Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series

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Girija Joshi

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ebv BERLIN

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Bibliographic information published by
the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de

Gefördert durch die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) im Rahmen der Exzellenzstrategie des Bundes und der Länder – Exzellenzcluster Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) EXC 2036/1-2020, Projektnummer: 390683433

Funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy – Cluster of Excellence Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) EXC 2036/1-2020, Project No.: 390683433

This book is available for free download in the Open Access section of the publishers' website. (https://doi.org/10.53179/9783868934298).

A print version is available for a fee from the publisher.
The page numbers in the print and in the online version are identical.

© EB-Verlag Dr. Brandt
Berlin, 2022

Coverdesign: © Rainer Kuhl, Berlin

ISBN 978-3-86893-419-9 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-86893-429-8 (Open Access)
DOI 10.53179/9783868934298

1. Introduction

This essay considers the effects of colonization on the asymmetrical relationships that underpinned the polities of north-western India in the eighteenth century. It has two aims: first, to highlight some of the ambiguities of dependency in precolonial regimes; second, to trace the erosion of these ambiguities within the framework of colonial law. I argue that, as in other parts of the subcontinent, British rule in this region sought to reconfigure, and in some cases, override certain kinds of politically key dependencies to achieve what it euphemistically described as 'pacification'.[1] Though this programme proceeded in tandem with the creation of new legal categories, its success was contingent upon the cooperation of local parties as well. This cooperation was often forthcoming, exposing the fault lines in the patron-client, and kinship networks upon which chiefly authority was built. While the colonial state's re-engineering of elite households has been studied before, much of the existing literature is concerned with Muslim families and their 'succes-

The groundwork for this research was laid thanks to a generous doctoral fellowship from the Dutch Research Council (NWO), and to the help of the staff of the Haryana State Archives at Panchkula. I am deeply grateful to both. My sincere thanks also to the Bonn Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies, for the opportunity to present, discuss, and publish my work.

Note on transliteration: I have generally adhered in this essay to the IJMES system of transliteration. There are occasional divergences, as the sources used in this paper did not always observe standardised orthography, and I have preserved these variations in my transliteration (e.g., '*asb*' instead of '*asp*' for 'horse'). In addition, I have chosen to keep the common transliteration for some words such as *karewa* (as opposed to *karevah*). Place names are not written with diacritics, unless they appear in the titles or text of an Urdu or Persian work. Nor are titles when used as such, proper nouns, and Urdu and Persian words used in English (e.g. '*zenana*', '*sardar*').

1 For analogous interventions in household-based polities in other parts of the subcontinent, see for instance Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery, and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Chatterjee, "Monastic Governmentality, Colonial Misogyny, and Postcolonial Amnesia in South Asia," *History of the Present* 3, no. 1 (2013): 57; Jessica Hinchy, "The Sexual Politics of Imperial Expansion: Eunuchs and Indirect Colonial Rule in Mid-Nineteenth-Century North India," *Gender & History* 26, no. 3 (2014): 414–37.

sor' states. By contrast, this essay studies a Sikh Jat[2] chiefly household of agropastoral origins, upon which colonial concepts of legitimate dependency were likewise foisted, with consequences for the polity as a whole. So doing, it brings both the similarities and differences between different regimes of dependence—'Islamic' and 'tribal'[3], servitude and kinship—in the subcontinent into relief. It furthermore adds to the still small pool of literature that has so far considered the fates of minor South Asian polities in the subcontinent during the nineteenth century.[4]

The main body of the argument is divided into three sections, beginning with a reflection on methodology. Here, I compare a recent discussion of asymmetrical dependency with a broader pool of historical work on slavery and patronage in the South Asian context. From a theoretical point of view, I join other scholars of the subcontinent to stress just how slippery the sliding scale of dependence could be. Definitions that therefore emphasise the immutability or stasis of such relationships, risk excluding social relations that were at once very unequal, and yet left room for upward—and downward—mobility. On the other hand, one of the advantages of the prism of dependency, is that it brings together a cross-section of social relationships in the precolonial and colonial periods which are not infrequently compartmentalised and analysed separately, as they ostensibly pertain to discrete social domains. Such neat categories do not appear to correspond to how the historical actors considered below viewed themselves—kin, servants, and clients were all part of the princely entourage, described simply as *tābeʿīn* (dependents) or *hamrāhān* (literally, 'followers of the same path'). Though there were

2 I use these identifiers cautiously and conditionally; they are discussed in section 3 below.

3 I will briefly address what I mean with 'tribal' in section 3 below. For the moment, suffice is to say that I am using the term as a purely political descriptor, to refer to polities that were more or less egalitarian.

4 See for example Pamela G. Price, "Kin, Clan and Power in Colonial South India," in *Unfamiliar Relations. Family and History in South Asia*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004): 192–221; Ramya Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines: Female Slaves in Rajput Polity, 1500–1850," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006): 136–61. Most recently, Arik Moran, *Kingship and Polity on the Himalayan Borderland: Rajput Identity during the Early Colonial Encounter* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

important differences of status within this entourage, these depended upon proximity to the head of the household, making him the common point of focus in a range of asymmetrical relationships.

Section three explores the gradations of dependency in a chiefly household from Panjab, north-western India, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Using a court chronicle composed in the early twentieth century, it focuses upon two different categories of dependent—the concubine/wife, and the court chronicler—to demonstrate both the difficulties of identifying slaves, as well as the relative unimportance of jural status, in these specific instances, in creating and maintaining dependency. Although these examples suggest different degrees and ways of being dependent, in both cases, the dependents are provided with the chance of social improvement in exchange for their loyalty. While there was provision, honour, and power to be derived from remaining dependent, removing oneself from this web of relations meant risking the loss of these coveted social goods. By contrast, for those dependents who had succeeded in establishing their own households, who had become powerful patrons in their own right, there remained the temptation to cast aside one's tributary status, and venture forth as an autonomous political entrepreneur.

In section four, I follow scholars such as Indrani Chatterjee to focus upon a key element of the British colonial state's programme of pacification in Panjab, the dismantlement of the relations of patronage/dependence that underpinned precolonial polities. In the implementation of this programme, they were assisted by local actors, usually men, who were either disgruntled clients seeking to sever links with their patrons, or kin who stood to gain by the exclusion of female dependents and their offspring from networks of provision. The result of these interventions was self-reinforcing; reductions in the network of tributaries and clients meant that chiefly households were less able to provide for their dependents. In this way, the wealth and influence of precolonial polities was starkly reduced.

2. The Limits and Guises of Dependency

As a recent publication of the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies has noted, dependency studies is very much in the incipient stages of acquiring form as a distinct field.[5] As such, a theoretical framework for the study of asymmetrical dependencies is still in the process of being established. According to the authors, at least part of the groundwork to be done in this direction, entails expanding discussions of dependency beyond the two classical examples of slavery: plantation slavery in the Atlantic world, and Ancient Graeco-Roman slavery. To that end, they note, it is necessary to incorporate experiences from non-European and precolonial societies considerably more than is currently the case.[6] The definition of 'strong asymmetrical dependencies' that they offer is suitably broad, and identifies two salient features of such relationships. The first of these is the control of one actor's access to resources, broadly construed, by another; the second is some form of institutional embedding, which restricts the dependent's ability to extricate themselves from the relationship, as also their ability to oppose it.[7]

Viewed as a student of South Asia, one analytical advantage of the focus on asymmetrical dependencies would seem to be that it captures the gradations of unfreedom that have historically seeped into a variety of relationships in the subcontinent. Coercion and dependency occur even where slavery is not explicitly mentioned, and perhaps did not formally—that is to say, legally—exist.[8] The degree of dependence was moreover subject to change with time and place, changes that were not

5 Julia Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency," Concept Paper, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, 2021, https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/bcdss_cp_1-_on-asymmetrical-dependency.pdf.

6 Ibid.: 3.

7 Ibid.: 2–3.

8 See for instance Sunil Kumar's work on the changing inflections of *bandagī* and *naukarī* from the 13th–16th centuries. Both these states were associated with service of some sort, and were distinctly, and 'strongly', hierarchical, but 'service' alone does not sufficiently capture the nature of dependency implied. Sunil Kumar, "*Bandagi* and *Naukari*: Studying Transitions in Political Culture and Service under the Sultanates of North India, 13–16th Centuries," in *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth Century North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014): 60–108.

necessarily accompanied by a corresponding semantic shift.[9] The obligations of the dependent and their status can therefore not be deduced from categories without reference to this broader context. Moreover, focusing on *practices* that create and uphold forms of dependence indirectly creates space for grappling with the sometimes obfuscating role played by language in disguising enslavement or asymmetrical dependence.[10] This is of importance in South Asia, for although enslavement did not necessarily imply the 'social death' that it entailed in the Atlantic context, the deracination, or rather, the kinlessness that it suggested, certainly was stigmatised.[11]

The creation of elaborate, and often patently false, genealogies, to paper over the kinless origins of slaves who rose to prominence was one way of mitigating this stigma. Such references to the kin of the enslaved was not, however, universally a literary foil for disguising natal alienation. Rather, the narrative conflation of dependency, servitude, and kinship could also derive from the lack of a strict differentiation between these categories. Indeed, it was through obligations of various kinds, extracted through the creation of dependence, that the affinity and intimacy associated with kinship was constructed and maintained. The converse of this is true as well—being born or married into a household might bring with it obligations and dependence which, although not formally designated as unfree, placed considerable constraints upon kin, a point I return to below. This is because, as the anthropologist Anjum Alvi has argued, personhood in Panjab, but also more broadly in South

9 Indrani Chatterjee notes, for example, the differential labour obligations and exemptions of royal and monastic slaves in north-eastern India and Burma. Indrani Chatterjee, "Slavery, Semantics, and the Sound of Silence," in *Slavery in South Asian History*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006): 287–315, at 289. In her work on 'temple women' in the medieval Chola domains, Leslie Orr noted that although such figures were to be found across peninsular India, the terms used for them were regionally specific, varying from synonyms for prostitute and courtesan, to servant, lady, and devotee. Leslie C. Orr, *Donors, Devotees, and Daughters of God. Temple Women in Medieval Tamil Nadu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 48–50.

10 Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 7–8.

11 Indrani Chatterjee, "The Locked Box in 'Slavery and Social Death'," in *On Human Bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, ed. John Bodel and Walter Scheidel (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016); Kumar, "*Bandagi* and *Naukari*": 73–74.

Asia, exceeds the bounds of the physical body, in marked contrast to the notion of the 'sovereign individual'.[12] Put differently, the self is thought to be incomplete without reference to a number of others, to whom it may be bound through a variety of hierarchical relationships. In such a context, whether or not one is formally the property of another, 'strongly asymmetrical' dependence very likely structures both one's experience, as well as one's understanding of the self.

'Dependency', then, offers a way of approaching and comparing different hierarchical relationships, by attending not simply to formal categories, but to the web of relations and practices in which it was embedded. It is however important to address two points of tension between the scholarship on South Asia, and the definition of dependency mentioned above. The first of these pertains to the permanence, or rather the immutability, of 'strong asymmetrical dependency'.[13] Speaking once more from a regional perspective, while dependence may be more or less ubiquitous, it should not be understood to be static, but rather changes in quality over the course of a lifetime. As one of Alvi's Panjabi respondents told her, 'old people are a wall of traditions that [must] be […] maintained; if someone dies or retires from this duty, he or she must be replaced.'[14] Similarly, in contexts of explicit enslavement, we find slave soldiers becoming counsellors of state, and monastic disciples (*celās*) becoming revered ascetics and even saints.[15] Such replacement, however, is only tenable if the inductee has more or less fulfilled the obligations associated with their (dependent) personhood, whether

12 Anjum Alvi, "The Category of the Person in Rural Punjab," *Social Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (2001): 45–63; Anjum Alvi, "India and the Muslim Punjab: A Unified Approach to South Asian Kinship," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 3 (2007): 657–78.

13 In this regard, the authors also acknowledge that the discussion of what precisely the adjective 'strong' entails is one that is still in its incipient stages. Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 28.

