarding similar titles for names in inscriptions from medieval Andhra, which cannot be understood as equal to modern-day understandings of caste. Status titles cut across differences of sect, region, and language, indicating instead the broad occupational, functional, and earned affiliations of individuals.¹⁴⁶ The merchants of Porto Novo who organized themselves into a unified group to respond to Lodi's qaul had a shared set of economic interests rather than any hereditary or kinship links. They were unified by the occupation of buying and selling goods and their shared dealings with local kingdoms and European companies.

The Dutch governor urged the merchants of Porto Novo to be vigilant about preventing the movement of supplies into St. Thomé, a city that was still living

under “the violence of the French criminals” (*het geweld van de Frans geweldenaers*).¹⁴⁷ He reprimanded them for letting two boats loaded with rice reach the city. The merchants’ letters, although obsequious in tone, insisted that this had not happened on their watch and that they had always respected the Company by offering it help and protection throughout. They added the explanation that the French were cunning thieves and animals and could have hijacked the boats at sea (*de Francen bezendige rovers en dieren sijn, zo kunnen ze ook wel iets ten zee kapen*).¹⁴⁸ They acknowledged receiving Lodi’s qaul and affirmed that they would follow it, but Captain Pit and Secretary Ruijser were not entirely convinced the merchants would do so. Pit and Ruijser observed that the traders appeared to be complying to the qaul not because the VOC had itself given them sufficient reason to do so, but because of the obligation they felt toward Sher Khan Lodi, from whom they had received many acts of kindness (*ook niets over gegeven hebben dat onredelijk is, maer aff de Heer Sher Khan Lodi door zijn uit budige genegentheijt die zij menig maal in verschiede occasie tot haer heeft betoont*).¹⁴⁹

So, what exactly were these “acts of kindness”? For an answer to this question, we must go back a few years and see what underlay the issuing of Sher Khan Lodi’s qaul in 1674, which we will do from the vantage point of those who inhabited the very bottom of the regional political economy, the *kaikkolar* (*kai* meaning hand, *kol* referring to a kind of weaving shuttle used then) weavers of the Senji region. The *kaikkolar* were one among many weaving castes, traditionally identified as left-hand castes in the Tamil country.¹⁵⁰ They appear to be at least one of the weaving communities that inhabited the areas around Valikondapuram, where Sher Khan Lodi’s household settled.¹⁵¹ Much has been written about intercaste conflict and cooperation within south India’s system of social organization, between the so-called *idangai* (left-hand, mercantile-warrior and artisans) and *valangai* (right-hand, primarily agricultural communities, tied to the land) castes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly with regard to how such relationships fared under European companies.¹⁵² The case at hand—the dispute between Bijapuri elites, Porto Novo merchants, and weaving castes in the early 1670s—was, in some ways, less bound to the left-right-hand dichotomy, which had to do with certain ritual privileges in public spaces, the allocation of honors, and status rankings in temples. The Tamil-speaking Shafi‘i Sunni Muslim Maraikkayars, for instance, do not map onto the left-right binary although, because of their common economic interests, they may have often allied with Tamil- and Telugu-speaking upper-caste Hindu merchants on either side of this dichotomy at different times and places. The multireligious and multilingual merchants in the Porto Novo collective who responded to Lodi’s qaul were more unified by their interests as a status group that cut across sectarian lines, which stood in opposition to those of the weaving castes.

As sultanate-affiliated Muslim elites, the Miyana Afghans were not new in trying to establish a foothold on the Coromandel coast; as such, Lodi’s encounter with

