

6 Invaders: Marathas and the British

In 1656, around the same time that Purshottam Das was picking up the family mantle, Shivaji, the ambitious son of a high-ranking noble of Bijapur, offered his services to the equally ambitious Mughal prince, Aurangzeb.¹ Bijapur was a flourishing kingdom in south-west India, located at the junction between two linguistic zones, Marathi and Kannada, ruled by a dynasty of Shi'a Muslim rulers and under threat from the Mughals from the early sixteenth century.² Shivaji's father, Shahji, held a Bijapuri grant to a *mōkāsa* (equivalent of *jāgīr*) to large areas around Pune, where he already possessed the rights of *dēśmukh* (the regional equivalent of *chaudhrī*). Shivaji was a far more ambitious man, and had taken to conquering areas and forts around this core area of control, leading to Bijapuri wrath. His overture to the Mughals was an effort to strike a deal with the worst enemies of Bijapur, with the aim of securing the beginnings of his own empire.

After negotiations with Aurangzeb did not come to fruition, Shivaji embarked upon an independent career of conquest, vanquishing and recruiting other *dēśmukh*. In 1663, he attacked and maimed a Mughal governor; in 1664, he sacked the Mughal 'blessed port' of Surat. Following significant military deployment led by the Mughal commander, Mirza Raja Jai Singh, Shivaji was defeated, and induced to come to the imperial court. But unlike an

¹ Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), pp. 55–6.

² For Mughal–Bijapur relations in the early sixteenth century, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The Deccan Frontier and Mughal Expansion, ca. 1600, Contemporary Perspectives', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 47: 3 (2004), pp. 357–89; this based to a great extent on the account of a Mughal noble sent to the Bijapuri court in 1603, which has been published as Chander Shekhar, *Waqā'i' Asad Beg* (Delhi: National Mission for Manuscripts and Dilli Kitab Ghar, 2017). More broadly on Bijapur, see Richard Eaton, *Sufis in Bijapur, 1300–1700: Social Role of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Eaton's theory that Bijapur and its Sufi complex were co-constituted in a 'shatter zone' has been resoundingly critiqued in Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, esp. pp. 99–105. Ernst has discussed the Sufi complex of Khuldabad, near Aurangabad, which is indisputably within a Marathi cultural zone and not on any frontier. He has also pointed out that few of the Sufi saints related to the Khuldabad complex were 'militant' pioneers in any sense of the word.

earlier generation of similarly vanquished Rajput kings, Shivaji could not be turned into a Mughal *mansabdār*, whether due to structural shortage of inducements to offer, cultural clash, or entrenched court politics. Instead, there was a famous falling-out in court, leading to his imprisonment, then daring escape.³ Thus began a half-century-long battle of mutual aggression between the Mughals and the Marathas, punctuated by efforts at co-option, which eventually led to the creation of the Maratha empire, the most important 'successor state' of eighteenth century India, save, perhaps the state of the East India Company.⁴

The rise of the Maratha empire coincided with a change in the dynamics of military and political recruitments in South Asia. Jos Gommans, in his work on Mughal warfare, proposed a process whereby *zamīndārs* with effective reach into a key zone of military recruitment, were turned into *jama 'dārs* or military recruiters for any regime that would pay enough. But in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the attraction appeared to be in the opposite direction, with locally entrenched *zamīndārs* flooding the Mughal army, and at the same time, becoming difficult about paying up the taxes, hurting Mughal revenues and making Mughal service less attractive. It may be questionable whether we should characterise this period with the downward imperial arc and local entrenchment (*zamīndārisation*, as Gommans calls it),⁵ or see it as part of a continuous spiral of competitive state formation.⁶

It may be productive to take a step away from that macro-historical question of why the Mughal empire declined, and look at the situation from the other, less dramatic side of the process. What our specific archive allows us to do is trace the fortunes of a non-Maratha *zamīndārī* family that, like the majority of *zamīndārs*, never made the move towards full sovereignty, and observe how it negotiated to remain in the same place, through the transition from Mughal overlordship to that of the Marathas, and eventually, that of the British. In doing so, this chapter would continue to make an oblique contribution to the very large volume of literature on the history of *zamīndārī* as a key institution, social formation and reformatory project of British colonial rule, which has been discussed in Chapter 2. At the very least, it will propose amendments to the Bengal-centred story of little kings turned into absentee landlords and eventually, a proto-colonial intelligentsia, by returning attention to the significantly different trajectories of *zamīndārs* located within a barely known princely state.