14 Alvi, "The Category of the Person in Rural Punjab": 59.

15 For a disciple who became a monastic-warlord, see William Pinch, "Who Was Himmat Bahadur? Gosains, Rajputs and the British in Bundelkhand, ca. 1800," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 35, no. 3 (1998): 293–335. Within the context of military slavery, see Richard M. Eaton, "Malik Ambar (1548–1626): The Rise and Fall of Military Slavery," in *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300–1761: Eight Indian Lives*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 105–28.

as a dutiful wife and mother, or a capable and vigilant son, husband, and brother. While Winnebeck et al. are careful to emphasise that systems of dependence may themselves hold out the prospect of emancipation, the examples cited above are not necessarily instances of liberation through highly asymmetrical bonds being severed, but rather of improving one's position within the web of dependent relations.[16]

This in turn feeds into the second point of friction, which relates to the question of obedience, or why dependent actors foster their own dependence. Besides the threat of violent retribution for disobedience, or the promise of basic provision, Winnebeck et al. suggest that there are worldviews into which dependents are socialised that make hierarchy seem common-sensical.[17] In other words, people comply with what appears to be the natural order. While this is certainly the case, since dependence could pave the way to social goods such as honour, it was both tactical as well as key to self-identification. To this extent, dependence might be sought not out of a sense of one's unworthiness, but as an expression of self-worth, and not because it led to emancipation or empowerment, but because there was value in being the client, subject, or servant of the powerful. Such dependent relations were and are, as Anastasia Piliavsky has noted, where the ambitious derive hope from.[18] This in turn helps illustrate what 'interagency'—a central pillar of the authors' approach to asymmetrical dependency—might look like in contexts in which the self encompasses *and* is subordinate to another. Here, actors use their agency within the system of relations, not necessarily to 'appropriate' it, which suggests hijacking a system for potentially subversive ends, but to reaffirm their identity as dependents. Such actions corresponded with strong emotional bonds. This is not to say that 'obedience' did not also have more pragmatic and opportunistic reasons, or that there were no instances of resistance or opposition. As we shall see below, dependents might coolly discard a patron that could no longer protect or provide for them, or sever ties where envy or disgrun-

16 Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 8.
17 Ibid.: 9.
18 Anastasia Piliavsky, *Nobody's People: Hierarchy As Hope in a Society of Thieves* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020): chapter 1 (1–38).

tlement displaced affection. Yet, as Piliavsky's work demonstrates, to avoid thinking purely in terms of subordination/emancipation, or treating 'compliance' as a form of self-sabotage, it helps to think in terms of the value of hierarchical relations for the parties themselves, which in turn is context- and role-specific.[19]

If this essay draws on a large body of work on South Asia, it also seeks to contribute to it. As previously mentioned, much of the work on dependency within royal households in the subcontinent from the early modern period onwards, has tended to focus on Muslim elites, who adhered nominally, at the very least, to Islamic law. This paper, by contrast, studies a Sikh household, that was moreover of rural, husbanding origins, and that had risen rapidly and recently in the social order, even as it retained its Jat identity. Its history provides insights into the customs that governed asymmetrical relations in such a tribal lineage, and explicitly links kinship, service, and servitude within the overarching framework of dependence. Moreover, the influence of Persianate and Islamicate terms[20] reveals, on the one hand, a partial integration into a cultural and juridical world that stretched disjointedly and with local variation across much of Asia. As Nandini Chatterjee has argued, the notion that 'Islamic' law in Mughal India extended only to civil disputes amongst Muslims is to view history backwards: such a simple correspondence between creed and law did not exist. Rather, she has suggested that the 'permissive inclusion' of *sharī'a* gave Mughal subjects

19 Ibid.: 25–26.

20 There is a large body of literature on the precise definitions of both these related terms; for simplicity's sake, however, I will here limit myself to their original meanings. Both 'Islamicate' and 'Persianate' were first coined by the historian Marshall Hodgson in his *Venture of Islam*. The former of these Hodgson used to designate the particular culture that grew with and through the spread of what he described as 'Islamdom', or 'Islamic civilization', which was shared in and co-created by a number of non-Muslim communities as well (Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974]: 95). The Islamicate's global spread was facilitated by different languages, Arabic serving as a medium for conveying religious knowledge, while Persian came to be the vehicle of Islamicate 'high culture'. The 'Persianate' was forged through the interactions between Persian and diverse regional languages, many of which subsequently adopted Persian literary models in an attempt to style themselves as the local language of sophistication (Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974]: 293).

the option of using 'Islamic' courts for civil disputes, regardless of their religion.[21] Though this essay does not primarily use legal records, the legal nature of the subject, and the reference to juridical codes in the sources, highlights the selective and adaptive use of laws across confessional lines, and their role—along with codes of honour ('*izzat*) and duty (*farẓ*)—in shaping customs (*ṭaur, rasm*) and the contours of family.

Lastly, by intermittently following the fortunes of a single family over the course of more than a century, this essay is able to demonstrate the staggered and divergent processes of elite formation during the transition from Mughal to colonial rule. By identifying the continuation of some 'common', or non-elite, kinship practices in the Kalsia household, this paper suggests that their political ascent did not imply a clean break with their rural, husbanding origins. This in turn complicates our understanding of what it meant to be an elite in the subcontinent. Building on Sumit Guha's critique of concepts of caste that treat it as a religious and particularly 'Hindu' institution defined by a specific set of ritual markers, I suggest that despite the increasing homogeneity of elite cultures in colonial South Asia, there remained viable alternatives to the narrow models of Brahmanical orthodoxy and Islamicate *sharāfat* (respectability) much after colonization.[22] Moreover, the continued attachment to relationships and dependent bonds decreed illegitimate by the colonial state indicates their sustained relevance in shaping the experience and self-perception of colonial subjects into the early twentieth century.

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21 Nandini Chatterjee, "Reflections on Religious Difference and Permissive Inclusion in Mughal Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 29, no. 3 (2014): 396–415, at 402–3.

22 Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013): 1–16. For caste as a matrix of Brahmanical values, see Susan Bayly's classic *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Bayly identifies the 'royal man of prowess' as a crucial agent of the spread of Brahmanical caste culture in the subcontinent (26). For elite formation amongst Indian Muslims, see Arthur F. Buehler, "Trends of Ashrāfization in India," in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the Prophet*, ed. Kazuo Morimoto (London: Routledge, 2012): 231–46.

3. Degrees of Dependency in a Chiefly Household

3.1 The Kalsia Household and its Chroniclers

The house of Kalsia was a chiefly lineage in Panjab, that had been established in the mid-eighteenth century. Even in the scheme of late Mughal Panjabi polities, it was a relatively minor player, an ally and client of Ranjit Singh's, and variously a competitor, enemy, and ally of the Phulkian princes of Patiala, Jind, and Nabha. We know about the Kalsia princes, thanks not only to the colonial archive or the chronicles left by their contemporaries and peers, but also because of a history written by a client and member of their household, written in c.1906–7. This chronicle, entitled the *Tārīkh-i Riyāsat-i Kalsiyah* ('History of the Kalsia State'), is the work of a scribe who identifies himself as 'Inayatullah, and who I focus on at length below.[23] In addition, there is a three-volume history entitled *Ravī Prakāsh, ya'nī Tārīkh-i Khāndān-i Shāhī Riyāsat-i Kalsiyah* ('Luminous Sun, or the History of the Household of the State of Kalsia'), the work of a certain Sardar Bawa Bhag Singh, who appears to have been a member of the Punjab Civil Service.[24] Of this, I have only found volume two. Judging from the narrative, the text was written after Ravi Sher Singh, the last Kalsia ruler, assumed the title of 'Raja' in 1916.[25] In this essay, I largely confine myself to 'Inayatullah's text, which was written at least a decade earlier than that of Bawa Bhag Singh. It was also written explicitly from the perspective of an insider, and appears to provide a more extensive account of the chiefly household and its depen-

[23] 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh-i Riyāsat-i Kalsiyah* (henceforth *Tārīkh*). Haryana State Archives, Panchkula, "Other Records." There are three systems of pagination visible on this copy of the manuscript: one adopted by the copyist (presumably 'Inayatullah himself) in Persian numerals, and two later additions in Arabic numerals. I have used the stamped (as opposed to pencilled in) Arabic numerals, using 'v' (verso) and 'r' (recto) to indicate respectively the right and left leaves.

[24] Sardar Bawa Bhag Singh, *Ravī Prakāsh*, vol. II, f.460. Haryana State Archives, Panchkula, "Other Records." This manuscript has two systems of pagination, one in Persian numerals used by the copyist, and the other in Arabic numerals added by a later archivist. I have followed the former.

[25] Singh, *Ravī Prakāsh*, f.460.

dents. I have not yet, however, been able to establish whose orders, if anybody's, 'Inayatullah's account was written on.

Although in the following analysis I refer only minimally to the *Ravī Prakāsh*, one aspect of its treatment of the Kalsia lords is relevant to this discussion, as it helps locate their identity. For Bawa Bhag Singh, Kalsia's history was firmly part of the history of the Sikh community (*panth*). To this extent, the part of his narrative that I have been able to access, begins with a history of the Sikh gurus, and the formation of the Khalsa (the armed vanguard of the Sikh congregation). In 'Inayatullah's *Tārīkh*, by contrast, the Sikh identity of the Kalsia household is less prominent. His narrative likewise begins with Guru Nanak and his teachings, but is remarkably brief. In contrast to the chapter (*bāb*) devoted in the *Ravī Prakāsh* to the different Sikh gurus, 'Inayatullah's account thereof is wrapped up in a single page. Though not contradicting the broad contours of Sikh hagiography, it seems to serve simply as a prelude to the history of the Kalsia chiefs, which is traced back to their participation in and then leadership of the Karorasingha *miṣl* (warband).[26]

As Purnima Dhavan has shown, how Sikh pasts were to be narrated had been a contested matter since at least the eighteenth century, and was further complicated by colonization.[27] 'Inayatullah's account suggests that this contest was still unresolved in the early twentieth century. He portrays his patrons as brave and benevolent Sikhs, who nonetheless paid their respects to other creeds as well. For example, we are told that at the death of the Kalsia chieftain Jodh Singh (d.1817), a funerary monument (*samādhī*) was built for him at his father's village, where excerpts from the Guru Granth Sahib were regularly recited by religious functionaries (*bhā'ī*). Yet, Jodh Singh's will also left gifts to functionaries of other denominations, such as a certain Surat Brahman, who was left a small income for regularly reciting the *Mahabharata*, as well as a priest (*purohit*)

[26] 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.10r.

[27] See the introduction to Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699–1799* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); also Purnima Dhavan, "Redemptive Pasts and Imperiled Futures: The Writing of a Sikh History," *Sikh Formations* 3, no. 2 (2007): 111–24; Purnima Dhavan, "Reading the Texture of History and Memory in Early-Nineteenth-Century Punjab," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no. 3 (2009): 515–27.

called Gangajhu, who presumably oversaw Jodh's rites of passage, even though he was not himself a Sikh.[28] Matters are further complicated, as we shall see below, by the Kalsia chieftains' adherence to customs that were particular to agropastoral populations, suggesting that their identity as 'Jats', or men of the soil, was at least as significant to their identity as Sikhs. I will return to this point in the conclusion, when I consider how law and custom interacted in shaping the Kalsia household.

