

Postscript

Forgetting Households, Making Dynasties

Spatially, this book began at the site of the military barrack scattered across gateway fortresses like Asirgarh and Daulatabad in the center of the Indian subcontinent, where thousands of imperial soldiers encamped before marching south toward the tip of the peninsula. From the imperial encampment, we first moved westward with elite households, tracing their conflicts over agrarian and maritime resources on the Konkan and Kanara coasts. We then stopped at the courts of Bijapur and Hyderabad, where contemporary poets tried to make sense of an imperial occupation, creating literary representations of the tension between household and monarchy in seventeenth-century politics. Finally, we ended up as far south as the weaving villages around the port city of Nagapattinam, looking out at the Bay of Bengal, where household elites navigated divisions of status and caste, mobilizing commercial resources for war-making and preserving the social order. Temporally, the book's journeys have stayed within the limits of the seventeenth century, during which household and monarchical sovereignties overlapped, intersected, and contested each other.

We will conclude its journey in the small town of Savanur (present-day Karnataka) in peninsular India in the 1840s, more than a hundred years after the dissolution of the Deccan sultanates. In the twilight years of the Mughal Empire, a man named Nawab Dilir Jang Bahadur returned to his home in Savanur after many years of exile in the city of Pune (present-day Maharashtra). Writing petitions and pleas to various English East India Company officials, Dilir Jang hoped to resolve bitter ongoing feuds with many of his nieces, nephews, and the widows of his brothers and half-brothers, holding onto the hope that he would be restored as the legitimate heir to this small "princely state," which now fell under Company suzerainty. The story of this Sunni Muslim Miyana Afghan family is recounted

in a Persian text called the *Tārīkh-i Dīlir-jangī* (History of Dīlir Jang, ca. 1847) by Muhammad ‘Azimuddin, an Arcot-born bureaucrat who had worked for fifteen years as a scribe for the English East India Company.¹

How did this text written in the early colonial period remember a household’s journey across the Mughal frontier in peninsular India more than a century before? The author combined two major modes of writing and curating the past: the court chronicle or *tārīkh*, the most common Perso-Arabic literary form of writing history; and the anthology or *majmū‘a*, a collection of copied letters, treaties, petitions, and revenue lists of and about particular lineages. By combining narration and curation, two forms of remembering the distant past and contemporary events, the author grappled with a larger anxiety, how to continue to write about the political in familial terms.² ‘Azimuddin’s attempt to renarrate Savanur’s past was part of a global phenomenon of transitional literature responding to early colonial attempts to categorize indigenous forms of knowledge, which included grappling with the question of what qualified as proper dynastic history versus what did not.³

One way to make sense of the momentous transformations of the eighteenth century is to turn to how colonial officials and administrators rewrote the precolonial past in their own self-image. Recent readings have meticulously examined how the precolonial past in different regions of the subcontinent was reframed—from the first political agent of the English East India Company in Rajasthan, Colonel James Tod (d. 1835), who wrote *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (ca. 1829), to Alexander Dow (d. 1779), who wrote the monumental *History of Hindostan*, to Alexander Forbes Kinloch (d. 1865), who wrote *Rās Mālā: or the Hindoo Annals of the Province of Gujarat in Western India* (ca. 1856).⁴ In this postscript, by going beyond colonial accounts in English, I turn to one of the innumerable histories that indigenous intellectuals continued to write in Persian as well as in various vernaculars well into the colonial period. The authors of these texts meditated on the meanings of belonging, still turning to the motif of ghar or house. Through a text like the *Tārīkh-i Dīlir-jangī*, I explore, following the aforementioned studies of English colonial writing that show how a radical shift in the writing of history took place in the early colonial period, the question that Manan Ahmed Asif has asked of this period—namely, “what is the past that remains visible after the annihilation of one’s present?”⁵

The choice to conclude the book with a postscript that examines a much later text reflecting back on the events and places examined in its preceding chapters is twofold. The first stems from the desire to make sense of how households were remembered and endured in various forms of writing history in the nineteenth century. Transitional authors tried reconstructing the precolonial past in the colonial present by restating the relevance of the family to political history. Second, the book’s itinerary from one social site to another across peninsular India—from the military barrack to the adorned palace—are in some ways mirrored in the

themes recounted in early colonial texts like the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*. With Company rule firmly in place and the Mughal Empire of little or no relevance, the memory of these sites served as a canvas within the text through which the author told a story about household power. Finally, part of the aim here is also to consider the limits of the method of connected histories, placing sources in multiple languages from vastly different philological and philosophical contexts in conversation with each other. When viewed from the vantage point of the early colonial period, the question of what is visible about the precolonial past was irrevocably linked to how colonial knowledge forms had transformed indigenous practices of writing history.

In the tiny town of Savanur in the first half of the nineteenth century, our author Muhammad 'Azimuddin was but one of many historians across early colonial South Asia attempting to make sense of their unbecoming present by remembering many different pasts. Like his predecessors, following the Perso-Arabic chronicle tradition, he stuck to defining power in past times in the familial idiom. And yet, in refusing to succumb to romance when writing about contemporary events, he made striking distinctions between familial and dynastic pasts and what it meant to write these as separate kinds of historical narratives. He reflected on the family as an object of narration at a moment when Company rule had effectively subsumed all political competitors, deciding which lineage was a mere family and which deserved to be a dynasty. Indeed, the very term for indirectly-ruled, "princely states" in the nineteenth century, signaled an unrealized and unfinished political formation, remnants of precolonial forms of sovereignty allowed to endure but without a dynastic king. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, intrafamilial conflict was complicated by the interference of the Governor's Council in Bombay and Calcutta and a long line of political agents of the English East India Company who kept a grip on patrilineal succession, adoption, and inheritance, a pattern common across minor kingdoms in early colonial South Asia.⁶ Combining the chronicle form, which had long been used to invent the origins of dynasties, with the *majmū'a* or anthology of documents, which made household claims to power legible, our bureaucrat-historian-author sought ways to continue narrating power through the familial idiom of *ghar* when recording the latter was becoming a less worthy subject for writing narrative history.