³ M. N. Pearson, 'Shivaji and the Decline of the Mughal Empire', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35: 2 (1976), 221–35.

⁴ On the Maratha empire, see Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); James Laine, *Hindu King in Islamic India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵ Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, pp. 63–88.

⁶ Frank Perlin, 'State Formation Reconsidered', *Modern Asian Studies*, Part I, Part II, 19: 3 (1985), 415–80.

It can also offer some glimpses of the changes that ensued in the process of recording, asserting and disputing entitlements as successive regimes overran the area. The section of the archive that allows us to reconstruct that story is more complex – in terms of language, script and genre – than the rest. New elements – such as new languages, scripts and terms – appear, but the overall picture is that of the reorganisation of existing elements, which begs the question about the continuity or novelty of concepts. Did new concepts of rights, justice and law appear as first the Marathas and then the British acquired control over the area? It is impossible not to speculate, but the fragmentary nature of the surviving record means that any answers can only be provisional.

In terms of language and forms, what strikes us most forcefully is continuity: in the eighteenth and even the nineteenth century, people continued to use Persian. They used it to record transactions, such as sales of houses, as well as to write personal letters to each other. They used the language and its well-established forms even when reporting on political revolutions – for example, in Persian-language *mahẓar-nāmas* recording the negotiations undertaken by local notables with the incoming Maratha *sardārs* in the 1730s. Once these *sardārs* established their own kingdoms, we find news-writers reporting on each other in Persian-language *akhbarāts*. But there are also changes: we find Marathi-language, Modi-script revenue accounts, which are frustratingly undated, but which we can perhaps place in the middle of the eighteenth century. We also find orders written in Hindi/Rangri, the Central Indian variant of Rajasthani described earlier, and in a version of the Nagri script which, until the end of the seventeenth century, had only appeared in the margins of documents, or the lower half of bi-lingual tax contracts (*qaul qarār*, discussed in chapter 3). These orders refer to the authority of the Puwars – the earliest of the Maratha *sardārs* to invade Malwa, who eventually set up two small states, at Dhar and at Dewas.

Most excitingly, perhaps, as we come close to the present, we find material that offers a fuller view of the principal protagonists. Such material includes a family history, also in Rangri, in two manuscript versions, in which the antecedents of the family are narrated, seemingly without reference to an immediate functional objective. Then, as the nineteenth century arrives, turning Dhar into a ‘princely state’ under indirect control of the British Indian government, we find family trees in the Persian script, bilingual and bi-scribal Hindi–Urdu documents, English-language petitions, magazine entries and finally, photographs. Such expanded focus, despite the impression of transparency it produces, is of course the product of yet more representational conventions, through which we must hear the story that the protagonists are trying to tell, but also think why they are doing so. That reflection is an opportunity to comment on law and/in empire, especially with reference to British ‘indirect rule’ in

India.⁷ Study of the princely states has the potential for ‘provincialising’ developments that are taken to be the general course of political, social and cultural change in colonial India. With the notable exception of Hyderabad,⁸ that potential remains unrealised, because the implicit assumption appears to be that hybrid political practices were symptomatic of a period of transition,⁹ and thereafter limited to theatricality within a broadly shared modernising trend, led by the directly governed British Indian provinces.

Finally, it is worth admitting here that it is impossible for me to fully decipher everything that the authors of these documents are trying to say. Allusions to officers and events are rendered obscure by time, connections between people smudged by badly placed seals, and the sheer linguistic and paleographic challenges of this section of the archive are simply too enormous to be fully tackled within the scope of this book. However, the heterogeneity of this portion of material is an invitation making it too hard to resist expanding upon some of themes that this book has been discussing with reference to the (predominantly) Persian-language sources – such as language and its use in self-representation, especially in the context of assertion of rights.