The founders of the Kalsia state were originally from the villages of Kalsia Khurd and Kalsia Kalan (see Map I), located on the west bank of the Beas River. The first Kalsia chieftain, Gurbaksh Singh, is said to have been the *caudharī* of these settlements. What precisely this entailed is open to some interpretation—however, we might assume that Gurbaksh was a lineage elder, who performed the function of an intermediary between the state and his kin. At the time that he began his political career, which appears to have been in roughly the 1720s, there was little Mughal presence left in Panjab. Instead, the region was in the shifting control of a number of Afghan, Rajput, and Sikh chieftains and their rival warbands, which were engaged in the twin processes of raiding and state-building. Not unlike tribal polities more generally, these states were fragile, as a result of the contradictory principles upon which their success depended, viz., the egalitarianism of the warband, and the hierarchy necessitated by governing ever-growing domains.[29] Such fissures appear to have affected the Kalsia polity from the earliest days of Gurbaksh's rise; the *Tārīkh* admits as much, and indeed, Gurbaksh's *hamrāh* (comrade; client; I return to the ambiguities of this term below) Karam Singh, with whom he appears initially to have shared command of the warband, seems to have gone his own way quite early on, settling at Bilaspur, away from Gurbaksh's court at Chhachhrauli.[30]

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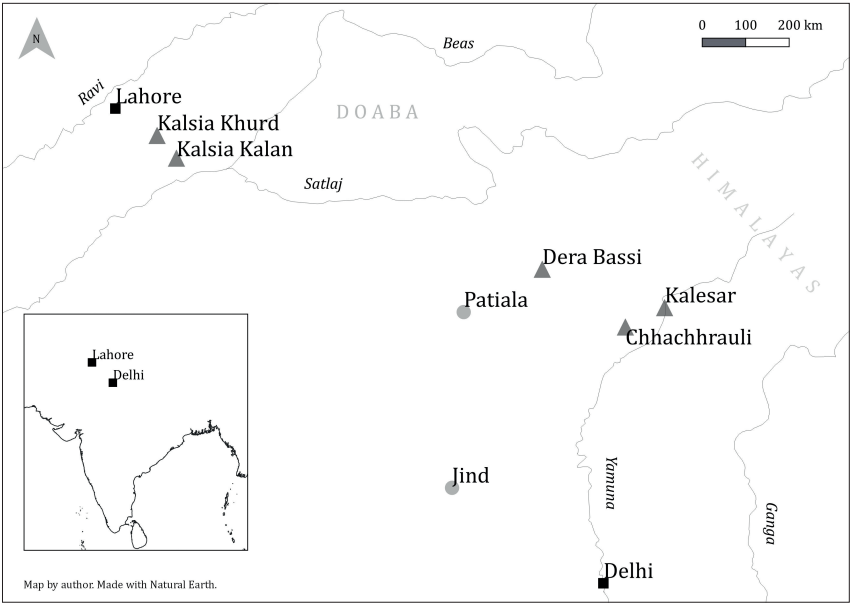
28 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh,* f.30v

29 The paradox of tribal polities—their strong internal bonds as well as their fragility and brittleness—has repeatedly attracted comment, at least since the 14th century thinker Ibn Khaldun. For a recent iteration, see Thomas J. Barfield, "Weapons of the Not So Weak in Afghanistan: Pashtun Agrarian Structure and Tribal Organization," in *Culture, Conflict, and Counterinsurgency*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Barry S. Zellen (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014): 99–103.

30 The details of Karam Singh's share in the conquered domains, measured in horsemen



Map I: Some of the bases of the bases of the Kalsia state (triangles)

The growth of a chieftaincy from a warband called for the gradual assertion of authority on the part of the Kalsia lords, such that their position developed from *primus inter pares* to one of clear primacy. This in turn entailed the cultivation of an extended household of kin, servants, and clients, who were clearly dependent upon them, and whose support provided a counterweight to the more contingent and egalitarian relationships that bound the 'comrades' of the warband together. It was out of these extended households that chiefly lineages grew. But how were households expanded? In the context of the highly militarized society of late Mughal Panjab, where raids and counterraids were an important modality of political consolidation, it is highly probable that the enslave-

(*savārān*), are provided, and appears to have been equal to that of Gurbaksh Singh. He is referred to throughout as 'Karam Singh Bilaspuria', and he appears to have forged ties with the Himalayan state of Bilaspur, although whether he was its client is not entirely clear. 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.12r.

ment of captives taken in war was one way of enlarging the warlord's household. Such enslavement is not always easily identifiable in the sources, let alone quantifiable. Nonetheless, we may read between the lines of the evidence to locate a few of the roles that the likely-enslaved fulfilled in the lordly household, which I come to below.

If waging war was an important means of enhancing one's pool of enslaved labour, it also had a symbolic significance that was central to cultivating other dependent relationships. Military successes were a demonstration of one's credibility as a patron. In a highly militarized society, where the work of agro-pastoralism was routinely combined with soldiering[31], the ability of a commander on the battlefield was correlated to the number of soldiers he could recruit. While the descent and lineage of a commander were therefore important, they did not eclipse his skill; and there were plenty of commanders of 'common' stock who could nonetheless draw large numbers of recruits. Not only were the chances of glory higher when fighting for a skilled patron, his ability to dispense generous patronage (*parvarish*) was also vouchsafed by his success. The prospect of patronage attracted not only military personnel, but all kinds of clients, including administrators, holy men and women, and artists of various sorts.[32] It also attracted subjects (*ri'āyā*), one of the most coveted resources in rural Panjab, where tax- or tribute-paying rural populations were swift to flee an oppressive ruler, and quick to resist a feeble one.[33]

This web of relations that constituted the core of the chiefly household, was likewise the apparatus through which conquered domains were governed. In the case of the various chieftains that carved out principalities for themselves in eighteenth-century Panjab, newly conquered territories were assigned to trusted dependents to settle on various

31 Cf. D.H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

32 For a study of the artistic patronage bestowed by Sikh chieftains, see B.N. Goswamy, *Painters at the Sikh Court* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1999).

33 See for example R.P. Rana's study of how cultivators in Rajasthan alternatingly migrated and rebelled in the face of what they deemed to be unreasonable levies imposed by Mughal imperial agents; R.P. Rana, *Rebels to Rulers: The Rise of Jat Power in Medieval India, c.1665–1735* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2006): 33–41, 143–66.

terms. Depending upon their rank and relationship to the chiefly household, some clients might be tribute-paying revenue farmers (*jāgīrdārān*), whose grants were intended to be temporary; others might be acknowledged as relatives (*rishtedārān*) and stakeholders (*pattidārān*), who held land on a permanent basis, while also paying tribute; and still others were granted land free of monetary obligations, but with the expectation of other kinds of service (*mo'āfīdārān*). Yet, even while using these separate categories, the *Tārīkh* suggests they were not quite watertight. For instance, 'Inayatullah notes that regardless of the category of dependent, all grants and prebends were gifts given by will of the chieftain (*apnī khushī se*), as charity (*khairat*), or patronage (*parvarish*) and as such, could be withdrawn at any time.[34]

Another indication of the mutability and permeability of categories of dependence is to be found in 'Inayatullah's use of the term *hamrāhān*. This term, which literally translates as 'followers of the same path', is applied collectively to the Kalsia retinue, encompassing all categories of kin, ally, client, and servant. It is likely, although difficult to establish, that this term had remained in use over the more than hundred years that separated Gurbaksh's first military adventures from 'Inayatullah's chronicle thereof. In that time, both the structure and extent of the Kalsia household had changed considerably. As the early separation of the aforementioned Karam Singh indicates, at least some of the first *hamrāhān* who were of more or less equal stature to Gurbaksh, had chosen to go their own way and carve out domains for themselves. Those who remained within the Kalsia household therefore, had at least nominally accepted the primacy of Gurbaksh and his heirs. By the time of 'Inayatullah's writing, enough stratification had crept into the Kalsia retinue that *hamrāhān* might be used interchangeably with *tābe'īn* (followers, dependents), which carries a far stronger connotation of subordination and hierarchy than does *hamrāh*. Notwithstanding this semantic shift, the terms on which members of the Kalsia household could remain within its fold was an enduring source of friction for the entire period under consideration here. Former comrades resentful of their subordi-

[34] 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh,* f.9r.

nate status looked for opportunities to extract themselves from their overlord's shadow, while others who had risen in the ranks of the Kalsia household tried to negotiate better terms for themselves within it, failing which, they sought a new patron. In turn, the Kalsia chiefs too appear to have sought to retrospectively alter these terms, as illustrated by the case of Man Singh, discussed in section 4 below.

3.2 Dependency and Status within the *Zenana*

For dynasties in the subcontinent, as in much of the world, the expansion of the court and political networks proceeded in tandem with—and indeed *through*—the expansion of the chieftain's female entourage. It is thus little surprise that one of the sites of Kalsia power where slaves were most easily found was the *zenana*. Here, as in the subcontinent more generally, a distinction was made between partners who were bondswomen, and those who came from high-ranking families. For example, Gurbaksh's son Jodh, under whose watch the Kalsia domains grew significantly, appears to have married two wives from prominent local families. In addition, he appears to have had at least one bondswoman (*kanīz*) concubine, who bore him a son named Karam Singh, who died as an infant (see Figure I).

The place in Jodh's household of Karam and his mother Sadan, whose name is prefixed with the respectful '*musammāt*' (lady), is difficult to assess. On the one hand, 'Inayatullah, whose account appears to have been composed roughly a century after the brief life of infant Karam, pointedly abstains from prefixing the latter's name with the honorific '*sardar*' (lord). On the other, it is interesting that Sadan and her son are mentioned in the *Tārīkh* at all. Too little is said about them to be able to explain their appearance in the archival record with any certainty. We might cautiously speculate, however, that this fleeting mention—and crucially, Sadan's inclusion in the family tree—indicates a special relationship with her master Jodh. Such relations were not unheard of; despite their enslaved status, favoured concubines and their offspring could acquire politically prominent roles in their master's domains, and

complicate the succession of the heir apparent.[35] That Karam and Sadan might have been similarly favoured is likewise suggested by 'Inayatullah's inclusion of the former in the three valiant sons (*aulād bahādur*) born to Jodh, and his mention that Sadan had apparently been awarded the village of Rasani for her expenses.[36] A more prosaic explanation is, however, also possible: that Sadan's example served as a documented precedent of the basic maintenance that dependents were 'customarily' entitled to, to counter the claims of ambitious kin.[37] Both mother and son likewise find fleeting mention in Bawa Bhag Singh's later *Ravī Prakāsh*, although by then Sadan, like all women, had been excluded from the family tree.[38]

How numerous the bondswomen in such small chiefly households were, is difficult to say. As mentioned previously, the dishonour associated with kinlessness often meant that the enslaved who rose to positions of prominence were provided elaborate genealogies, making their identification as bondspeople difficult. Yet, there are at least three other women who are mentioned as part of the immediate household of Kalsia, whose origins provoke the suspicion of bondage. The one upon whom I focus here is the woman respectfully referred to as 'Mai' (mother) Jassi, wife (*zaujah*, pl. *zaujāt*) of Gurbaksh and mother of Jodh Singh. The use of the term *zaujah* allows for some ambiguity. On the one hand, it is usually translated as 'wife', the feminine counterpart of *zauj*, consort, com-

35 This is precisely what happened in the principality of Alwar, not far from the Kalsia base at Chhachhrauli. When civil war broke out in Alwar state, the East India Company intervened to dispossess the claimant born of slave origins. Cf. James Skinner, *Taẕkirat al-umarā,* ff.97v–98v (Oriental Manuscripts, British Library, London); Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines": 155–56.

36 For Karam, 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh,* f.25r; for the mention of Sadan's subsistence, see the family tree (*shajrah-yi nasab*) at f.5r. As to the site of Rasani, I haven't been able to identify this with certainty. It could be Rasankheri in the present-day federal state of Punjab, situated close to the Kalsia base at Dera Bassi. It could also be Dasani in northern Haryana, some 10 kilometres from the Kalsia's court at Chhachhrauli.

37 This is, in all likelihood, at least partly the reason that Sadan and other 'unorthodox' kin remained important to scribes like 'Inayatullah—and indeed, a scribbled note near Sadan's name in the family tree mentions that her case had been brought up in the Kalsia chieftains' disputes with Man Singh, which is discussed in section 4 below. I have however not yet been able to find which side of the contest Sadan's example was used to argue, whether patron or client.