The modern anxiety involved in separating family history from dynastic histories, as we saw in the preceding chapters, was a dichotomy irrelevant to pre-modern textual traditions. The trope of *ghar* or house, evoked so often by the seventeenth-century poet Nusrati, had framed politics within the intimate, familial register. Why, then, did the writing of history in the nineteenth century come to be equated with only dynastic history? At the dawn of colonialism, Persianate literati were still being commissioned to reassert the legitimate origins of various lineages at precisely the moment when the English East India Company positioned itself as the only heir to Mughal imperial sovereignty. Reflecting on these times,

Muhammad 'Azimuddin chose to divide his text into two parts: in the first, he traces the *khāndān* or family's journeys across Mughal Hindustan and the Deccan; in the second part, he explains his reasons for composing such a work at a time when volatile and violent intraclan feuds had shifted the fortunes of his patron, Nawab Dilir Jang, necessitating a rewriting of Savanur's past.

In this postscript, I reconstruct three temporalities embodied in three sequential images of the house in the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*: the "burnt house," signifying the author's immediate present in the first decades of the early nineteenth century; the "remembered house," covering political relations in the eighteenth century; and the "eminent house," which is about the distant past in the seventeenth century when households were integral to state-making. My reading here begins in the middle of the text, where the author's present is recounted in a section that includes the authorial confession, rather than at its chronological opening, where the authorial confession is typically found, which, in this case, is set in the distant past.

I first examine 'Azimuddin's curious authorial confession that appears more than halfway through the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*, where the act of forgetting households and making dynasties begins. In the first half of the text, in contrast to his declaration halfway through it about separating the distant past from the present, the author begins by constructing a memory of itinerance, tracing the footsteps and longer histories of Afghan circulation across Mughal Hindustan and the Deccan sultanates in the seventeenth century. He then moves on to representing Savanur's political relations with other contemporary regional polities such as those connected with Haider 'Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore (ca. 1761–99) and the Peshwa government of the Maratha Empire (ca. 1751–1818), marking the boundaries of intermarriage, interdining, and sectarian purity with these regional competitors in the late eighteenth century. In the second part, 'Azimuddin narrates various intrafamilial or interlineage disputes, illustrating how "the family feud" came to define the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Company rule had restricted and transformed the terrain of kinship.⁷

The *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī* is but one example of many late Persianate texts from different regional contexts across early colonial India that tries to make sense of the eighteenth century's momentous political transformations. And yet, modern historians often consider such texts as either apocryphal or not as great as the canonized Persian chronicles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These texts are reflections on well-established forms of writing and curating the past that were called into question in the early colonial period. For example, in one political history of Savanur, a twentieth-century historian faults the text's author, Muhammad 'Azimuddin, for failing to adhere to neat chronologies and for messing with the facts. And yet, political historians continued to rely on such texts to extract the sequential narrative of events among the major eighteenth-century political players such as Tipu Sultan of Mysore, the Peshwas, and the Nizams of Hyderabad (ca. 1724–1948), while diligently purging their legendary and anecdotal portions.⁸

As this chapter will show, the gaps, inventions, and split temporalities within this text index a much larger reflection on a dilemma that came into its own in the early colonial period: How to write the family in and out of history? The dichotomy between the familial and the political was not irrelevant to the way 'Azimuddin reimagined political power in the early colonial period. Marking the familial as opposed to the political produced two seemingly contradictory outcomes in a text like the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*. On the one hand, the familial frame remained capacious; it continued to enable real and imagined notions of ghar that transcended differences of religion, language, and ethnicity. On the other hand, in the period of early colonialism, anxieties about both caste endogamy and sectarian purity within communities also produced far more circumscribed definitions of belonging to a house. As the chapter will show through the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*, and in other such late Persianate texts, we also begin to see the earliest iterations of the politics of *sharāfat* or respectability, defined in and through caste, which would come to define Indic Muslim elite identities along sectarian lines in the wake of the Revolt of 1857.⁹

THE BURNT HOUSE

Writing about his patron's changed fortunes in the mid-nineteenth century, Muhammad 'Azimuddin begins his authorial confession by lamenting all that was left of his patron's house(hold) was a piece of hay from a burnt house (*az khāna-yi sukhte kāhī*) and a lone brick from a ruined monument (*az 'imarat-i munhadima kheshtī*).¹⁰ He evokes this image of the burnt house when recounting a recent incident. Some faithful palace guards had recently prevented Nawab Dilir Jang's nieces and nephews from robbing the little jewelry and money left in the treasury. In an ideal world, these nieces and nephews, who were the house-born sons or blood relatives and children of the heads of this family (*sāhebzādegān* and *khānezādegān*), would have been treated with the same respect according to the sons of dynastic kings (*shahzādegān*). According to 'Azimuddin, the thieving progeny had done little to accord such respect from posterity and were unworthy of being written into history as dynastic heirs. And yet, for more than ten chapters (*aurang*) of the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*, 'Azimuddin remains silent. He holds back his critique of a disobedient new generation at the mercy of the English East India Company, all of whom had played a part in setting aflame the house of Savanur. It isn't until the book's final chapters that 'Azimuddin reveals his position, laying out the reasons for the house burning down in the present.