The Maratha Empire in Malwa

Sociologically, the Maratha empire was an empire by *zamīndārs*. The classic Maratha claim, that of *sardēśmukhī*, connected landed power to kingship organically. This claim to one-tenth of land revenue was a multi-pronged claim thrust into a mesh of overlapping rights in the countryside. When Shivaji began asserting this claim from the 1660s, and he worked systematically to vanquish and/or recruit other significant *dēśmukh* families into his kingdom. He also began working towards acquiring legitimacy for such moves through concessions from Bijapuri and Mughal overlords. The claim of *sardēśmukhī*, substantively one-tenth of the tax collections of an area, was an innovation based on a much-older Marathi- and Konkani-region title, for which there are grant records from as far back as the twelfth century.¹⁰ Etymologically, the title implied that the holder was the ‘head’ of *dēśmukh*,

⁷ Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*; for studies of specific regimes, see Pamela Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*.

⁸ Kavita S. Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013); Eric Beverley, *Hyderabad, British India and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁹ Michael Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System, 1764–1858* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Principal Balkrishna, ‘Nature of Sardeshmukhi during Shivaji’s Time’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 3 (1939), 1189–93.

or a kind of ‘first among equals’, but it was to Shivaji’s credit that he turned this term of landed entitlement into one of sovereign legitimacy.

Following Shivaji’s death in 1680 and the succession battles that followed, *dēśmukh* recruited into the Maratha empire project turned into marauding *sardārs*; some of them began spilling into Malwa from the end of the century.¹¹ In 1713, the Maratha polity began to acquire some structure, mainly because of the new office of Peshwa, a Brahman minister who ruled in the king’s name, and led the federation of Maratha *sardārs*. In 1719, Balaji Vishwanath, the first Peshwa, stormed to faction-ridden Delhi and secured three separate orders from the recently and partially enthroned Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah, granting the Marathas the right to *sardēśmukhī* and *chauth* in all six Deccan provinces, and *svarājya* or sovereignty in sixteen districts that constituted the Maratha homelands.¹² It is short-sighted to see *sardēśmukhī* simply as a revenue-sharing arrangement; it was integral to a concession of sovereignty.¹³ Although Malwa was not part of these arrangements, from around this time, Maratha bands began to call their demands in Malwa by these names.

Older scholarship had already provided us with the framework of declining Mughal political structure – cornered governors, rival state-builders and so on. Due to the meticulous work by Gordon and Wink, using principally Marathi records, we also have a very detailed picture available about the rise and fall of particular Maratha *dēśmukh* families, the rise of some of these to kingly status, and of administrative consolidation as this formidable new imperial federation expanded into non-Maratha areas, most importantly Malwa, in the eighteenth century.¹⁴ But we know very little about the fortunes of the *zamīndārs* and other middle-ranking powerholders already ensconced in Malwa, about the manner in which they dealt with the incoming overlords and negotiated to retain their existing entitlements.

The Puwars, who would eventually establish two linked kingdoms in Dhar and Dewas, were among the *sardārs* who led the Maratha raids into Malwa, perhaps from as early as the 1690s, and certainly in the 1720s.¹⁵ Two brothers,

¹¹ Irvine puts the date at 1705; *Later Mughals*, p. 164. But Malcolm was of the opinion that the raids had begun earlier.

¹² James Grant Duff, *The History of the Mahrattas*, 4th ed. (Calcutta: R. Cambay, 1912), Vol. I, pp. 368–9.

¹³ Shivaji’s grandson, Shahu, who had been captured, brought in the Mughal camp and released to assume the Maratha throne in 1707, was said to refer to himself in ‘transaction with the Moghuls’ ‘merely as a Zumeendar, or head of the Deshmookh of the empire’. Grant Duff, *History of the Mahrattas*, Vol. I, p. 360.

¹⁴ Gordon, ‘The Slow Conquest’; Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, pp. 66–155, but the rest of the book elaborates on the processes involved.