38 Bawa Bhag Singh, *Ravī Prakāsh*, f.447.

panion, or spouse. A more precise translation, closer to the etymology of *zauj*, might translate it simply as 'partner', or one of a couple.[39] The term has Arabic roots, and within most schools of Islamic law, the juridic definition of its verbal noun, *tazvīj,* appears to be similar to *nikāḥ*, implying a contractual and 'free' marriage, in which the bride was not bought.[40] Indeed, according to Wael Hallaq, the 'pairing off' implied by the word *tazvīj*, was generally deemed to be incompatible with enslavement, 'since the "owner" […] can never stand with that which is "owned".'[41]

Although these terms were carried via Arabic and Persian into South Asia, they were uncoupled from any exclusive association with Islam, and were used with reference to other creeds as well. Thus, an earlier Persian account from the nineteenth century describes the (prestigious) marriage of Gurbaksh's grandson Hira/Hari with the daughter of the Maharaja of Patiala as a *nikāḥ*, even though the Kalsia lords were Sikhs, not Muslims.[42] *Nikāḥ* in this context simply implied a respectable union with a 'free'—in the sense of maiden, as well as not-enslaved—woman of high birth. In the case of *zaujah*, the *Tārīkh* itself shows that it could be applied to wives or partners of various sorts, notwithstanding its most common interpretation within Islamic law. Sobha Singh (r.1817–1858) is thus said to have had one *zaujah-yi karewa*, or a wife taken in a heterodox union, as well as two other *zaujāt* taken freely from high-ranking families.[43] His own younger son, Man Singh, who was born of a *zaujah-yi karewa*, likewise took two wives, one in an orthodox union, and the other in *karewa.*[44]

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39 Cf. Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met With in Persian Literature* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1892), and Sulayman Hayyim, *New Persian-English Dictionary, Complete and Modern, Designed to Give the English Meanings of Over 50,000 Words, Terms, Idioms, and Proverbs in the Persian Language, As Well As the Transliteration of the Words in English Characters. Together With a Sufficient Treatment of All the Grammatical Features of the Persian Language* (Teheran, Librairie-imprimerie Béroukhim, 1934–1936).

40 Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharī'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 273.

41 Idem.

42 James Skinner, *Tazkirat al-umarā*, f.225v. Skinner names Jodh's son 'Hira', while 'Inayatullah, scribe of Kalsia, names him 'Hari'. Both are recognizable names, although the latter is more Sanskritised, and might have been adopted later in an attempt by the Kalsia household to distance itself from its husbanding origins.

43 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.38v. Karewa is discussed below.

44 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.46v.

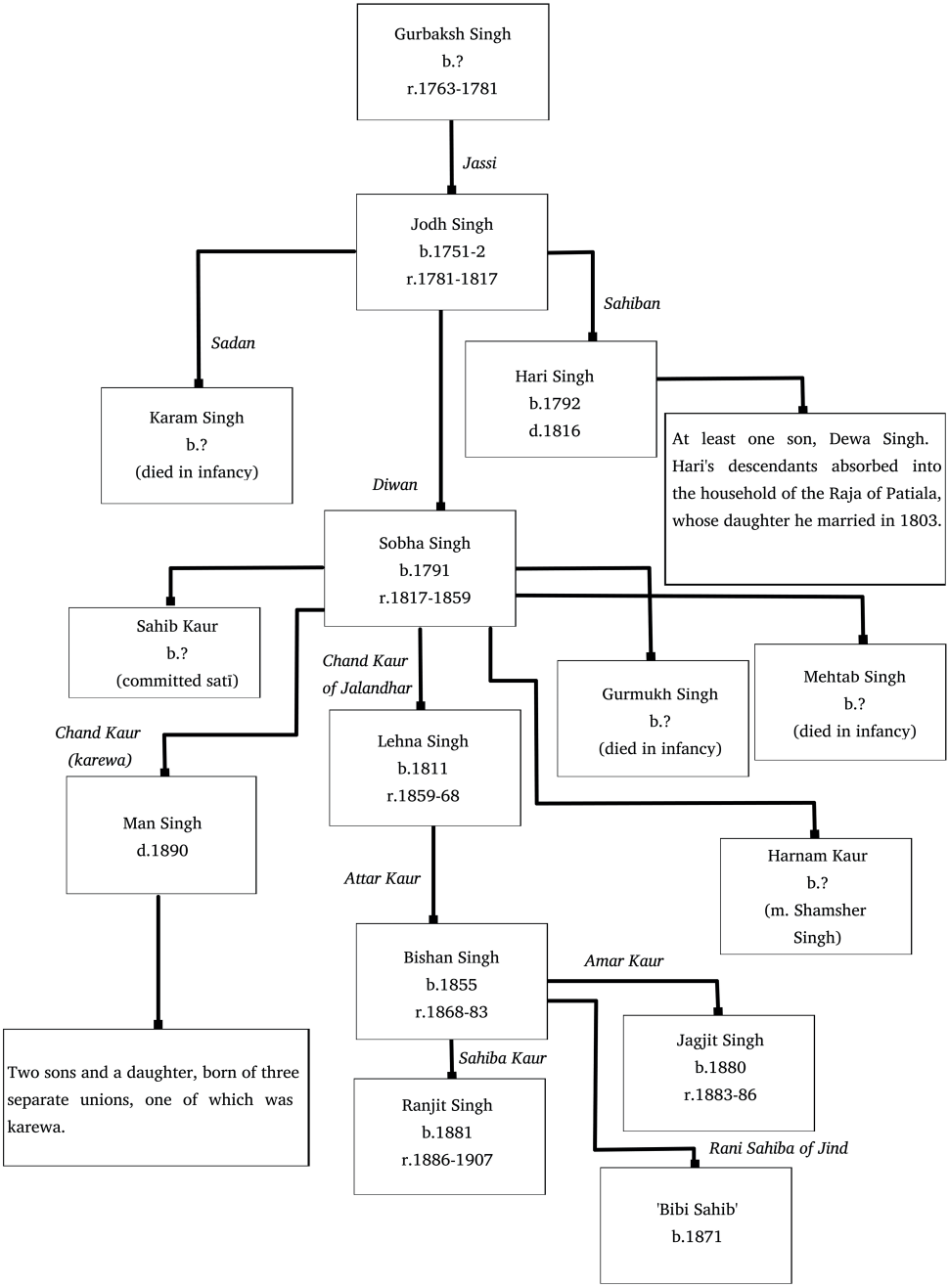

Figure I: The Kalsia Family Tree (adapted from the *Tārīkh-i Kalsiyah*)

In view of his acknowledgment of these other differences, 'Inayatullah's discrete silence about Jassi's origins seems deliberate and pointed.[45] The only reference to her that I have come across, is in an episode early in the narration, where she intercedes on behalf of an ascetic (*faqir*), whose hermitage had been raided by her husband and his comrades. As part of the plunder, the men appear to have carried away a mare (*asb-mādah*), whose return the *faqir* had come to request. After he was initially turned down by Gurbaksh's *hamrāh* Karam Singh, Mai Jassi intervened, and in return, the *faqir* is said to have blessed her, and prophesised the birth of a brave and noble son.[46] While her moral stature is thus established, there is no information about her lineage. She is strikingly absent from the family tree included in the chronicle, in contrast both to Sadan, and to her son's other wives, whose lineages are explicitly mentioned. And, while the site and nature of her progeny's unions (including some heterodox partnerships) is specified in the text, there is no explicit mention of the precise nature of her relationship to Gurbaksh.

According to Lepel Griffin, a colonial officer with an interest in and knowledge of Panjabi history, contemporaries too had wondered about Jassi's precise status. There were rumours that she had been a widow who had (been) entered into a heterodox union known as *cādar ḍālnā* (literally, 'to place a veil') with Gurbaksh. Others whispered that even this minimal ritual had not been performed, that Jassi was *not even* Gurbaksh's slave, and that Jodh, as the offspring of an entirely unconsecrated union, was 'illegitimate'.[47] While illegitimacy is perhaps too schematic a category, the gradations of dishonour are worth emphasising: it was deemed incomparably better to be the child of a slave and her master, than to be the child of a woman belonging to a household other than that of the father. In a succession dispute involving the Sikh Jat state of Radaur, for example, the colonial state was counselled by their Sikh advisors to choose the candidate born of a slave rather than of a dishonourable relationship, as the former's mother 'was at least the

45 She is also, as far as I can tell, entirely absent from Bawa Bhag Singh's account.

46 'Tere farzand jodh ya'nī bahādur paida hogā.' Tārīkh, f.11r.

47 Lepel Henry Griffin, *The Law of Inheritance to Chiefships as Observed by the Sikhs Previous to the Annexation of the Panjab* (Lahore: Punjab Print Co, 1869): 25.

property of her master.'[48] In this instance, dishonour is associated not with having a relationship with a slave, but with the slave of another.

Whether Jassi was brought into Gurbaksh's household with no ceremony, or through a heterodox but recognised union, or whether her union with him was entirely orthodox, her position originally was likely to have been that of a dependent, if not kinless spouse, even though the use of the honorific '*mā'ī*' suggests that she did not remain so. Perhaps 'Inayatullah wanted to avoid the dishonour to his patrons that conceding that their celebrated hero, Jodh Singh, was the child of a heterodox *cādar ḍālnā* marriage—or worse still, *no* union whatsoever—might bring. And, if the rumours Griffin reported were true, and Jassi's relationship to Gurbaksh had not been consecrated at all, then an admission to this effect would risk not only the reputation of the Kalsia warlords, but whatever domains they had managed to hold on to under colonial rule. As we shall see below, narrowing the definition of legitimate unions and succession was one of the methods that the colonial state resorted to, in order to confiscate the territories of their princely clients and allies.

Besides the difficulties of identifying enslavement, Jassi's case is interesting as a point of entry into the complex terminology of conjugal relations within the *zenana*. The neat binaries that I have used above to distinguish between marriages of different statuses—free and unfree, orthodox and heterodox—in fact conceal a wealth of difference, as the uncertain limits of who could be considered a *zaujah* already suggests. Take another example—that of the aforementioned case of *cādar ḍālnā*. In colonial administrative parlance, this term and its synonym *karewa* were often translated as 'widow remarriage'. Specifically, they were applied to the practice shared by a cross-section of non-elite rural populations, whereby a man's death would be followed by the swift remarriage of his widow within the family. This was in stark contrast to the 'respectable' (*sharīf*) norm, whereby a widow would observe abstinence until her death, thereby honouring the memory of her dead husband. Such a widow would nominally be exempt from the productive process, and the cost of her maintenance would be borne by the family.

[48] Ibid.: 56.

In fact, however, *cādar ḍālnā* was used for a range of unions that differed from the respectable norm of taking a 'free' bride from a higher-ranking family.[49] Such unions were not celebrated; at most, they were acknowledged by a few witnesses, and consecrated with the groom draping a veil (*oṛhnī*, *cādar*) over his bride's head.[50] Women thus inducted into a household might come from a variety of backgrounds, as captives of war, the daughters, sisters, or widows of junior relatives, servants, or clients. They could also be women of high-ranking, but destitute families, who were compelled to either sell their womenfolk, or contract marriages for them with men of 'common' stock.[51] In this case, the woman's family would be loath to acknowledge the union, even though the presence of such high-status, if unwed, companions in the *zenana* brought the man respect amongst his peers and subordinates. Such women were thus alienated from their own kin, even as the honour they brought to the *zenana* was dependent upon the continued memory of their birth and status. While they would rank under those women who were married 'respectably', their position was hardly akin to that of an anonymous bondswoman (*kanīz*).[52] Yet, as Sadan's example suggests, even the humble *kanīz* could find herself occupying a position of some consequence, by virtue of her intimacy with her master and spouse.

Somewhat akin to the term *hamrāhān* (comrades/followers of the same path), the terms *cādar ḍālnā* and *karewa* appear to have undergone a change over the course of the nineteenth century. Amongst 'common' landholding communities, these referred to the practice of widow remarriage, which was first and foremost a response to the need for labour.

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49 W.E. Purser and H.C. Fanshawe, *Report on the Revised Land Revenue Settlement of the Rohtak District in the Hissar Division of the Punjab* (Lahore: W. Ball, 1880): 19–20. For a union to be honourable for the bride's family, not only should there be no money accepted for her, but the groom's family should not be of significantly lower status. How much lower was acceptable was, once again, instinctively understood and highly contextual. Typically, though, a chieftain would not consider marrying his daughter into the family of the village cobbler, but would seek out either another ruling family of perhaps marginally less noble a lineage, or the family of a courtier or kinsman.

50 Cf. James Skinner, *Tashrīḥ al-aqvām,* c.1823. Library of Congress, Washington, Lessing J. Roswald Collection, f.216 and Purser and Fanshawe, Report: 64–65.

51 James Skinner, *Tashrīḥ*, f.216.

52 See in this regard also the comments about women in Rajput courts in Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines": 143–46.