Sighing with sadness for the state of his own times, in this confession he first signals the shift in temporality before writing the final five chapters that recount the present. He alerts his readers to the text's two distinct temporal parts, noting that he is finished writing about the long past (*tawāmīr-i māzī*) and would now

speak of the news of ensuing and future events (*bar akhbār pur ayandeh*) as a means to restore the facts about the family that had been lost in some stories.¹¹

To understand how the familial anxieties that plagued 'Azimuddin's times shaped the craft of narration and curation, it's worth recalling the uncertain conditions of Nawab Dilir Jang's exile in Pune, where he had lived for six years, prior to his return to Savanur in 1825. Nawab Dilir Jang was expected to report frequently to the government of Bombay and the acting collector in Dharwar on his plans to return home, which he was granted permission to do in 1819 after the death of his elder brother, Munawwar Khan, who incidentally left behind a wife who was six months pregnant. Interrupting narrations of these recent events, 'Azimuddin diligently copies relevant documents and correspondence to and from the English East India Company, translated into English from Persian and Urdu and vice versa—for instance, from William Harrison, the acting collector in Dharwar, to index the veracity of his narration of his patron's claim to rule.¹² Given his vocation as a professional scribe, the author affirms the need to prepare documentary forms accurately, as one problem afflicting Savanur's administration at this time was bad scribes and counterfeit writing (*khat-i ja'li*), even making an example of a few wayward, prodigal scribes, whom the author names and shames.¹³

After copying and curating selected documents, 'Azimuddin then returns to the narrative about his patron's troubles in the decades before he completed the *Tārīkh-i Dilir-jangī*. The elder brother Munawwar was known to have been careless with managing finances; disagreements between the two brothers led to the younger Dilir Jang's departure. Politically isolated, ridiculed, and forgotten by the people of Savanur and all his paternal relatives, Dilir Jang set off for Pune along with his wife and most loyal servants and friends. He took out loans to sustain himself, relying on the generosity of those who proved more loyal than his real uncles and brothers ('*amm-i haqīqī wa birādarzādī*). In asides within such narrations about family feuds, 'Azimuddin goes to great lengths to emphasize how the English East Company admired his patron's character, praising his moral fortitude and respectability with the maxim "*har ja sharāfat ast / dalil az rafāqat ast*" (where there is respectability, there is friendship). Despite the Company's appraisal of the Nawab Dilir Jang's character as respectable and righteous, which made it seem like he had gained its steadfast approval, his patron remained anxious about the likelihood of his return home to Savanur.

The news about the impending birth of another nephew troubled Dilir Jang, who was urged to be patient and wait in Dharwar, where the acting collector patronizingly told him to stay optimistic and patient (*az khairiyat-i khud lutf farmā bāshand*). But Dilir Jang remained worried, and he even sent a few of his trusted men back to Savanur to watch over his sister-in-law giving birth to check whether the baby was a boy or girl and to make sure the palace servants did not switch or exchange the infant.¹⁴ Answering the nawab's prayers, the infant turned out to be girl. But, by the time he returned to Savanur, he was confronted by more

opposing relatives, nieces, and nephews from other brothers who opposed his claim to rule. Despite these trials, Dilir Jang gained permission from the Company to sort out a great mess of judicial and administrative matters and make decisions about what to do about members of his extended relatives with absolute independence (*khud mukhtāriyāt-i mutlaq*), without consulting the government of Bombay. He was, for instance, allowed to withhold the monthly pensions of his disobedient nieces and nephews unless or until they gave a *zamānat* or guarantee for good behavior and not cause future troubles.¹⁵ The nawab's authority to discipline the family here stands in contrast to and is superseded by the larger frame of the Company's inescapable control over the political and having granted him such authority. The image of the burnt house therefore captures the contradictions of Savanur's present when this small state's ability to exist depends entirely on the Company's decision to allow policing the squabbling relatives within it. From the authorial confession, therefore, we learn that the Company's strict grip over all matters political shaped the terrain on which intrafamilial disputes unfolded.

THE (RE)MEMBERED HOUSE

From this halfway section, which contains the authorial confession where 'Azimuddin reveals the reasoning for his composition, we can work our way back to the beginnings of *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*. The aforementioned anxieties and the image of the burnt house captured the tumult of the most recent decades before 1847, setting up a contrast for remembering the house in the previous century. In the ten chapters that precede the authorial confession, 'Azimuddin describes political relations between Savanur and other neighboring rival polities. The metaphor of the burnt house that 'Azimuddin identifies with his patron's recent family troubles in the first half of the nineteenth century contrasts with his retrospective on the (re)membered house, when political ties with competing states were held together through a vocabulary of kinship in the eighteenth century.

Under the Company's watchful gaze, the family feud had come to determine an elite household's terms of either survival or complete extinction. 'Azimuddin begins narrating the relevant events of the eighteenth century as a way of reflecting on the crisis of his family in the present. He begins by imparting moral maxims about the futility of revolting against the family's elders (*akābir-i khāndān*), a lesson which he applies back to previous eras—for example, two generations prior, to the year 1752. In this example, he writes about when one Khaliq Miyan and Rasul Miyan unsuccessfully rebelled against their brother and the man who was next in line to be ruler, Nawab 'Abdul Hakim Khan (d.1795), they were paraded around town on a donkey with their faces blackened. 'Azimuddin concludes narrations of many such episodes in the eighteenth century by admonishing family members' split loyalties and misguided actions with the common Hindustani proverb—*dhobhī kī gadhī huī ghar kī na ghāt kī* (a rolling stone gathers no moss)—evoked by

the author in a curious feminine version (*gadhi* instead of *gadha*).¹⁶ This literally means, “the washerman’s donkey has no home, neither at the house [ghar] nor the washing steps; this idiomatic phrase conveys the sense of contempt and judgement reserved for those who fail to remain loyal to one’s house. When retelling numerous succession disputes, ‘Azimuddin continues to reflect on the dangers of one’s own and the problem of revolting against one’s own.¹⁷ He held a mirror to familial bonds, often seen as being expressions of a natural sense of duty and obligation towards one’s kin. And yet, the author understood family ties to be the most fragile of social relations, the quickest to unravel and often proving the most destructive. Throughout the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*, he revisits the theme of succession and fratricide across different generations in the Miyana household, persuasively making the case that blood lines and agnatic descent offered uncertain foundations for sustaining the house.