¹⁵ The reason for this long unclear period is the patchiness of Marathi records for the period, and an attitude of denial on the part of Persian-language chroniclers. Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, Vol. I, p. 64.

Udaji and Anand Rao, undertook daring raids, and captured the fortress of Dhar for significant lengths of time, punctuated by periods of dislodging, sometimes due to siding with the wrong side in Maratha politics, and at others by energetic Mughal governors, especially Girdhar Bahadur, appointed to Malwa in 1725. Udaji Puwar was also involved in the battle in which Girdhar Bahadur was killed, in 1729.¹⁶

Given the nature of the early Maratha polity, these commanders were also tax-collectors. In 1724, Bajirao I, the most ambitious of all Peshwas, gave a *sanad* (document) of grant to Udaji Puwar. Malcolm reports having seen this document in the ‘old papers of the Puars of Dhar’. The document granted Udaji the obligation-cum-right to collect the *chauth* of Malwa and Gujarat, and keep three-quarters of the proceeds as his *saranjām* (expenses for his troops, hence the equivalent of *jāgīr*), while sending the rest to Pune. Substantively, this would have been one of those pre-emptive grants that formed the stuff of the Maratha empire in its predatory, expansive stage – grants to revenue from unconquered lands were made to warlords who had to then win battles in order to actually collect them. Idiomatically, Malcolm’s translation, included in *A Memoir of Central India*, appears to have followed the text of an original fairly closely, with its invocations, injunctions and formulaic conclusions. If that is indeed so, then the Maratha empire was bringing new conventions into Malwa: the document began with an invocation to goddess Lakshmi, and used the terms *mōkāsa* and *saranjām*, which were new to Malwa, if not the Deccan.¹⁷ There were still the familiar Islamic months (Rabī‘ al-awwal, in this case), combined with the Mughal Fasli year (1123), which Malcolm incorrectly took to be a ‘Hindu’ calendar. There terse sign offs: ‘there is no occasion to write more’ was one that Mughal Persian documents shared with their Maratha–Marathi counterparts, across the language divide.¹⁸

Eventually, Puwar prowess would have made the initial grant worth following up: Malcolm says that he found approximately 150 supplementary orders,

¹⁶ Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, pp. 135–6; Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, Vol. I, p. 78; Sinh, *Malwa in Transition*, pp. 153–66.

¹⁷ Gordon, *The Marathas*, p. 24, note 22, citing the seventeenth-century *Ajnāpatra*, Ramchandra Nilkanth’s answer to Abul Fazl’s *Ā’in-i Akbarī*, states that this political treatise-cum-administrative manual proposed a fourfold division of land tenures – *waṭan*, *inām*, *mokāsa* or *saranjām* and *vṛttī*. This appears to be a misreading; the translation of the *Ajnāpatra* that Gordon cites does not propose such a division. Instead, it states the importance of *waṭandārs*, and then moves on to lands held as *vṛttī* and as *inām*. The word *mokāsa* or *saranjām* are simply not used. ‘The Ajnapatra or Royal Edict,’ *The Journal of Indian History*, 8: 1 (1929), 81–105, 207–33. Also, for a facsimile of the Modi-script manuscript and Nagri transliteration, see Anuradha Kulkarni, *Ajnāpatra* (Pune: Diamond Books, 2007), pp.165–75. It appears the term *mokāsa* was Persianate; specifically, Bijapuri administrative parlance carried over to the Maratha empire, despite the Sanskritising efforts of Shivaji’s Brahmin courtiers.