Widows were remarried to ensure that their share in their deceased husband's land was not alienated. Were a widow married outside the immediate household, she relinquished her claim to her first husband's wealth; in some cases, the loss of her (re)productive labour was even financially compensated.[53] But for those rural families who, like the Kalsia lineage, grew wealthier, *cādar ḍālnā* did not carry the same significance. The need to remarry widows was no longer acute; they could be supported without having to earn their subsistence, and would in all likelihood even be explicitly forbidden from engaging in anything approaching hard manual labour. And yet, heterodox unions continued. In part, this may have been a way to bridge the gap between economic and social status, the former of which tended to rise more swiftly than the latter. For upwardly mobile men of humble roots, to acquire brides in all kinds of ways, to increase the size of the *zenana* might have been the first strategic step towards higher status. In this context, it was the size of the *zenana* as much as the identity of its women that was a sign of chiefly prestige. But such unions were not purely functional; and as 'Inayatullah's account indicates, at least this one 'peasant' custom continued to be practiced, and though not celebrated, nor does it appear unambiguously to have been a source of shame.

If the examples of Jassi and Sadan show that heterodox unions did not preclude women from possessing rank and status, an orthodox, 'free' union—one in which she was given (as opposed to being sold) to a noble but subordinate family—was no guarantee of freedom. Indeed, the burden of respectability weighed heavily on female partners, especially those of higher status, who symbolised the honour ('*izzat*) of their marital and natal families alike. The case of Sahib Kaur, one of Jodh Singh's granddaughters, is illustrative of this seeming paradox. Sahib was born to Jodh Singh's elder son Sobha Singh, and his first wife, a Musammat Chand Kaur, the daughter of a Sikh notable. Chand and Sobha's marriage is described as a *shādī*, that is, a 'free' union. Sahib was therefore herself a woman of high status, and was suitably married off into a high-ranking

[53] T. Gordon Walker, *Final Report on the Revision of Settlement of the Ludhiana District in the Punjab* (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press, 1884): 296.

family from the village of Attari. The marriage was both childless and short-lived; and when Sahib's husband died, she appears to have burnt herself on his pyre in an act of *satī*.[54]

Sahib's is the only case of *satī* in the Kalsia chronicle that I have come across, and there is no evidence that the Kalsia household itself expected its womenfolk, whether free or unfree, to burn themselves on their husbands' pyres. Moreover, as Ramya Sreenivasan has shown, in the Rajput polities to the south-west, it was slave women who disproportionately became *satīs*, as a way to counter the loss of status and authority that their master's death entailed, as well as to repay the 'debt' of their provision.[55] Since Sahib was neither a slave, nor from a family that practiced *satī*, what explains her behaviour? Was she trying to erase the dishonour of her childlessness, of being, as Anjum Alvi has put it, an 'incomplete woman'?[56] This seems the likeliest, although not the only, explanation.[57] We know of at least one other woman, whose untimely death is explicitly explained in terms of failure to produce an heir. This was the wife of Bishan Singh (r.1869–1883), who was himself the nephew of Sahib Kaur. As chief of Kalsia, he married the daughter of the Maharaja of Jind, identified as Rani Sahiba ('princess'), to whom a daughter was born in 1872. So horrified was the Rani at having failed to produce a male heir, that she immediately died of (self-)reproach (*bīghār ho kar mar ga'ī*).[58] If this shame was, in part, because of the burden that the colonial state's narrowed definition of a legal heir had placed upon noble wives, it was also likely expressive of the widespread preference for male offspring in Panjab.[59]The examples of the partners and mothers considered so far demonstrate that there was no easy correspondence between the status of a marriage and the status and autonomy of a wife. This complexity coloured the position of her offspring, too. Where in

54 In 'Inayatullah's words, 'she also became his companion *satī*' (*vah bhī unkī hamrāh satī hu'ī*). *Tārīkh*, f.38v.
55 Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines": 152.
56 Alvi, "The Category of the Person in Rural Punjab": 60.
57 For *satī* as protest, see Chatterjee, "Monastic Governmentality": 67.
58 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.50v.
59 Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 11.

Muslim households, *khānzādagān*—the children born of unions between masters and slave or servant women—were, legally speaking, both provided for by their father's households, and were formally free, sons born of heterodox unions amongst families of husbanding (Jat) origin were considered legitimate heirs.[60] What share they were entitled to, however, could be disputed, particularly if there were sons of more respectable unions as well. As the Kalsia household grappled with the question of how to support its retinue with a declining income, the always delicate question of what the entitlements of a chieftain's other children were became a cause of dispute. Some of these will be considered in section 4.

3.3 'Inayatullah and his Patrons

Within the Kalsia chieftaincy, another example of a trusted and upwardly mobile client is provided by 'Inayatullah, the scribe and author of the *Tārīkh*, who prefixed his name with '*bandah*' (bondsman, servant). 'Inayatullah claimed to have been in service of the Kalsia lords for three generations, describing himself as a 'salt-eater' (*namak-khvār*) of the lineage, thereby adopting a common metaphor for service.[61] His familial affiliation with the principality appears to have begun under his father, Sheikh Qudratullah and his uncle, Sheikh Ghulam Maji al-Daulah. Like Mai Jassi, there is no note of when or how either of these men came into the service of Kalsia. 'Inayatullah only mentions that he began working as a *taḥṣīldār*, a revenue collector, during the tenure of Gurbaksh's grandson, Sobha Singh (r.1817–1858). This office seems to have been akin to a family patrimony (although whether it was officially such, is not clear), as 'Inayatullah and his kin appear to have served in the same positions in the core territories of the Kalsia chieftains, viz. Chhachhrauli and Dera Bassi (see Map I). Each of these men is identified with reference to 'Inayatullah's father, which might indicate that it was he—Sheikh

60 Purser and Fanshawe, *Report*: 64.
61 Eaton, "Malik Ambar": 113–14.

Qudratullah—who had first forged a close relationship with the Kalsia household.[62]

Qudratullah was clearly well-trusted by his masters, for he is said to have supervised a number of scribes (*munshīs*) during Sobha Singh's reign.[63] It is possible that he came into his master's household as a slave; in such a case, however, 'Inayatullah, as the son of a slave, would in all likelihood have been no more than a client of the administration.[64] His usage of the term '*bandah*' may have thus been a reference to a familial history of enslavement; equally, it might simply have been a form of politeness, whereby 'Inayatullah's subordination to the Kalsia house is emphasised.[65] The same might be said of the use of the term *namak-khvār*, which referenced the ethical obligations of service that eating another's salt created to underscore the servant or client's debt to the patron. In practice though, this did not universally translate to acute dependency. As an illustration, it was common for soldiers, for instance, to refer to their military commanders as the *namak-parvar* (lit., 'they who provide for salt'), but this did not mean that they felt themselves bound

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62 For instance, in a table identifying key members of the administration, 'Inayatullah mentions himself as Qudratullah's son, and yet another uncle, Sheikh Ishtaq Ahmed, who was *taḥṣīldār* of Dera Bassi. 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh,* f.44v.

63 '*Jinke bā-taḥat aur bhī munshī the',* or 'under whose supervision there were other *munshīs* too'. 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh,* f.39r.

64 In *sharī'a*, which as mentioned above, was not applied or appealed to solely by Muslims, there appears to be some ambiguity about the inheritance of slave status of non-kin (as distinct from, say, the children of a slave women and her master, who would simply be clients of the master). Hallaq notes that to free a slave was regarded as an act of piety and penance for Muslims; Hallaq, *Sharī'a*: 86, 235. According to the twelfth-century jurist Ibn Rushd, if a slave were to die and the names of their children be in the contract of enslavement, there was disagreement amongst legal scholars about whether or not those children could be considered free, or whether they had to purchase their manumission. Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*, vol. 2, Great Books of Islamic Civilisation (Doha; Reading: Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization; Garnet Publishing, 2000): 464–65.

65 *Bandah* was also used for disciples (*celā*) of spiritual preceptors; but if this were 'Inayatullah's intended meaning, it is odd that he doesn't mention the name of his *guru*. On the blurry boundaries between 'slave' and 'disciple', see William R. Pinch, "The Slave Guru. Masters, Commanders, and Disciples in Early Modern South Asia," in *The Guru in South Asia*, ed. Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame (London: Routledge, 2012): 64–79.

to the same commander for life, as the currency of the term *namak-fasād* (lit., 'betrayal of salt') indicates.[66]

Whatever 'Inayatullah's precise status at the beginning of his career, his claims to have advanced in the ranks of the administration were certainly not empty, although being the son of a trusted advisor, this is perhaps not entirely surprising. His rise was also the result of fortuitous timing; when Sardar Bishan Singh died in 1883, leaving only two infant sons to ascend the throne, the British 'Political Agent' who kept an eye on the princes of Panjab, appointed a Council of Regency, of which 'Inayatullah was made a member. The composition of the Council changed over time, but does not appear to have had more than three members, of whom at least two were scribes (*munshī*).[67] The Council was responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the state. 'Inayatullah's tasks were diverse, from finding suitable tutors for the young princes, to sorting out its finances and paying off debts, to serving as a messenger to neighbouring states such as Jind and Nahan. He seems to have been trusted by the colonial state, too, such that by 1893 he had been appointed *nāẓim* (chief officer) of Kalsia.[68]

As Barbara Ramusack has noted, British-appointed Councils of Regency were often used to limit the power of the *zenana* in the administration of Indian states.[69] As appointees of the colonial government, their decisions were not infrequently in service of British interests and against the explicit wishes of the princely household. This held true in the case of Kalsia as well; a number of 'improvements' were ushered into the administration on the Council's watch. For instance, the organization of excise duties on intoxicants such as opium and alcohol was transferred to the British government, and a plan was put in place to regulate

66 Self-effacement on behalf of the speaker was a common form of politeness in Persianized vernaculars; to borrow an example from Dhanesh Jain, describing one's house as a *gharīb-khānah* (lit., 'poor abode') and that of one's addressee as a *daulat-khānah* (lit. 'palace'), 'even if the reality is just the opposite.' Dhanesh K. Jain, "Verbalization of Respect in Hindi," *Anthropological Linguistics* 11, no. 3 (1969): 79–97, at 84.

67 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, ff.56r–57v.

68 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.56r.

69 Barbara N. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 108–10.

the forest tracts held by Kalsia in the Himalayan submontane.[70] The education of the young princes—often a point of contention between the *zenana* and the British state—was also experimented with, although ultimately Bishan Singh's widow, having already lost one infant son to illness, succeeded in keeping her remaining son and titular prince Ranjit Singh under her watch at Chhachhrauli.[71]

Though as a member of the Council of Regency, 'Inayatullah certainly facilitated these decisions, it also seems that he found it quite challenging to do the bidding of two masters, to whom his bonds were of very different kinds. There is a certain caginess palpable in his account, as well as sorrow at the decline of the Kalsia household, and a nostalgia for the glory days of Jodh and Sobha Singh. He notes, for example, that while servants of state were not paid much under Sobha Singh, they were 'enchanted by Sardar [Sobha] Sahib's kindness'; indeed, Sobha's reign 'from beginning to end, is a string of celebrated statesmen'.[72] Grave trouble began with the death of Sobha's grandson Bishan Singh at age twenty-nine. Until then, 'whatever trivial worries and difficulties there were at the time were easily borne.'[73] Bishan's death, however, upset the stability of the state, even as it effectively elevated 'Inayatullah to a more prominent rank and position than he had enjoyed before. Notwithstanding this promotion, he betrays a real sense of calamity at how dire affairs were at the time. Bishan's 'munificence' (*faiz-bakshī*) had left no more than twenty rupees in the state treasury, along with some Rs. 350,000 worth of promissory notes, and a large amount of debt.[74]

At times, 'Inayatullah is quite forthright in his criticisms of the Kalsia rulers. He deemed it regrettable, for instance, that Jodh Singh had not

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70 C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. 6 (Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1931): 65–66; 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.54r.

71 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, ff.60v–r.

72 'Sab ko janāb sardār sāḥib ki mahrabānī par nāz thā […] unki 'ahd ibtadā'i se ākhir jo mashūr ahl-e-kārān kā guẕārah hai.' 'Inayatullah, Tārīkh, f.39v.

73 'Jo tafakkurāt aur mushkilāt us-vaqt dar pesh āy'ī vah nāqābil bardāsht thī'. 'Inayatullah, Tārīkh, f.52r.