These internal family feuds stand in stark contrast to other iterations of the familial in the text’s preceding ten chapters on the eighteenth century. Rewriting past political encounters in a language of relatedness, ‘Azimuddin devotes his attention to narrating Savanur’s bonds with various eighteenth-century polities. Here, he references other previously well-known chronicles while also curating copies of documents to index his own retelling. The first set of political ties were with rulers, such as the Peshwas and nayakas of Keladi and Bidnur, who shared no obvious commonalities of blood, sectarian affiliation, or marital ties with Savanur. ‘Azimuddin affirms that these ties were based on obligation and service alone and were, at times, more resilient than those Savanur had with contemporary coreligionists. The second set of political ties were undergirded by affinal or marital bonds and carried implicit expectations of caste and commensality that defined the boundaries of a house within and against coreligionists. The latter included the competing, neighboring Indic Muslim households that surrounded Savanur, such as those of Haider ‘Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore and the Nizams of Hyderabad. As in the case of the internal family feud within the Miyana household, defining the boundaries of intermarriage and interdining with affinal coreligionists was often volatile and created insufficient conditions for maintaining political unity.

To write about the eighteenth century, he then turned to numerous examples of cross-cutting alliances between Savanur, the Peshwas of the Maratha Empire (ca. 1751–1818), and the nayakas of Bidnur and Chitradurg (ca. 1499–1763), which were imagined as akin to and, at times, even stronger than family. If those within the household cannot be trusted, those completely outside it held out some hope for sustenance. It is well known that by the mid-eighteenth century, Savanur ceded territories to the Marathas and fell under the protection of Balaji Rao Nana Saheb Peshwa (d. 1761) in the second half of the eighteenth century, episodes that ‘Azimuddin sums up by referencing previous chronicles.¹⁸ He begins a summary of these events in the mid-eighteenth century first by copying the entire *sulahnāma*

or peace agreement (ca. 1756), detailing the revenues of Savanur's villages, districts, and hamlets ceded to the Peshwa government.

After curating diplomatic documents that affirmed Savanur's vassalage to Pune, he then turns to explaining how this alliance managed to forge a different kind of house all together. He thus describes the *garm jūshī* (love) and *bagal gīrī* (embrace) between Nawab 'Abdul Hakim Khan and Nana Saheb. According to 'Azimuddin, the latter's first wife, Kupa Bai (Gopikabai) apparently gave birth to her son Madhav Rao in Savanur, whom the Nawab loved dearly. The Nawab of Savanur took care of Nana Saheb's wife and son in the same way a paternal or maternal uncle would of his daughter or a brother would of his sister (*chūnānche 'amm wa pedar wa khāl wa birādar nisbat be dukhtar wa khwāhar be-nuzūl midārānd wa mar 'ī mīfarmūdand*). Even after many years of returning to his *watan*, Madhav Rao, remained like a nephew to the Nawab, whom he continued to call maternal uncle (*'ammū-yi khāl or māmā*).¹⁹

Casting past political relations as durable familial ones sets up a contradiction throughout a text like the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī* because 'Azimuddin's central claim is, indeed, that familial ties are the ficklest and most troubles originate from them. By stating the common expectation from one's family, in this case, that an uncle take care of his nephew or niece as if they were his own children, 'Azimuddin is addressing his present audiences, Nawab Dilir Jang's nephews and nieces who, at this very moment, were proactively contesting and undermining their uncle. To frame the bond with Nana Saheb's wife and son as exemplary, therefore, presented a lesson for those who were currently engaged in defying their maternal uncle. Rather than being anomalies or mistakes in writing a linear history, in this way, 'Azimuddin's representation of split temporalities of how the family used to be as opposed to how it is now actually read purposefully against each other, demonstrating the moral meanings of the house to his immediate readers.

This remembered kinship with Nana Saheb's family is extended to others, including the nayakas of Keladi, with whom the Miyana nawabs of Savanur did not share any sectarian, religious, and linguistic commonality. Like the wife of Nana Saheb, 'Azimuddin describes the emotional bond between Nawab 'Abdul Hakim Khan and the Keladi queen, Viramma of Bidnur (d. 1763), the widow of Basavappa Nayaka II, who was ruling at the time until her adopted son, Chennabasavappa Nayaka, came of age.²⁰ Alluding to her regency, while echoing portraits of her that had been repeated in other Persian chronicles such as Mir Husain 'Ali Khan Kirmani's *Nishān-i Haidari* (ca. 1802), 'Azimuddin regarded her as a woman with a man's temperament (*an zan-i mard sīrat wa mardānagī sarīrat*).²¹ Speaking of the affinity between Bidnur and Savanur, he notes that Viramma wished well for the Nawab and nurtured the seed of true friendship and devotion toward him (*dil-i khīsh mamlu mīdāshd wa tukhm-i sadāqat wa 'aqīdat dar mazra' dil-i khīsh mikāshd*), with the hope that he would come to her aid when she was in need. The queen regent of Keladi was an equivalent ruler to

the Nawab, who was obliged to her in the same way that one would be toward a close relative. This sense of obligation toward the Keladi queen however, spelled trouble for the Savanur Nawabs, as it raised the ire of Mysore's Haider 'Ali (d. 1782) and his ally, the raja of Chitradurg. Again, 'Azimuddin sutures these widely known cross-cutting eighteenth century alliances into his broader diagnosis of the household and the state in the past and present.