¹⁸ Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, I, pp. 73–4, long note. Malcolm also converted the Fasli year incorrectly to 1724.

dated around 1729, addressed to ‘managers of towns of districts, from Bundelcund East to near Ahmedabad West and as far north as Marwar’ to pay the said taxes to Udaji Puwar. Here the picture becomes rather murky, because Stewart Gordon found five substantial documents, all dated 1728–9, in the Peshwa *daftar*, which inventorised the revenue received from Malwa, and the military leaders who had collected it; this named Udaji Pawar, but alongside several other military leaders – the Mores, the Shelkes, the Sindhias. Gordon took these documents as evidence of the as-yet-unsettled and military nature of extraction in this early period of Maratha conquest of Malwa;¹⁹ for us, it complicates the story of straightforward usurpation of Malwa by three Maratha generals which was favoured by those that won in the end. In any case, the Puwars continued to collect various grants from the Peshwas, none of which settled their position for very long. In 1725, further *mōkāsa* grants, this time over Dhar and Jhabua, were made to Udaji Puwar²⁰; in 1726, he was given some kind of compensation for rights over Malwa and Gujarat,²¹ from where he was expelled by the Gaekwad *sardārs*. Anand Rao Puwar once again received a grant to collect the Maratha share of taxes from Malwa and Gujarat in 1734, but it was revoked the following year when the Peshwa himself took over the governorship of Gujarat.²² Anand Rao’s son, Jaswant Rao, who fought and was killed in the third battle of Panipat, fought against the Afghans in 1761. His son, Khande Rao, endangered the family’s holdings by siding with the wrong side in the dynastic struggle of the Peshwas, and only when he recanted did he receive a *saranjām* grant giving rights to collect taxes from certain districts in Malwa for maintenance of troops.²³ Thereafter, following a period of turmoil due to the minority of heirs, attacks by Holkars, Sindhias and their Pindari agents, a *diwān* who could not agree with his masters and a plucky but inevitably besieged female regent, the state of Dhar was taken under the protection of the British, and treaty being concluded with this ‘princely state’ in 1818.²⁴

Peshwa-era (i.e., eighteenth-century) Marathi documents could have highlighted new forms and formulae of rights creation in Dhar, but they were not available to me until the work on this book was nearly complete. For now, it has to suffice to note that in the early nineteenth century, Malcolm saw many such grant documents, and offered summaries of these in his account of a region that was being ‘settled’ (i.e., brought under colonial control). The picture that emerges from his account is that of an area with numerous petty principalities left behind in a shatter zone after the demise of the Maratha empire. His

¹⁹ Gordon, ‘The Slow Conquest’ pp. 8–9, note 14. ²⁰ Sinh, *Malwa in Transition*, p. 156.

²¹ Ibid., p. 159. ²² Malcom, *Memoir of Central India*, Vol. I, pp. 98–100.

²³ Malcom reported having seen the document recording the *saranjām* grant to Khande Rao in the hands of the ‘pandit of Dhar,’ who was rather alarmed at his inspection of it. Ibid. p. 103.

²⁴ Malcoln, *Memoir of Central India*, pp. 104–15.

informants were naturally eager to assert their historical and hence legal precedence and his narrative is transparently the product of his co-optation into that process. Nevertheless, his *A Memoir of Central India* has become a standard reference for historians working on the area. Because of its detailed descriptions and summaries of the documents he saw, in conjunction with reports of his discussions with key political protagonists in the region, it is indeed difficult to resist the ring of authenticity offered by Malcolm's book. Unfortunately, since Malcolm's focus was on the petty princely houses themselves, our family of *zamīndārs* in Dhar does not make an appearance in this work of reference.

There may indeed be archival materials available to trace the evolution of the relationship between the incoming Puwars and Mohan Das's descendants, the *zamīndārs* of Dhar. With the generous help of Amit Choudhary and Dominic Vendell, I discovered a large volume of Marathi records issued by the Dhar state that have been preserved at the Shri Natnagar Shodh Samsthan in Sitamau, the creation of Raghbir Singh, the 'princely historian'. Raghbir Singh's efforts mirror those of the famously activist Marathi-reading and -writing historians whose efforts led to the creation of significant archives of material pertaining to the core Marathi- and Kannada-speaking regions. The Bharat Itihasa Samsodhak Mandal of Pune was at the forefront of this activism, which involved searching for, collecting and archiving documentary material held by various land- and office-holders in the region. Many such collections were also published as *daftars* of the respective families, complementing the Peshwa archive, which was taken over by the British and remained difficult to access for Indian researchers. This process of creation, retrieval and recreation of archives, and the linguistic-cum-research activism of the Marathi area is one that has only been partially told,²⁵ and begs comparison with similar efforts in other linguistic areas, for example, Bengal.²⁶

Research in such records, and the regional nationalisms that created such archives, has to take place within another project. Some of the Dhar state's records were collated and published as part of this same historical process.²⁷ Thus far, I have not been able to identify documents related to Mohan Das's

²⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015), especially chapter 3.