74 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh,* f.52r.

been quicker to stake and defend his claims to the entirety of the Kalsia domains conquered by himself and his father; as a result, several lands passed into the permanent possession of some of the state's more opportunistic clients.[75] 'Inayatullah likewise regreted that Lehna Singh, Jodh's grandson, had not settled the inheritance dispute with his half-brother Man Singh in court, leaving a potential loophole for other extended kin to demand financial support from the Kalsia state.[76] Criticism is also levelled implicitly, by comparing past rulers to present ones. We are told, for example, that Sobha Singh 'did not keep new servants' (*jadīd naukar nah rakhte the*); were he to take on a new retainer, he 'did not lavish favour' upon them (*muvaffaq nah farmāte*).[77] This would seem to be a thinly-veiled critique of Sardar Bishan Singh, for whom 'Inayatullah's affection is tempered by a slight exasperation that he had no appetite for governing, and carelessly deputed all affairs of state to various servants, regardless of the depth and vintage of their relationship to the state.[78] Similarly, he rues Bishan's 'habits and ways' (*isti'māl o funūn*) which led to the deterioration of his health and premature death, even as he maintains a discreet silence about what these habits were.[79]

Despite his own rank and influence growing with his appointment to the Council of Regency, some of 'Inayatullah's greatest regrets seem to be bound up with that body. Since Sardar Lehna Singh's death in 1869, Kalsia had repeatedly been governed by this Council (1869–1873; 1883–1886; 1886–1907), although its composition had varied. Different parties vied with each other to have their chosen candidate appointed to its ranks. In the 1870s, when Sardar Bishan was still a teenager, his prospective father-in-law, the aforementioned Maharaja of Jind, suc-

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75 'Afsos ke us-vaqt is mauqe-yi aval par nah to sardār sāḥib Jodh Singh ne miṣl-i dīgar rājgān ibtadā'ī se apnā irādā-yi shamūlīyat ẓāhir kīyā, nah ba'd mein uski pā-bandī hu'i.' 'Inayatullah, Tārīkh, ff.24r–25v.

76 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.39v.

77 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.39v.

78 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.42r provides an overview of the appointments made by Bishan Singh. At least one of these individuals—Munshi Lal Bahadur, who would later be made the head of the Council of Regency—was a recent arrival from Awadh. Charles Francis Massy, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Delhi, Jalandhar, Peshawar, and Derajat Divisions of the Punjab* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1890): 85.

79 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.43r.

ceeded in convincing the British to have various of his trusted servants appointed to its ranks.[80] However, the Maharaja's habit of frequently shuffling his advisors' posts, presumably to prevent them from growing too influential at any site, caused havoc, as did the disagreements and quarrels between the teenage Bishan, his mother, and his regents. 'The pace at which servants were transferred, and some of the changes in the affairs of the administration because of the Rani [Queen Mother's] agents, disrupted the course of work.'[81]

'Inayatullah's tactful criticism of the Council also seems to extend to officers of the British government who supervised it, and to the plans that it enforced. His portrayal of Col. Currie, the Commissioner of Delhi, who kept an eye on the Kalsia administration, seems to hint at officiousness: he would 'come to Chhachhrauli on rounds and issue orders and hold court, [all of which] will be described at their proper place.'[82] He then immediately emphasises Currie's helpfulness when Bishan Singh's son Jagjit was unwell: 'his kindness on this occasion rendered everything simple.'[83] Elsewhere, 'Inayatullah articulates polite scepticism regarding 'improvements' introduced by the colonial state. We are told, for example, that tracts of forest land in the Himalayan foothills held by Kalsia were surveyed under British orders, the findings compiled by 'Inayatullah himself in a report. Policies for the 'improvement' of the forest, however, which entailed both its preservation and regulated exploitation for fodder and wood, were shaped by one of the fresh crop of 'Foresters' who had graduated from the newly-built Forestry School at Dehra Dun (est.1878).[84] These policies were introduced elsewhere in the Himalayan foothills, too. Their costs were born by local chieftains, and the restrictions they introduced on grazing and fodder collection

80 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, ff.48r–49v.

81 'Kis qadr tabdīl-i mulāzamān o cand umurāt-i riyāsat mein ikhlāf-i rānī ki vajah se ijrā'ī-yi kām mein farq āyā.' 'Inayatullah, Tārīkh, f.49v.

82 'Janāb ṣāḥib Commissioner bhallah Chhachhrauli mein tashrīf lākar daureh farmākar mutā'liq intiẓām-i ḥukum o badā'yat farmāte the, jiskā apne-apne mauqe par ẕikr kiyā javegā.' 'Inayatullah, Tārīkh, ff.53r–54v.

83 'Is mauqe par mahrabāni-yi janāb karnīl Currie ṣāḥib bhallah Commissioner se sab āsān ho gayā'. 'Inayatullah, Tārīkh, f.54v.

84 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.54r.

were unpopular amongst local inhabitants, who on occasion took to arson to express their displeasure.[85] As such, 'Inayatullah noted, whatever income the Kalsia state earned from grazing dues and levies on fodder collection, was exceeded by the costs of managing the forest, and the damage inflicted by fires, whether deliberate or otherwise. 'Of course', he carefully concluded, 'the yields and revenue from the forest are improving.'[86]

3.4 Servitude and Clientelage in the Chiefly Administration

From the point of view of this paper, 'Inayatullah's loyalty to his chiefly patrons despite the considerable decline of their political star is interesting for the complexity of 'dependency' that it suggests. As a man with a valuable set of skills, he could have found work at another court, or—more lucratively—directly in colonial service. Certainly, the information order of colonial India did gradually change from the Mughal period, such that the range of competencies expected of the Mughal *munshī* were different from those expected of the colonial scribe. Nevertheless, the colonial state remained dependent upon informants conversant in local languages, and able to write in what was coming to be known as 'Urdu' (a hybrid of Persian and spoken vernaculars).[87] As Hayden Bellenoit observes, it was through the scribal services provided by diglossic informants and administrators that the colonial state was able to enhance its revenue collections from cultivated land.[88]

The pay commanded by these men was considerable, even at the lower end of the scale, while those who began at middling positions such

85 Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 163.

86 'Albattah bīṛ ki ab paidawār o āmdanī ru bah taraqqī hai'. 'Inayatullah, Tārīkh, f.54r.

87 See in this connection C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 284–93. More recently, see Hayden Bellenoit, *The Formation of the Colonial State in India: Scribes, Paper and Taxes, 1760–1860* (London: Routledge, 2017).

88 Hayden Bellenoit, "Between Qanungos and Clerks: The Cultural and Service Worlds of Hindustan's Pensmen, c. 1750–1850," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (2014): 872–910, at 896–98.

as revenue collectors (*taḥṣīldār*, the post with which ʻInayatullah appears to have commenced his service) were handsomely paid.[89] As a concrete illustration, according to a colonial report from 1888, *taḥṣīldārs* or revenue collectors in Panjab were paid between Rs. 150–250 per month.[90] According to ʻInayatullah, however, his salary as a *taḥṣīldār* of Kalsia was Rs. 50 per month.[91] On appointment to the Regency Council, he was—inexplicably—paid a mere Rs. 15 per month, although this was in all likelihood in addition to his *taḥṣīldār's* salary. This was then raised to Rs. 100 per month, and he subsequently mentions that by the 1890s, when he was effectively appointed first minister of state (*nāẓim*), he was paid Rs. 300 per month.[92] In other words, after some forty years of service, he was being paid at best double of what a *taḥṣīldār* directly in British service might command, even though his responsibilities far exceeded those of a revenue collector.

From a purely materialist perspective, ʻInayatullah's choice to remain in service with a minor principality that had long been eclipsed in might by the colonial state might be viewed as selfless loyalty. This is not entirely anachronistic; certainly, there were others described as 'dependents' of the Kalsia state who chose to sever their bonds with their former patrons, for material gain, as we shall see below. Yet, I would suggest that rather than selflessness, ʻInayatullah's choice might better be understood as an *assertion* of his self, of which service in the Kalsia administration was an inextricable part. To better appreciate this point, it is worth dwelling upon the role of the scribal servant in northern India in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have noted, the connotations of *munshī*, the term commonly translated as 'scribe', evolved with time.[93] The category

89 Ibid.: 892–95.

90 National Archives of India (henceforth NAI). Digitized Public Records/Home, 39–45: Reorganization of Tehsildars in the Madras Presidency, 1888 [consulted 14 May 2022].

91 ʻInayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.49r.

92 ʻInayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.56r.

93 Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," in *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011): 311–38, at 312.

was also immensely varied, as the increasing dissemination of Persian in early modern northern India meant that a knowledge of the skills necessary to be a scribe were being learnt across many social strata.[94] Some *munshīs* were much more than record-keepers for their patrons, as the example of the seventeenth-century Chandar Bhan Brahman demonstrates.[95] Rather, they engaged in a wide range of literary activities, including epistolary correspondence, poetry, and writing administrative and linguistic manuals that circulated widely, and shaped the use of Persian in a variety of literary and bureaucratic contexts.[96] By virtue of their accomplishments, such men were considered ornaments to any court that they served, and the high esteem in which they were held was evidenced by the number of different patrons and high-placed friends that they cultivated.

Of course, not all courts were of the same stature as that of the Mughals, or even of the several successor states known for their literary culture and patronage.[97] And, although knowledge of and immersion in sophisticated Persian were by no means the preserve of such royal centres, having percolated right down to the grassroots, the category of scribe was nonetheless very mixed. It included a range of functions, from those who served as village accountants (*paṭvārī*) and registrars (*qānūngo*), all the way up to those whose place was at the imperial or other princely court, such as the aforementioned Chandar Bhan, or the famed Abul Fazl.[98] Each of these functions, even the most 'lowly', provided social groups with more than simply a livelihood; rather it provided them a connection to political power, honour, and status. Scribal service at chiefly courts became a patrimony of sorts, concentrated in

94 Ibid.: 320.

95 Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire. Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian Secretary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

96 A range of practical and esoteric skills that Kinra describes as 'mystical civility'. Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*: 61 and *passim*.

97 See for example, Kevin L. Schwartz, "The Curious Case of Carnatic: The Last Nawab of Arcot (d. 1855) and Persian Literary Culture," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 53, no. 4 (2016): 533–60; Madhu Trivedi, *The Making of the Awadh Culture* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2010).

98 For an overview of the lower-ranking scribal posts, see Bellenoit, "Between Qanungos and Clerks."

the hands of certain families, around whom distinct service communities crystallized.[99] As mentioned above, this seems also to have held true of 'Inayatullah and his family, albeit their roots in scribal service at Kalsia were relatively shallow.

As groups of relatively high status, the boundaries of scribal communities were closely policed, but they were not entirely watertight.[100] Moreover, the continued dissemination of Persian in the medieval and early modern periods meant that there was an ever-larger pool of candidates for administrative posts. Ruling houses could use this competition to their advantage; as Sunil Kumar has shown in the context of the fourteenth century, inducting diglossic administrators from marginal communities into the administration provided the sultans of Delhi with a means of creating '*bandagān*-like creatures', who felt a comparable degree of obligation to their patrons as did slaves to their masters.[101] Typically, surges in the growth of the scribal and broadly administrative class followed upon conquests and the advancement of the fiscal frontiers of states. They also coincided with periods of political fragmentation/proliferation, such as the eighteenth century in northern India. In Panjab, the process of political fragmentation and state formation that marked the late Mughal period was particularly acute. The Kalsia chieftains were only one of a far larger group of political entrepreneurs that had succeeded in carving out a principality for themselves during the eighteenth century. While part of the corresponding need for administrative personnel was likely met by erstwhile clients of the Mughal court, the integration of 'marginal' communities into the chiefly administration, whether through formal enslavement or clientelage, probably accounted for a greater share.

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99 For Bengal, see Kumkum Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites"; for the Doab, Bellenoit, *The Formation of the Colonial State in India*: chapter 2.

100 As Kumkum Chatterjee has shown in the case of Bengal, although scribal communities identified as 'Kayasthas' were concerned with the preservation of their high ritual status within the paradigm of Brahmanism, they nonetheless could on occasion accommodate outsiders within their ranks as well. Kumkum Chatterjee, "Scribal Elites": 466–67.