the weavers of Valikondapuram was not without precedent. The Miyanas were following the same routes charted by Golkonda's celebrated Iranian courtier Mir Jumla in the 1640s and later by the Bijapuri Indo-African Khan Muhammad in the 1650s, all of whom sought access to the Bay of Bengal and its resources to sustain the sultanates' expanding boundaries in the wake of Mughal suzerainty.¹⁵³ Since the early 1660s, during the Karnatak war campaigns, Sher Khan Lodi's contemporary from Golkonda, Reza Quli Beg or Neknam Khan (d. 1672), gained notoriety in the northern Coromandel not just for policing Europeans but also for disciplining weaving castes in Madras and Pulicat on numerous occasions. VOC officials made comparisons to the situation in Pulicat, which fell under Neknam Khan's and Golkonda's authority, with the regions south of Madras falling under Lodi and Bijapur's control. In the port city of Pulicat, a large number of weaving groups had moved out of the city because of Neknam Khan's disciplinary actions. The heads of caste (*hoofden der castas*) traveled to the court in Hyderabad with a letter, waiting for months without an audience with the Golkonda sultan. In response to this attempt to voice their grievances, Neknam Khan jailed the head weavers and forbade the residents of Pulicat from buying provisions from the VOC.¹⁵⁴ Similar disputes unfolded in the regions south of Madras in 1670, where Bijapuri-affiliated Miyana Afghan interests converged with those of regional merchants, causing a weaver's revolt that brought all trade to a standstill.

When the weavers around Senji first expressed their grievances, the object of their complaints was not Lodi as such, but the merchants (identified with the broad term *chetti*) who had been the VOC's suppliers for a long time. The weavers decided to no longer use the merchants as intermediaries and instead tried to deliver their linen directly to the VOC, despite lacking the capital and means to do so. In the port city of Teganapatnam, the revolt took an ugly turn when one weaver committed suicide to encourage his allies from giving into the Chettis (*eene der wevers, goetwilligh hadde laten doden, om sijne medestanders daer door aen te moedigen datse hare strenge omtrent de Chittijs zouden blijven vast houden, dat onder die wevers voor een onverbreecklijknent wert gehouden*).¹⁵⁵ When Lodi arrived on the scene on behalf of his master 'Abdul Karim Bahlol Khan, he sought to monopolize the advancing of capital directly to the weavers, removing both the Muslim and non-Muslim Tamil- and Telugu-speaking merchants from their intermediary role altogether and forcing the cotton weavers into a contract to supply cotton cloth directly to him.¹⁵⁶ The standoff brought trade to a standstill in the three port cities of Teganapatnam, Porto Novo, and Nagapattinam. With inland production inexorably intertwined with what was happening at sea, the Dutch attempted to block Miyana shipping across the Bay of Bengal, anticipating that this would bring Lodi to the negotiating table. The strategy worked. With their ships from Malacca and Aceh unable to reach Teganapatnam, the Miyanas incurred a significant loss of income. As a result, Lodi arrived at the Dutch lodge one morning and agreed to crush the weavers' revolt instead and make them return to supplying

the merchants. Although the Dutch appear to take credit for ending the tripartite standoff by pushing Lodi toward this humiliation, the decision to preserve the old way of doing business would prove advantageous for Lodi, local merchants, and the VOC, but not for the weavers.¹⁵⁷

The negotiations and realignments that preceded the qaul of 1674 therefore essentially preserved the existing status quo by maintaining regional merchants' role as the VOC's sole suppliers. It was this "act of kindness" that had obliged the Porto Novo merchant collective to implement Lodi's qaul of 1674 to limit the movement of supplies to the French without any protest or objection. That these negotiations cut across lines of sect, region, and language is an unremarkable pattern for precolonial southern India. More intriguing, within these interelite realignments, the interests of Persianate brokering elites on the one hand and those of an intrasectarian collective of regional merchants on the other, intersected in preserving socioeconomic hierarchies, a pattern worth examining in other parts of the subcontinent's coasts. Although the voices of weaving communities are often difficult to find in this early period, on the rare occasions they do appear, particularly through interpolated indigenous documentary genres such as the qaul found in Company archives, they tell a story of how resources were redistributed at a moment when different sovereignties collided at the intersections of an agrarian warfront and a subregional littoral economy. The triangular relations of the groups that labored on the Coromandel coast with various Bijapur and Golkonda brokering elites along with dominant regional merchant castes unveils the messy mechanisms that underlay interelite solidarity, rather than an essential and pre-given quality of harmony, tolerance, or absolute opposition.