In contrast to the portrait of enduring ties with the Peshwas and Keladi nayakas, 'Azimuddin offers a much more cynical appraisal of Savanur's ties with its coreligionists, the Nizams of Hyderabad and Haider 'Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the relatively small state of Savanur faced military threats from larger regional states, including from the Peshwa government to the north and from Haider 'Ali and Tipu Sultan in Mysore to the south. Events, battles, and treaties of this period have been narrated many times in political histories written since the late eighteenth century.²² Narrations of these well-known political events are revealing for other reasons, too, such as the portrayal of ceremony and everyday social practices. It is here, when the author tries to make sense of the family formed through affinal ties within a community that anxieties about sectarian purity and commensality come to the forefront. The occasion of memorializing a major wedding between Savanur and Mysore afforded 'Azimuddin the opportunity to highlight social practices that demonstrated the distinctiveness of his patron's household.

As we saw in chapter 4, in the chronicle form, the canvas of a wedding served not merely as an ornate description that digressed from its more central narrative of battles and treaties, but as commentaries integral to the making of fraught affinal ties. More than a century later, 'Azimuddin continued to draw on the chronicle form's wedding as topos for a different purpose. As a means to emphasize status differences between competing Indic Muslim households, through a wedding narration, he elaborated on the everyday politics of caste that came into play when two families became interlinked through marriage. Meeting standards of hospitality was one measure for gauging an elite household's reputation. Weddings and their rituals that created new households were sites for expressing violations of custom and obligation, critical for preserving the standards for being a respectable Muslim family. Therefore, the author of an early colonial chronicle-anthology like the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī* worked with the familiar topoi of the wedding—its preparations, food, and ceremony—to represent political relations. In his descriptions of wedding celebrations, 'Azimuddin uses the politics of caste and cleanliness to mark respectability within and among competing Indic Muslim households. After several confrontations over the course of two decades, Nawab 'Abdul Hakim Khan and Haider 'Ali sought to deter war by marrying their sons and daughters to each other, most notably in two celebrated weddings in the 1770s. The Nawab's daughter Nawaz Begam married Karim Saheb, the second son of Haider 'Ali and the latter's daughter, Sultan Begam, married 'Abdul Khair Khan, the Nawab's son.²³

For the second wedding, the ruler of Savanur, the groom's father, traveled to the outskirts of Mysore where Haider 'Ali, the bride's father, came to receive him. Up to this point, 'Azimuddin had described the two rivals, now soon to be kin, as two seeds of an almond in a single shell (*mānand badām do maghaz alal ittisāl*). He then describes the scale of preparations, the elaborate palace decorations, and how the wedding guests began to be served the finest dishes prepared by the best cooks from Delhi and Hindustan. All this effort was made to give the groom's side no excuse to blame the bride's father or complain about their hospitality. Alas, despite the extravagance, a mistake happened. This mistake not only ruined the *zauq* (taste) of 'Abdul Hakim Khan but also laid bare an uncleanness characteristic to the house of Haider 'Ali and disappointed the ruler of Savanur. The wedding feast laid out and put before the groom's father smelled delicious and looked exquisitely cooked, but something was wrong. Taking the first bite, the Nawab noticed the food had been cooked in unclean vessels, which had not been sufficiently scrubbed by applying the technique of coating them with tin (*qal'ī*).²⁴ In contrast to the way things were done in Mysore, back in his own kitchen in Savanur, vessels were kept fresh by coating them with tin every single day. If the tin coating had been applied on the cooking vessels properly, the food would have tasted just right.

As if the disappointment of dining from unclean vessels was not enough, another incident followed that reveals to the reader how the bride's side (Mysore) did not meet the criteria for respectability. To make up for and remedy the first embarrassment, Haider 'Ali sent over a servant with a set of fine hookahs to the Nawab's chambers, shinier than gold and silver and scented with rosewater and musk to the groom's father. Right before the hookah's pipe touched the Nawab's lips, he saw smoke twirling in the air, and he threw the pipe down to the floor. His facial expression turned dour as he interrogated the hookah carrier. He saw that instead of fresh coals, stale ones wrapped with leather were burning, producing noxious smoke. Whether the polluting leather was placed in the hookah on purpose or not, the narrative serves to mark distinctions of cleanliness between the two households. As a result of this incident, Haider 'Ali was embarrassed again and apologized profusely to the groom's father, trying his best to make it up so that the guests could trust him again. Despite these embarrassing incidents, the weddings between Savanur and Mysore continued, with great attention paid to the cleanliness in lavish preparations.

The image of the groom's father coming into contact with smoke from burning an unclean substance like leather serves a larger purpose. The Nawab's disgusted response to the possibility of bodily pollution from inhaling the smoke from a piece of burning leather implicitly carried a critique of the bride's household. By critiquing the patriarch Haider 'Ali's carelessness regarding standards for food preparation, 'Azimuddin sought to emphasize the difference between these two elite Muslim households that, on the surface, might seem indistinguishable.