101 Kumar, "Bandagi and Naukari": 81–82.

The social and political capital that accrued through royal service to such '*arrivistes'* was described, with a mixture of disdain and envy, by a nineteenth-century observer named James Skinner. Himself the son of a heterodox—specifically, mixed-race—union, and the client of various Indian principalities and the colonial state, Skinner expressed somewhat disingenuous horror at the infiltration of elite service groups by those of 'low' birth. Writing of the Khatri community, for example, from which scribes in Panjab were often drawn, he noted that besides true Khatris, who were men of high birth, there was a large pool of fraudulent, 'low-born' Khatris to be found at northern Indian courts. These men, he wrote, specialised in 'trickery' (*chhal-chhidrī*), which he equates with an artfulness and sheen of learning (*dānishvarī*).[102] It was by virtue of their knowledge of Persian, and their general cunning that they acquired the favour of kings and chieftains, who in turn expressed their gratitude by way of grants of land. In this respect, they were similar to the houseslave (*ghulām*) or domestic service (*khidmatgār*).[103] The *ghulām*, too, is attributed with using their skills (in this case, an expertise in caring for the body) to trick their way into positions of power, their rewards consisting of 'money and all sorts of gifts of land' (*naqd o jans bihẕī'at-i in'ām*) as well as 'future alimentary expenses' (*ā'indah vajah-i qavvat*) and 'the liberty to oppose orders' (*bā ikhtiyār-i inkār-i ḥukm*).[104] The favoured slave, then, albeit of 'low' birth, is nonetheless influential, and even wealthy, and a patron in their own right. The equation of dependence in Skinner's telling is thus inverted—the hapless master/patron is at the mercy of the cunning and avaricious slave/client.

Although it is unlikely that 'Inayatullah identified as a Khatri, it is quite difficult to locate him as anything more than a servant of the Kalsia state. This anonymity itself suggests that he and his family came of humble stock, and that their rise to prominence began, akin to Skinner's '*faux*-Khatri', with their scribal service. Certainly, 'Inayatullah affixed the honorific '*sheikh*' to his family's name; but this could just as well indicate a rise in social status, as birth into an already-elite fam-

[102] Skinner, *Tashrīḥ*, f.149.
[103] Skinner, *Tashrīḥ*, f.368.
[104] Skinner, *Tashrīḥ*, f.368.

ily. As a colonial observer acidly remarked, 'every convert of low caste who wishes to glorify himself assumes one of these titles'.[105] If this was true of 'Inayatullah, it is little surprise that he remained loyal to the Kalsia household for more than a half a century (c.1850–1907?). And it is equally unsurprising that the waning fortunes, to which he bore witness, appear to have caused him much grief.

[105] Denzil Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes* (Lahore: Government Printing, Punjab, 1916): 266. See also Buehler, "Ashrāfization": 240–41.

4. Redefining 'Legitimate' Dependencies

The preceding two sections have sought to trace the gradations of dependent relations that structured the Kalsia household and administration. Difficult as they might sometimes be to reconstruct, such relations were pivotal to the functioning of the administration. It is therefore unsurprising that the colonial state's dismantlement of the precolonial political order undercut these bonds, both directly and indirectly. Within the realm of the *zenana* and household, the state took pains to define the boundaries of kinship precisely, in the course of which it declared a host of relationships 'illegitimate', thereby foreclosing them from involvement in governance. As the size of the kin group thus shrank, more and more land passed from the hands of indigenous states to the control of the colonial government. This in turn shrank the incomes of the former, restricting their ability to support the assorted servants, clients, allies, and friends through whom they had governed.

One of the pretexts used for this programme of 'pacification' was that it was necessary to ensure the orderly governance of Panjab, a highly militarized society, where raids and warfare had hitherto served as a modality of state-building and governance. Once the policy of proxy governance had been shelved as a failure, though, the aim was no longer simply 'orderly governance' within Company territories, but the expansion of colonial domains through the expropriation of local elites. Broadly speaking, while the colonial state was willing to accept the existence of some chosen principalities as subordinate allies, it was keen to both reduce the numbers of these nominally sovereign territories, and to keep a close eye upon them. This differentiated policy was furthermore strategic, as it held out the prospect of a measure of autonomy to those states that the colonial government chose to recognize, while the spectre of complete dispossession provided further incentive to cooperate. Those of its princely allies who escaped this dire fate could then be 'made to feel [their] obligation'.[106]

[106] NAI, "Foreign Political Consultation." "Report on the Jageers held by Individuals in several of the Districts of this Territory" (c.1812–14). 24 October – 7 November 1818.

An important exercise in redrawing the political boundaries of the hinterland west of Delhi came early in the nineteenth century, when the Company, having appointed itself the agent of the Mughal state, undertook a review of the various land grants and revenue assignments in the region that the imperial court had issued to its dependents and clients. Many of these were thought to be quite recent, and operating upon the somewhat arbitrary maxim that any grant that had been issued during or after the eighteenth century was likely fraudulent, the Company succeeded in seizing land worth Rs. 235,000 of annual revenue.[107] In order to prevent confiscation, the concerned grantee would have to present proof of their 'rightful' possession. To begin with, this entailed identifying the type of grant; had it been given in perpetuity? Was it liable to be inherited? Was it a gift, and if so, to whom? If, however, the land was no longer held by the original grantee, it became important to determine their relationship to the incumbent. Crucially, the Company rejected a number of 'dependent' relationships that were locally recognised, narrowing the criteria of legitimate dependence according to norms of family and service that suited its purposes. Beyond extending their own domains, these measures had the general effect of favouring men's claims to property over those of women and embedding certain 'orthodox' norms of marriage and kinship in law.

The criteria of legitimate dependence that the Company used in its dealings with the Mughal imperial household and its clients were largely extended to their approach to other chiefly principalities in the region as well. Notable in this regard was the outright declaration of women as unfit to hold and manage property, a measure that had in fact first been enacted in the Company's eastern possessions.[108] The implementation of this law, at least amongst the elite households of Delhi and its hinterland, drastically reduced the income that women could derive from land. In addition, while women were allowed to temporarily hold the property left to them by their deceased male relatives, the pool of relation-

[107] NAI, "Foreign Political Consultation," Letter from C.T. Metcalfe to the Secretary to the Governor General, 20 September 1813. 24 October–7 November 1818.

[108] For the progressive restrictions upon women's rights to hold property, see Indrani Chatterjee, "Monastic Governmentality": 75–76.

ships recognized as 'legitimate' for these purposes was reduced. Thus, for instance, in the absence of a male heir, women recognized by the state as 'widows' were allowed to hold their deceased husband's property for the duration of their lifetime. This law was later made stricter still, entitling such women to maintenance alone.[109] Crucial in this context was the nature of a woman's relation to her deceased male partner, as concubines were generally provided with a lower maintenance than wives of *nikāḥ* or *shādī* unions. In this specific respect, it is worth emphasising, the Company was not so much inventing a tradition as codifying an existing prejudice against heterodox practices into a system of law. Of the many strands of practice that constituted local 'custom', the Company privileged one, rendering codified custom a lot more rigid than it had hitherto been. This legal innovation meant that, were inheritance disputes brought to court, then claims of concubines would be deemed secondary to those of other partners, potentially overriding the wishes of the deceased, and disregarding the complexity of relations within the *zenana*.

Besides making the income that women could derive from the land contingent upon their precise relationship to property-holding male kin, what women could do with such property was also subject to new, and newly clarified, restrictions. Their ability to bestow gifts upon their network of friends, kin, and dependents, as well as to leave their wealth to heirs of their choosing, were both undermined. Childless widows who sought to adopt sons to inherit their estates soon found that the colonial state would not recognise these adoptions. One such episode concerns the house of Kalsia itself, specifically a transfer of property between the households of Jodh Singh and his father Gurbaksh's ally and comrade Karam Singh. The latter had settled at the village of Bilaspur and had established a client lineage of the Kalsia state there. Upon his death, his widow Diya Kaur had inherited his estate. Anticipating her own death, and without an heir, Diya chose to adopt Jodh's elder son, Sobha, so that he might inherit the Bilaspur estate after her death. The adoption was

[109] "Sirdar Soba Sing vs. Mussumat Attur Kour and Mussumat Golab Kour" under "Civil Judgments," *Panjab Record*, 1868, 79–80.

however declared null and void by the Company, and upon Diya Kaur's death in 1820, her domains were seized.[110] While I have not been able to find an assessment of the worth of the entire estate, just one part of it—the Kalesar Sal forest in the Himalayan foothills, which Diya Kaur had jointly held with a local Pathan family—appears to have had an area of roughly 14,500 acres, a little under 60 sq. kilometres.[111]

Not only women, but their children, too, became the target of strict colonial laws of inheritance. The law forbidding women to manage property targeted mothers as well as daughters; and the narrowed definition of 'legitimate' conjugal dependence impacted the offspring born to unions deemed 'illegitimate' as well. Besides colonial bureaucrats keen to confiscate the land of their subordinate allies, local beneficiaries themselves played a significant role in the implementation of these new laws. They often provided the information about the type of marriage contracted, or the parentage of a child, especially when this would play out to their material gain. In one example, Khem Kaur, the wife of a Sikh chieftain from the village of Baidwan who had been wed in a *cādar ḍālnā* union, put forth a claim on behalf of her son, who she said was entitled to inherit his father's estate. As Griffin noted, Khem made no pretence of the nature of her relationship, stating only that customarily, sons born of heterodox unions were recognized as their father's legitimate heirs. The succession was initially accepted by the East India Company; this decision was, however, swiftly reversed upon the objections raised by the deceased chieftain's brothers, who insisted that their claims to inheritance superseded that of an 'illegitimate' son.[112]

A similar case arose in the Kalsia household as well, involving the aforementioned Man Singh, son of a heterodox *karewa* union between Sardar Sobha Singh and a certain Chand Kaur. Man Singh was the younger of two sons, the elder being Lehna Singh, who was moreover born of his father's first, 'respectable' marriage. At Sobha's death, whether due to

[110] Lepel H. Griffin, *The Rajas Of The Punjab. Being the History of the Principal States in the Punjab and Their Relations with the British Government*, 2nd ed. (London: Trübner & co., 1873): 154.

[111] "Kalesar Sal Forest," under "Miscellaneous Papers," *Punjab Record,* 1866, 13–14.

[112] Griffin, *Law*: 57–59.

clerical error or design, the estate of Kalsia was registered as the shared property of both of the deceased man's sons.[113] According to 'Inayatullah, who does not disguise his antipathy towards Man Singh, this claim was subsequently rejected by the Commissioner of Panjab, who instead decreed that as a son of an inferior union, Man Singh would simply be paid a maintenance allowance of Rs. 200 per month. Unsurprisingly, Man Singh contested the judgment; and when his case came in front of the new Commissioner, Major Edwardes, the decision was overturned. Man Singh was granted an annual income of Rs. 10,000, although the basis for this decision is not clear from the *Tārīkh*.[114] The arrangement was, apparently grudgingly, honoured by Lehna Singh for some years. But relations between the two men appear to have continued to sour, and 'Inayatullah seems to indicate that Lehna eventually put a stop to the payments.[115] After Lehna's death, Man Singh's salary came under review of the Council of Regency and the colonial 'Court of Wards', which decided that Kalsia could simply not afford to pay Man Singh's enhanced income. His allowance was thus reduced to its original amount, which he was expected to collect from the revenues of a single village called Syedpura.[116] 'Inayatullah even refers to him as the '*ra'īs* [governor] of Syedpura', even though his income was equal to that of a *taḥṣīldār*.[117]

'Inayatullah's attitude towards Man Singh's demands is interesting, because it reveals the latent tensions that were present in some chiefly households, particularly between dependents.[118] His concerns were primarily financial; 'if even a few of Sardar Sahib Bishan Singh Sahib's progeny were to be given an allowance', he wrote, 'where is it within

113 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.47v.
114 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.44r.
115 This is not made explicit, but is implied; 'Inayatullah writes, that Man Singh did not 'keep Sardar Sahib (Lehna) agreeable' ('*Sardār ṣāḥib ko razāmandī nahīn rakhā*') *Tārīkh*, f.45v.
116 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, ff.44r–45v.
117 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.47r.
118 A demonstration, perhaps, of what Piliavsky terms 'transitive virtues': behaviours (e.g., loyalty) that are elicited within the context of particular relationships, rather than being characteristic of individuals. Piliavsky, *Nobody's People*: 25.

the capacities of the *riyāsat* to continue to function?'[119] Yet, both Khem Kaur and Man Singh's claims demonstrate that children of all unions harboured far greater expectations of their fathers than mere maintenance. And, the relations between Man Singh and his half-brother's children do not appear to have been uniformly acrimonious. Bishan Singh, for example, is said to have contributed the considerable sum of Rs. 30,000 to Man Singh's daughter's wedding.[120] And after Man Singh's death, though the Council of Regency appears officially to have slashed the income of his wives and children even further, according to 'Inayatullah, they continued secretly to be paid a slightly more generous allowance, although on whose instruction it is not clear.[121]

Though 'Inayatullah may not have been fond of Man Singh, this animosity seems to have been more generally directed towards his patrons' 'faithless' clients. There is moreover a distinct anxiety palpable in his narrative about Kalsia's fortunes. This would explain his insistence that the precise conditions of each client's maintenance be clearly stipulated, and if need be, adjudicated in court. It was precisely by refraining from moving the colonial courts, as he felt many chiefly families were inclined to do, that the Kalsia household had lost significant amounts of land; at the same time, to contest the colonial state's decisions might be viewed as disobedience.[122] In other words, to cross the colonial state, or challenge its understanding of power relations amongst their subjects, might be to invite its wrath at a later moment. This left plenty of room for 'greedy' and 'unscrupulous' clients to abuse the trust of their patrons, in a bid to renegotiate the terms of their relationship. From 'Inayatullah's point of view, Man Singh was just another of a long list of claimants who had betrayed their patrons.