²⁶ Here I am thinking of activists such as Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad, rather than English-writing government-allied historians such as Jadunath Sarkar.

²⁷ I could not find the book cited in Gordon, 'The Slow Conquest' pp. 7, 13–14, notes 10, 11, 21, 22, K. K. Lele and S. K. Oka, *History of Dhar State: Marathi Saramjyant pawarache dharachya pawarache [sic] mahaty v daji* (Importance and rank of the Pawars, especially of Dhar, in the Maratha Empire), II (Poona, 1934); the title is somewhat faulty. Instead, I found A. W. Wakankar (ed.) *Dhar State Historical Record Series: Dharkar Pawarancya Itihasaci Sadhane*, Vol. III, Part I, The Maratha Period (Dhar: The History Department, 1949). This book offers transcriptions in Nagri of Marathi documents, and short English summaries of each document. The book was introduced by the historian G. S. Sardesai, pp. 5–8.

family in those published records, but that may well be because in collating and selecting records for publication, the editors of the Dhar Historical Series predictably looked upwards (towards the Peshwa) rather than downwards, towards pre-existing *zamīndārs* over whom the Puwars had acquired overlordship.

Thus, the story of state-formation that is revealed through the Marathi documents (and documents collected and generated in the British era) is told from the point of view of the conquerors. As for the Malwa *zamīndārs* who faced the Maratha onslaught, we know relatively little except that they ultimately decided or were compelled to acquiesce to the Maratha demands. There are self-congratulatory snippets in the Puwar dynasty's annals which assert respect and good treatment of the *zamīndārs*: contrast this with the otherwise rough handling suffered at the hands of other Maratha imperialists.²⁸ All of this amounts to little more than royal eulogy. But in that part of the family archive which I discovered in the family mansion in Dhar in December 2016, there are two documents, both classical Mughal *maḥẓar-nāmas*, which offer a more complex and dramatic picture of that transition, one that indicates extensive negotiation, with reference to a range of obligations and rights. Mughal law clearly died a very protracted death.

Negotiating with the Marathas

In the first *maḥẓar-nāma*, a minor local Mughal official called Shaikh Alimullah outlined his woes. Alimullah said that he was *sharīk* (sharer, coparcener) in the *taujīh-i jāgīr* of a certain Badakhshi Khan and others, *mansabdārs* of the *khāṣ chauhī*, and also *mutasuddī* (official) of the *maḥāl jāgīr* of Safiuddin Muhammad Khan and others. In the beginning of the Fasli year 1142 (1733 CE), said Alimullah, news kept arriving that the imperial (i.e., Mughal) army was about to reach Malwa, which emboldened the *jāgīrdārs* and peasants. But hardly had the imperial army left Shahjahanabad (Delhi), when four '*nā-sardārān-i ghanīm*' (non-leaders of the plunderers/enemy; i.e., Marathas)²⁹ – Malhar [Rao Holkar], Ranoji Shinde, Anand Rao Puwar and another who is not named – crossed the Narmada and entered Malwa. Straight away, they took over the *bādshāhī* (i.e., Mughal) *jāgīrs*, appointed *mōkāsadārs* (their own version of *jāgīrdār*), and seized the entirety

²⁸ Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, p. 101, in which he repeats a legend popular in the district of Bersiah.