For a modern reader, such narratives about dining taboos that violated standards of hospitality can come off as facetious embellishments unthinkingly affixed to the more important narrative of political relations. However, the passages that emphasize the cleanliness of one elite Muslim household vis-à-vis another reveal how social distinctions and boundaries were marked. The politics of caste included standards of cleanliness and dining that highlighted the ethnic difference between the current rulers of Mysore, Haider 'Ali (a Sunni Muslim soldier of fortune with unknown origins) and Savanur, founded by one line of the Sunni Muslim Miyana Afghans, who had long served as soldiers in Deccan and Mughal armies. The narratives about cleanliness and hospitality worked in tandem with anxieties that lay at the heart of the uneasy affinal ties forged between Mysore and Savanur in the eighteenth century.

Shortly after narrating these awkward wedding incidents, 'Azimuddin further emphasized the differences between Mysore and Savanur. On the eve of the invasion and looting of Savanur, an old confidant and childhood friend of Haider 'Ali, La'l Khan, dissuaded him from proceeding with battle. He warned that most of the great nobles of Savanur served in Mysore's army while their wives and families were still in Savanur. Repeating an old trope of intra-Afghan solidarity, La'l Khan noted that these relatives were bound by feelings of brotherhood for other Afghans (*birādārī wa hamdīgārī-i qaum-i afghānhā*) and had affection and respect for 'Abdul Hakim Khan.²⁵ If all the Afghans united (*hameh-yi qaum-i afghān yek dili wa yak zabān shawand*), Mysore was bound to lose. It is against this imagined ethnic solidarity that the troubling violations of caste and commensality in the wedding narratives must be read. Through such narratives, 'Azimuddin constructed the criteria through which he could distinguish the respectability of two elite Sunni Muslim households, both of which came from relatively modest soldiering backgrounds.

This image of Afghans on different sides of a political fight uniting to turn the tide of major battles goes back several centuries to the time of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and still earlier to the time of the Deccan sultanates in the seventeenth century, when chronicles first constructed this trope.²⁶ Finally, in the first third of *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*, 'Azimuddin begins with narratives memorializing the seventeenth century when the journeys of households at the edges of states first emerged, journeys that have taken us in this book across peninsular India.

THE EMINENT HOUSE

So, finally, what did the distant past of the seventeenth century mean to someone like Muhammad 'Azimuddin composing a Persian chronicle-cum-anthology in the nineteenth century for his little-known patron, Nawab Dilir Jang Bahadur? In the very beginnings of the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*, we find a sweeping genealogical account starting in the sixteenth century, when the *akābir-i khāndān* (greats of the

household) first emerged journeying across the Mughal frontier and into peninsular India. The author tells us that his patron Nawab Dilir Jang asked him to compile a history of Savanur's ancestors from an array of scattered and separate histories and write them anew in a sequential, colorful manner. The first *aurang* (chapter 1) thus begins with a *shajara* (family tree) going back to the earliest ancestors of the Miyana Afghans who settled in the watan of Hindustan, where they held a *jāgīr* for seventeen years.²⁷ After the fourteenth generation, in the time of the Mughals (*timuri bādshah*) and under Emperor Humayun (r. 1530–40), they came to hold the title of *malik* or lord. It was during the reign of Sher Shah Sur (r. 1537–45) that they earned the titled *nawāb* (variously translated as vice regents, governors, or lieutenants) and came to be held in the highest regard by kings. When describing the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'Azimuddin expresses a nostalgia for the relationship between households and states in the distant past with the following Urdu verse:

*mu 'tamad milti hai shāhon kī jo hote hain rafīq
sab ko milti hai par aisī hawā jawānhā kahān*

those who become friends receive the trust of kings
no longer can it be found, where have such youthful winds gone?

The twenty-second descendent, 'Abdul Khan Bahadur, became minister of the lands of the Deccan at borders of the Karnatak (*wazīr-i mumālīk-i dakkān ke mahdūd-i karnātak ast*). 'Azimuddin describes the multivalent itineraries of the family line: while some sons joined the Mughals, others entered the service of the Sultanates. Here, the recounted narratives follow the templates of the mirror-for-princes genre, attaching moral lessons to actual historical events that conclude with the lesson that monarchs cannot function without the wise consul elite householders. For instance, on the eve of the Mughal invasion of Bijapur in the 1670s, the author explains how 'Abdul Rauf Khan made a peace deal with the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.²⁸ 'Azimuddin follows this narrative about how integral the Miyana household was to Bijapuri sultans with a well-known story about how they also helped the Mughals. He recounts how Prince Muazzam Khan, one of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's disaffected sons, was persuaded to return to his father by 'Abdul Rauf Khan (who, as a result, earned the title of Dilir Khan Bahadur). In constructing these household memories, 'Azimuddin draws heavily on preexisting chronicles, such as Kirmani's *Nishān-i Haidari* (ca. 1802), a text he acknowledged using as a reference and one in which such narratives about the household's ancestors are also recounted.²⁹

A final legacy of the Mughals and the Deccan sultanates, as the author explains, was the production and collection of books and manuscripts about these preceding political formations that ended up in household libraries in the early nineteenth century. This preexisting knowledge implicitly shaped an early colonial chronicle-anthology like the *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangī*. Thus, in the final chapters, we

learn that Nawab Dilir Jang's library received many manuscripts from Bijapur and Hyderabad, confirming the circulation and transfer of many renowned materials into elite libraries in the early nineteenth century.³⁰ 'Azimuddin's patron's love of learning and deep knowledge of the Arabic and Persian languages, and prose and poetry in general meant he was constantly seeking authentic and original manuscripts. In this portion of the work, the author acknowledges that a learned Sufi from Bijapur even sent a copy of Ibrahim Zubayri's *Tārīkh-i Bijāpūr* (which he titles *Hasht Bustān-i Tārīkh-i Bijāpūr* or the Eight gardens of the history of Bijapur [ca. 1802]) to Savanur. This was one of the key texts consulted to learn about the previous kings of the Deccan and it shaped how the author composed the early chapter of the present work, much like the Nawab himself, who benefited from reading such well-known chronicles. In the early colonial period, manuscripts moved across libraries in peninsular India, echoing the itineraries of households that had in past centuries moved across the same landscape,—from the military barrack in its central plateau to the weaving villages on its coastal plains.