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[119] 'Sardār ṣāḥib Bishan Singh ṣāḥib ke agar cand farzand bhī miqdār muqarrar hū'e, ḥaiṣīyat-i riyāsat kahān hai ke qā'yim rah sake?' 'Inayatullah, Tārīkh, f.45v.

[120] 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh,* f.45r.

[121] 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.46v.

[122] He observes: 'In reality, there is no determination amongst [Indian] princes to go against the [colonial] government's orders.' (''*aṣl yah hai ke hindostānī ra'īson [mein] ḥauslah nahīn ke bah muqāblah-yi ḥakam koī tajāvuz karen*'). 'Inayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.45v.

Of course, this was only part of the story. 'Inayatullah's account, whether consciously or not, retrospectively imposes clear and simple boundaries upon relationships that had in reality been full of ambiguities and negotiations. It is conceivable, for example, that the Kalsia chieftains' erstwhile tributaries in the Doaba, who had severed ties with them and become autonomous 'princes' of their own realms, had taken advantage of the presence of the colonial state in order to do so. Yet, as Jodh Singh, who was still alive at the time of the loss of these domains, knew, friction and disagreement were very much woven into the fabric of the household, as well as the tribes that they constituted. What was novel under colonial rule, then, was not the attrition of comrades, but rather the limits placed upon the capacity of household and polity to grow, indeed, even simply to provide for their own. In the 'pacified' landscape of colonial Panjab, the usual modalities of household expansion—violence, raids, and the promise of protection—were no longer viable. While the risk of fission and attrition thus remained, the opportunities for reconsolidation had been greatly reduced. And so it fell to patrons and clients alike to favourably renegotiate and document the terms of their association, to protect their wealth from their rivals and disgruntled relations, as well as from the colonial state.

5. Conclusions

It is difficult to say precisely how much land the Kalsia chieftaincy lost over the course of the nineteenth century. As ʻInayatullah notes, at the time that he began his work of documenting the lineage's history, he could find no continuous paper record (*musalsal kāg̲ha̲z̲āt*) of all the land this chieftaincy had held, nor of its value.[123] Yet, his narrative of the confiscation of the lands in the Doaba, corroborated by Griffin, suggests that these losses were not inconsiderable. Besides the land and revenue thus lost, the Company's interventions also strained the chiefly household's ties with its tributaries, and constrained its capacity to care for its dependents in different ways. In this, they were facilitated by local actors, who either hoped to benefit from such dispossession, or used the colonial state as a proxy to settle scores with their rival kin or estranged patrons. And, although the focus here has been upon Kalsia, this is by no means a process particular to this chieftaincy; it was a more general phenomenon, and a key element of the colonial state's programme of 'pacification'. Undermining the precolonial political order could not be achieved without streamlining the contours of the chiefly household, and redefining who was a 'legitimate' dependent.

If the case of the Kalsia household is illustrative of a certain modality of colonial expansion, it is also interesting for what it tells us about relations within precolonial household polities. This essay has shown that many kinds of bonds were forged under the unifying banner of a single successful chieftain. There were the comrades and peers (*hamrāhān*), whose allegiance in the early days of conquest (*mulkgirī*) was essential to lineage consolidation; there were also the subordinates, the slaves, servants, subjects, and clients, who sought favour from the chiefly household, and were often absorbed within it. The greater the number of one's dependents and subordinates, the less the need for comrades; and so, as the chiefly household swelled, so did the tribal lineage tend to fission into numerous principalities. Peers who tactically agreed to a subordinate role as a follower (*tābeʻ*) in the chiefly household made for ambiva-

[123] ʻInayatullah, *Tārīkh*, f.8r.

lent and unreliable allies, as illustrated by the many clients in the Doaba who cut ties with Kalsia. Still, these associations were not necessarily permanently forgotten, and might be revived in times of need, as Diya Kaur's attempt to ensure her household's lands in Bilaspur be passed on to the Kalsia state indicates.

Besides the latent tension in the relations between patrons and clients of more or less equal stature, colonial legislation also brought the shifting practices and conceptions of kinship and family in upwardly mobile lineages into relief. Notably, even after the Kalsia state had crystallised as a minor but growing Panjabi polity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it did not simply discard the practices of household consolidation that it shared with subject rural populations. While wives from higher-ranking families were sought out to bring status to the *zenana*, other kinds of partnerships continued as well. Liberated from the necessity of remarrying widows, the Kalsia chieftains continued to take slaves, servants, and women of humble lineages into their *zenanas*, and to father children with them. As amongst their rural subjects, such heterodox unions, did not carry the same prestige as the gift of a daughter by a peer or social 'better'. But nor were they a source of shame. They were acknowledged even into the twentieth century, suggesting that while descent was certainly an important consideration, claims to respectability were not incompatible with 'humble', heterodox kinship practices. In other words, descent, which is one of the foundations of caste status, whether within the Brahmanical fold, or within the paradigm of 'Ashrāfization', was only one factor in determining the prestige of a lineage, even into the twentieth century.

Descent and lineage are in fact only one part of the larger puzzle that is locating the Kalsia household in terms of their identity. Their conjugal practices suggest an enduring link to their rural roots, even though the significance for them of practices such as *karewa* changed. At the same time, they were of course well aware of other cultural and juridical codes, and even made superficial use of these. The interchangeable use of *nikāḥ* and *shādī* indicate that these had been stripped of much of their religious and normative character, and reduced to a single denominator—respectability—to designate 'free' unions with a bride of 'high' birth. What lit-

tle 'Inayatullah tells us of his patrons' religious practice suggests this was similarly broad: as warriors and then leaders of a Sikh *miṣl*, their devotion to the Gurus and the Sikh congregation was established. Once more though, a closer look at the ranks of their dependents indicates the continued patronage of ritual functionaries of other denominations as well. This once more links the Kalsia household back to its rural origins, for communities in the nineteenth-century Panjabi hinterland tended to pay their respects to and patronize shrines, priests, and ascetics across denominational lines. This is in part why the colonial state found it so difficult to develop neat identity classifications in rural Panjab, as none of its trusted lines of categorization—creed, caste, and tribe—seemed in the least watertight.[124] What was codified as 'custom'—the body of law that came to govern many, though not all, rural Panjabi populations—was thus a hybrid of what might be imperfectly described as 'peasant' practices and 'respectable' norms borrowed from Islam and 'Hinduism' alike, distilled through the colonial prism of what kin, family, household, and dependency could safely and profitably look like.

Though the Kalsia chieftains have been a central focus in this essay, I have tried also to foreground the experiences of their dependents, and to thereby also say something about dependence more generally. As the women in the chiefly *zenana* demonstrate, it can be quite hard to determine the precise nature of a dependent relationship. Though descriptors such as *karewa* and *nikāḥ* provide an initial indicator of whether a bride had been brought in celebration into the *zenana*, or simply quietly absorbed therein, more precise information is often elusive. The precise position of Jassi—Jodh's mother—is illustrative of this. It is tempting to read 'Inayatullah's use of the vague term *zaujah*, without further qualification, as an implicit acknowledgment of her heterodox relationship to Gurbaksh, an acknowledgment that might have been particularly explosive at a time when the Kalsia state was seeking to limit its obligations to its kin and clients. Yet, if such knowledge was politically charged in 'pacified' Panjab, it is unlikely to have shaped Jassi's experience of

[124] Brian P. Caton, "Social Categories and Colonisation in Panjab, 1849–1920," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 41, no. 1 (2004): 33–50, at 43–46.

dependency in any straightforward way. Should she have lived long enough to see Gurbaksh and especially Jodh's military successes, her prestige—as the woman who birthed the hero of Kalsia—would likely have risen. Conversely, the pressures on 'free' brides, illustrated through the examples of Sahib Kaur and the Rani Sahiba, remind us of the constraints and obligations binding jurally-free female kin.

The colonial state, in its attempts to closely define and limit the scope of 'family' and 'kin', not only made women subsidiary partners in their husband's households, but also made the nature of their union—orthodox or heterodox—determinant for the nature and extent of their entitlements from him. In doing so, it codified what was viewed as 'respectable' and made it law. The innovation here was not the prejudice, but rather to assign itself the arbiter of when that prejudice carried weight, and when it might be overridden. Those who suffered as a result were both women such as Khem Kaur, as well as their children. As the example of Man Singh shows, princely houses with straitened means were no longer in a position to support extended retinues. 'Inayatullah's attitude, combining anxiety about his patrons' fortunes with what seems to be indignance at Man Singh's 'ingratitude', was clear: those with competing claims, or who might seek to stake a share in the state's wealth, had to be nipped in the bud, using the colonial legal apparatus. And yet, Man Singh's disgruntlement, that he was being paid a paltry maintenance, and that his father's domains had been entrusted to an infant and various regents, rather than to him, is hardly surprising.

I close this essay by returning full circle to the scribe and servant whose account I have relied upon throughout. Banda 'Inayatullah, of unknown origins and avowedly multigenerational affiliation with the chieftains of Kalsia, found himself in a challenging position as the century wore on. By approximate calculation, he was writing his account at the end of a half-century of service. Though his own status and influence appear to have risen in inverse proportion to that of the chieftains of Kalsia, he remained loyal to the household, which had first taken his father into service. Despite working in close association with a number of British officers, his *Tārīkh* is ambivalent towards the colonial administration, and unambiguous in its assessment at the wrongs it had inflicted

on his masters. Both the nostalgia for the early days of his service, and his anxiety about the future of Kalsia, underscore how central being a dependent servant and client of the principality was to his identity.

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This essay traces the changing contours of a Panjabi state during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It focuses on the Kalsia principality, founded by a family of rural warlords who had transformed themselves from village elders to the rulers of a distinct principality within a generation. Using a chronicle left by a retainer and scribe of the Kalsia administration, it studies a handful of the chiefly lineage's dependents (*tābeʿīn*), to try to understand what their position within the ruling household was, what rendered them dependent, and what kept them loyal. It argues that jural status was of some, but not determinant, importance in creating deeply hierarchical bonds; just as important was the value that patron and client, master and slave alike attached to such unequal relations, as a source of honour, status, and influence. This value was moreover shared across and attached to a range of relationships, from kinship bonds to servitude, blurring the distinction between family and service. This began to change, at least in law, in the wake of colonization, as the British sought to impose fixed boundaries on the household, to progressively strip ruling houses of their land.

THE AUTHOR

Girija Joshi is a historian of South Asia, interested in the social, environmental, and intellectual history of the subcontinent. She received her PhD from Leiden University in 2021. As of this year, she is a Rubicon post-doctoral fellow at the Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, Paris.