²⁹ Prachi Deshpande has pointed out that word *ghanīm* was embraced by the Marathas, in a movement of appropriation of a Persian pejorative. By doing so, the Marathas acknowledged their guerrilla military strategy and subversive position, but also expressed pride in being recognised as the archenemy of the Mughals. Personal communication and seminar at Exeter, February 2018.

of the revenues. The *mōkāsādārs* took charge; the *mōkāsādār* Sadashiv Pandit sent his men, including *ghulladārs* (grain-collectors) into the villages, and dismissed the arrangements of the *jāgīrdārs*. At this, the ‘*āmils*, *zamīndārs* and peasants sent a joint message to the Maratha ‘*nā-sardārs*’, saying, ‘Since 1141 Fasli (1732), thirty-five percent had been decided as *khandnī* (tribute). Now too, take according to the *dastūr-i sābiq* (old custom) and give over the rest to the *jāgīrdārs*’. After these *jawāb-sawāl* (exchanges), the *nā-sardārs* said, ‘Now that the *jāgīrdārs* have brought the *bādshāhī* (Mughal) armies to kill us, what *sulūk* (dealing) and *sulḥ* (treaty) does there remain between us and yourselves, that you want an arrangement?’ Some time elapsed in *rad-badal* (negotiation, in Perso-Marathi usage)³⁰, and then the *sardārs* issued a *parwāngī* (order), that with a view to the *taraddud* (organisation, settling) of the *gumashta-hā* (agents) of the *jāgīrdārs*, half the taxes collected should be given over to them, and the rest taken as *khandnī*. [But] the *mōkāsādārs* took everything from the peasants as *khandnī*, forcing the peasants of many villages to sell up all they had to the *sāhukār* (merchant, moneylender). Many peasants, unable to pay the *saranjām*, decided to abscond. Many merchants and *muqaddams* (village headmen) were in the custody of the *mōkāsādārs*, for failing to pay up the arrears. In spite of all this, there remained 3,000 rupees in arrears for the *khandnī*, and for this 1,000 rupees was taken from the *gumashtas* of the *jāgīrdārs*, from the collection of their ‘*āmils*, and a *tamassuk* (debt-acknowledgement) was taken for the rest. For this reason, the entire land revenue dues of the *jāgīrdārs* of the district was in arrears. If anyone had information about this matter, Shaikh Alimullah appealed to them to attest to this.

Three *qāzīs*, with large circular seals and the ‘*khādim-i shari‘a*’ legend, attested that the account was true. There were fifteen other seals in the right-hand margin, all attesting to the veracity of the account. Most of the witnesses were Muslims, including a certain Jamilullah Suhrawardi, two minor Mughal government servants (indicated by the legend on their seals, ‘*fidwī-yi* (loyal to) *Bādshāh ghāzī*’ called Muhammad Baqir and Amir Muhammad. But there were also Jaswant Rao, probably the Rajput chief of Amjhara, and Hamir Chand, the scion of our illustrious family and son of Purshottam Das. The last two names were written in Nagri.

We have, in the family’s collection, a second *maḥẓar-nāma* from around the same time,³¹ this document also following the Mughal-era format and formulae bearing multiple seals, one possibly of the *qāzī*, and one of a Mughal government officer called Alimullah, and four more of witnesses. This document is

³⁰ I thank the first anonymous reader of this manuscript for pointing this out to me.

³¹ 1736 BRD 20, Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar. The document dates itself to 5 Ramzān, RY 17. Since Muhammad Shah was the only Mughal emperor in the eighteenth century with a reign long enough, we can date this document to 1148 AH, that is, 1736 CE.

less well-scribed and on poorer quality paper than the other, but it still has *chaudhrī* Hamir Chand named as one of the witnesses. The main complainant is an individual called Sarup Ram, who is somehow involved with the *jāgīr* of a Sayyid Ali Khan; he complains that on 29 Sha‘bān in that year, that is, just a month ago, *bhīlān-i zalīl* (the contemptible *bhīls*) had attacked the village of Akbarnagar in the said *jāgīr*, set it on fire and stolen the crops and animals. Thus, the peasants were not able to pay their taxes.