The purpose of concluding a book about the seventeenth century with a reflection on the meaning of ghar and what it means to write its histories more than a century later is twofold. The burnt house in the present, the remembered house in the immediate past, and the eminent house of the distant past all constituted how 'Azimuddin conceptualized the place of household and state in historical time. He was looking back at the time when elite households mattered to dynastic power—that is, as opposed to his time, when they were being actively forgotten at exactly the moment when dynastic histories were becoming separated from family histories. This postscript presents what was visible to 'Azimuddin—namely, a refraction of the book's preceding chapters on the seventeenth century. In other words, what was discernable about the household's role in state power to early nineteenth century authors was inexorably conditioned by ruptures in the early colonial present.

PRECOLONIAL IMPERFECTIONS AND THE POSTCOLONIAL PRESENT

This book began as an inquiry into the place of the household in connected histories.³¹ Raising the question of historical method here was also a way of reflecting on the book's larger stakes and the interdisciplinary fields in which it intervenes. The central question before us was how to reconstruct the role of the subcontinent's most enduring form of social organization—the household—across vastly different linguistic and philosophical archives, as well as geographic units. Poems, administrative documents, chronicles in South Asian languages share no obvious linguistic or common epistemic ground with European Company archives. To me, the salient question in connected histories is not so much the mutual legibility of any body of materials, for their philological and philosophical worlds are indeed mostly separate and mutually exclusive. Rather, a more interesting direction

one can go with them is to show how together they illuminate proximate geographies and units of circulation within which premodern power functioned. Thus, through our analysis of both a battle poem and Company archives we saw how soldiers, poets, and household chiefs moved across shorter distances from one social site to another, competing, contesting, disputing with one another, linking the central plateau to the Kanara coast and the Raichur Doab to the northern Tamil country. Tracking everyday mobilities across more proximate geographies of circulation thus helped us move away from the usual sites where we tend to look for connections, such as the world of diplomats, courtly circulation, and overlapping high literary cultures.

Tying the ambitions of social history to the practice of drawing from sources in multiple languages, whether through textual traditions in indigenous languages or European archives, this book has, above all, presented the case for an unromantic portrait of premodern power. Students of South Asia, in the United States and elsewhere across the world, are now better acquainted with the subcontinent's colonial and postcolonial pasts, as a range of disciplines—whether literary studies, anthropology, or history—have all embraced the critique of Orientalism. One of the generative questions emerging from postcolonial studies, still insufficiently explored, is how to make sense of everything that existed before Europe? The radical rewriting and pulverizing of indigenous texts in the colonial period is a process echoed in our postscript here, through the reflections of Munshi Muhammad 'Azimuddin in his *Tārīkh-i Dilīr-jangi*.³²

But the alternative to the critique of colonial knowledge cannot be that premodern South Asia was a land bereft of competition, conflict, and social hierarchies or that all identities before colonialism were necessarily fluid. Belonging somewhere in the vertical hierarchy of a ghar was a form of privilege. Social historians have long argued that elite power must be examined not merely as a question of identity and representation, but also as it related to other actors, whether commercial elites or laboring groups, a question that deserves closer examination in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the subcontinent's largest precolonial and most enduring empire was intact and improvising its institutions very far from the so-called center.³³ Over the course of the book's chapters, we traversed different social sites across peninsular India, where cross-status interactions are most visible—spaces where elite households participated, constituted, and undercut state institutions.

The Mughal Empire occupies a complicated position in the public life of the postcolonial nation-states that constitute South Asia today.³⁴ Given the rise of ultranationalist movements that seek to erase every imprint of Islam in the modern Indian republic, it should come as no surprise that scholarly work has successfully restored Mughal greatness by emphasizing this Sunni Muslim Turk-Mongol empire's capacious forms of cultural patronage, its ability to rule over subjects from various different religions, ethnicities, and linguistic worlds, and

most importantly, its role in defining a sense of belonging.³⁵ As this book shows, nowhere else is the empire's role in shaping the politics of place more clear than in peninsular India, a region that was never fully incorporated into the imperial domains. Here we found that contestation and disagreement, as much as accommodation and borrowing, lie at the core of belonging to a ghar or house. That the story of Mughal presence in southern India is not one of happy harmony need not be lamented. But, by emphasizing the conflict and contestation inherent in it, we can observe how the empire transformed and built on regional patterns of sovereignty, producing debates about imperial power.

Working at an empire's edges meant moving along with different kinds of households across nodes and sites of interaction with the state and focusing on how social relations transformed when an imperial and regional war front first started expanding. Starting in the 1620s, the book began by first turning to the untold story of naming ghar in caste (the foundational building block of households) and various other identifications in the Mughal Empire. When provincial elites first fell under the northern Indian Mughal Empire's shadow, at the site of the military barrack at the northmost limits of peninsular India, household and state encountered each other. At these interconnected networks of checkpoints and forts, social identifications were written, recorded, and interrogated, bringing a state scribe into conversation with the humble soldier affiliated with households from many different sectarian, ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds.