CONCLUSION: COMPARING SOCIAL EXCLUSION ACROSS REGIONS

A celebrated feature in scholarship about South Asia before the British is that premodern, elite, economic, and political realignments cut across differences of language, status, ethnicity, and sect; however, I suggest that in an era unbound by the nation-state form and its attendant identities this is somewhat unremarkable. Instead, I examine the underlying mechanisms of interelite alliances, which simultaneously depended on sustaining entrenched inequities of status and caste. No different from the agents of other state formations throughout global history, members of corporate groups asserting their autonomy from both the regional (Deccan) and imperial (Mughal) kingly authority had to tap into existing socioeconomic hierarchies in coastal regions to sustain their networks. The case study here, of the negotiations of military households alongside mercantile and artisanal groups in the Deccan-Karnatak, merits a comparison of the study of social hierarchies across different regions of early modern South Asia. Divya Cherian has demonstrated how in eighteenth-century Marwar interelite and intra-elite competition

actually resulted in the cleaving out of a larger Hindu upper-caste dominance in the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁸ Unlike Rajasthan in northwestern India, where the harsh climate of the Thar Desert created more centralization, the regulation of natural resources, and forms of coercion under various Rajput lineages,¹⁵⁹ the Deccan-Karnatak frontier, with its greater social and ecological diversity, created long periods without a singular centralized power, thereby necessitating that social elites forge cross-cutting ties that could encompass more than one religious or sectarian group. And yet, these realignments also preserved status hierarchies in this region.

To put it plainly, whether premodern elites were good or bad, heroes or villains, or better than what came later—that is, European colonialism—is a less interesting question for the postcolonial historian to ask. Starting with these modern binaries speaks more to our present-day anxieties than to the task of reconstructing the imperfect actions of historical actors in times past, along with an unwitting elision of marginalized voices.¹⁶⁰ The question of belonging in South Asia, across different time periods, can therefore never be decoupled from the study of social exclusion and inequality.

I showed how contested ways of belonging emerged at the intersections of the court and the state and between literary and documentary ways of being. Bridging these modern binaries this chapter is also an experiment with method, sources, and disciplines, as it connects literary studies with social history and historical sociology. The cantankerous itineraries from the capital city of Bijapur to the port city of Teganapatnam reveal the coconstitutive and interdependent spheres of state and court at the intersections of which household and state operated.

One of the defining tropes of seventeenth-century peninsular India is the region's inevitable incorporation into Mughal Hindustan and the role of ethnic court factions in either resisting or facilitating this endeavor. The journeys of this chapter from Bijapur to Cuddalore, moved past political histories often fixated on the question of identity, by transcending the divide between literary and nonliterary ways of being, the court versus the state, the agrarian versus the maritime, and the cultural versus the economic. Court factions were not a deviation from a supposedly centralized kingly authority; rather, that imperial suzerainty only heightened the relative autonomy of households from kingly authority, an old pattern of state formation in the south. Whether it was the Miyanas, the Indo-Africans, or the Maratha Bhonsles, household lineages operated in similar ways. In this context, seventeenth-century observers like the poet-historian Nusrati judged political contentions between households through a shared rubric of all belonging to the same house or ghar. Bijapur's premier court poet, even as he excoriated Shivaji, emphatically highlighted the proximity and intimacy of his patrons, the Miyana Afghans, with the Maratha Bhonsles.

While modern intellectuals have often used such uneasy premodern representations to resolve present-day anxieties about identity, I show that these sites of contradiction reveal how politics and political concepts were expressed in Indian

vernaculars by both mobilizing recognizable tropes of difference and then collapsing them altogether. Juxtaposing the vernacular literary expression of premodern Indian politics with the portraits we find of the same protagonists in European Company documents creates space to transcend the social worlds of courts and states and the discrete archival molds these spheres have left behind for historians to make sense of. Although Persian sources have often been paired with European travel accounts and Company documents, examples of placing vernacular literary texts against the so-called “global” archives of “European expansion in Asia” are far fewer.¹⁶¹ When we turn to Company documents, we find members of elite households transcending differences of language, region, sect, caste, and status, but not for the sake of upholding an idealized syncretism. The social and economic transactions of Bijapuri affiliates such as the Miyana Afghans with Tamil- and Telugu-speaking Muslim and non-Muslim merchants, on the one hand, and the weaving castes of the Coromandel, on the other, suggest a far more pragmatic orientation toward existing differences of caste and status, which was to keep such hierarchies intact and undisturbed.