In chapter 2, by shifting the question of identity to identification, I argued for the utility of using documentary fragments for writing the social history of caste, rather than turning to frozen representations of elite power and identity in court chronicles. In these terse materials, a pointillist portrait of everyday interactions and bureaucratic processes that held down a massive military occupation showed how social categories were created, used, and defined by ordinary actors. In chapters 4 and 5, just as regional sultanates were falling under the Mughals in the mid-seventeenth century, we stopped at regional courts, which remained a key site for producing a critique of imperial rule. In Bijapur and Hyderabad, from the 1630s to the 1660s, we heard the voices of émigré and regional poet-political commentators who formulated the earliest and most trenchant critiques of the imperial occupation. These observers saw provincial households making claims to power, thereby unsettling the criteria for belonging to ghar. In the adorned palaces of regional capital cities, dynastic and aristocratic marriages, births, and circumcisions continued to be celebrated, where participants in public ceremony once again evoked the notion of ghar, an idealized space that could be built on many forms of relatedness, such as marriage, slave patronage, and fosterage. In chapters 3 and 6, we moved beyond courts to the coasts of peninsular India, where, through case studies of interactions between Iranian, Afghan, and Maratha households, we saw two kinds of bottom-up perspectives on elite power—from intra-kin competition, on the one hand, which threatened the very survival of regional rulers,

to realignments along lines of status, on the other, which conserved economic hierarchies in the coastal economy. I showed that in an era unbound by the nation-state form and its attendant identities based on religion, region, language, gender, and ethnicity, such interelite solidarity is entirely unremarkable; and by interrogating the underlying mechanisms of these affinities, we saw how social order was preserved.

The general scholarly focus on the Mughal heartland in northern India has meant that reigning imperial rulers continue to organize extant scholarship on the empire. Recent studies have usefully moved toward a social history but are still firmly located in Delhi or the northern Indian plains more broadly. By contrast, in peninsular India, scholarship has either focused on courtly and literary cultures or on political history, leaving unanswered the question about the social constitution of power. To recover an unromantic picture of elite power, the space between the household and the state offers one possible site for the study of precolonial social history, particularly in peninsular India, where diverse physical and human geographies have for centuries produced weak monarchical states and a continuous and fraught pattern of corporate groups as cosharers in sovereignty.

Given vexed political debates in the postcolonial present, the Mughal historian today must apparently try to prove whether this premodern political formation and its rulers were good or bad.³⁶ The notion of good Mughals and bad Mughals remains pervasive, as recent popular histories readily embrace this trope for the Muslim rulers of the Deccan as well.³⁷ One way of making the Mughals Indian has been to affirm their proximity to or affinity with non-Muslim groups, languages, traditions, and sects in the subcontinent. And yet, this paradigm still leaves us with the problem of origins that begins with the fundamental otherness of Islamic polities (in this case Mughal and the Deccan sultans) often cured by taking on local flavor or adopting preexisting cultural norms.³⁸ The focus on Mughal pluralism has often overshadowed the dynamic story of intrareligious and intrasectarian critique within various communities across South Asia, which recent work has usefully undone.³⁹ Despite bringing to light the polyglot Mughal world, an integrationist model leaves out the problem of competition and contention within the senses of belonging created by South Asian Islam. Both narratives in part draw on persistent colonial and nationalist discourses that frame the empire as a monolithic imperial entity by exclusively examining the rise and fall of dynastic kings, who in turn are cast as either the paragons of syncretic culture or conservative rulers guided by Islamic orthodoxy.

It goes without saying that the Indian subcontinent has for centuries been the ghar of many kinds of people, languages, ideologies, religions, and communities. On the eve of colonialism in the eighteenth century, it was the Mughal Empire that played the single biggest role in integrating the subcontinent's distant, heterogeneous regions, which, in turn, did their part in transforming imperial ambitions. Stepping outside Delhi and the Hindi heartland requires putting the Mughals

at the center of the discussion about caste in circulation and internal mobilities in early modern India. The Sunni Muslim Mughals have largely been left out of the discussion about their role in shaping the history of caste mobility partly because the history of the subcontinent's most enduring social variable, particularly in the periods before 1800, is purportedly one of and about Hindus.⁴⁰

This book's chapters offer an itinerary with stops at different social sites, where we can see the internal and external interactions of household power and caste circulation with state institutions. If and when possible, this book interrogates not just the representations of elite power in courtly literature but also its everyday workings and interactions within and across social classes in surviving documentary genres, the body of evidence traditionally generated by the state. Whether by tracking the movement of a vast panoply of soldiers in the imperial military or through case studies of intraclan conflicts within elite households, this book urges that histories of the subcontinent's most salient social feature of status and caste need not be erased in the well-meaning effort to restore Mughal greatness. If anything, the best reason to make the Mughals "Indian," as the late historian M. Athar Ali observed decades ago, is that they were firm believers in caste and efficient enforcers of social hierarchy.⁴¹ By moving across different social sites where we see the practices and meanings of social identities in circulation, it may also be possible then to bridge the divide between the world of the court versus the state, a dichotomy naturalized in recent studies of both the Mughal north and peninsular India.

Like any other category, the rich history of South Asian Islam long before colonialism deserves closer scrutiny for its innumerable contradictions in a story replete with disagreement and debate. If we want to move away from either exaggerating or minimizing the significance of sectarian difference in the precolonial world by talking to or against the Indic versus the Islamicate paradigm, then contending with political meaning-making and debates within either of these categories may also be useful.⁴² There is therefore no denying that for seventeenth-century provincial Muslim observers, the Mughals were, indeed, a troubling presence, especially in peninsular India. Rather than shying away from the earliest trenchant critiques of the empire, it is worth listening to the dissenting voices that diagnosed how imperial ambitions transformed the meanings of belonging and altered politics and institutions.