It is not clear whom Alimullah and Sarup Ram (possibly the agent of a *jāgīrdār*) intended to appeal to with their *maḥẓar-nāmas*, and with what aims in view. It is also not clear why original documents, not copies,³² were preserved in Hamir Chand’s family archives, given that he was not a party, merely a witness. Both documents attest to a time of acute disturbance, of change in regimes, the first very explicitly so. In the first *maḥẓar-nāma*, the terminology used for revenue demand – *khandnī* – relates to the second of four stages Gordon identified in his chronology of administrative and fiscal stabilisation in the Maratha empire in Malwa. This indicates that the demand had moved beyond *ad hoc* raiding demands – called *rakhwālī* – but was still a form of tribute. Only after the 1740s, would such *ad hoc* demands be replaced with tax contracts with civilian official-entrepreneurs, very much like the *ijāras* of Mughal times. Thus the documents are windows to that period when the Maratha empire was being formed in Malwa. But they are also evidence that Mughal-endorsed claims were yet to be extinguished entirely, leading to a jostling between Mughal *jāgīrdārs* and Maratha *mōkāsādārs*, in which both contractual agreement and political loyalty were used as bargaining chips. The times were simply too violent and unstable for either to hold steady, and people like Alimullah appeared to be referring to multiple sources of legitimation at the same time: castigating Maratha warlords for failing to honour agreements that created traditions (*dastūr*), but also resorting to a spot of anti-Maratha snobbery by describing them as ‘*nā-sardārs*’ or non-leaders and *ghanīm* (enemies/plunderers). Sarup Ram’s complaint against the *bhīls*, on the other hand, was in the nature of reporting a *force majeure*; and it seems to indicate that Mughal tax-collectors were still operational in the area, and required documented evidence of inability to pay. In this process, witnessing by the local *qāzī*, government officials, and local *zamīndārs* all continued to play a role. As the next rung of powerholders, our protagonists remained an inevitable part of such a documentation process. It is difficult to say whether that co-option was necessitated by the respect for existing landed rights asserted by Maratha political theorists,³³ or simply by the fact of social entrenchment, which even systemic disruption could not alter.

³² For a discussion of originals and copies, see Chapter 4.

³³ Kulkarni, *Ajnāpatra*, pp. 169–71, where these landed rights are referred to as ‘*vṛttis*’.

In addition to these documents of transition, we have in the family archive three more documents, these written in Hindi in an archaic Nagri script, which derive from the Maratha regime established in Dhar; two of them definitely related to the Puwar dynasty. The first is an order, bearing a Nagri-script seal, directed at Sahi Ram *ji*, *mōkāsādār* of *pargana* Dhar, instructing him to make regular monthly payments to Bijay Singh and other cavalymen who had been employed as *cākar* (servant/retainer). The nine horsemen, listed below the main text of the document, are admonished to guard the *chaukī* (police station) night and day.³⁴ The second document, very similar in appearance and format, is also a Hindi-language order, from Pandit Gangandhar *ji*, on behalf of Yashwant Rao Puwar, who is clearly the sovereign, because his name is elevated above the main text as a mark of respect, just as the names of Mughal emperors and nobles used to be. The document makes a grant of three villages to Sadashiva *mōkāsādār* of *pargana* Dhar, and the grant seems to be very similar to the *qaul-qarār* documents we have seen before, because a *qabūliyat* is mentioned, and the grantee is expected to make earnings out of the grant.³⁵ The third document of similar appearance and temporal provenance bears a date on the beautifully formed Nagri-script seal: Śaka 1705, which converts to 1783 CE. But the sovereign whose name is elevated in this document is Ramchandra Rao Puwar, who as we know, was the child-king during the transition to British rule in 1818. This is also a royal order, but the contents are unclear to me.³⁶

My reading of these three documents is still imperfect, because of the highly eclectic vocabulary and the archaic letterforms used, but they still offer some information about the effects of regime change and the workings of the newly formed Maratha Puwar state. What is striking is that administrative record in the Dhar state was at least partly in Hindi (or Rangri) rather than Marathi, no doubt in response to the linguistic terrain the Puwar dynasty found itself in.³⁷ Moreover, although written in Hindi and in Nagri script, the documents still use Perso-Arabic formulae – referring to excuses as *‘ujar*, admonishing employees to settle their minds (*khātīr jama*’) and so on. In terms of content, the second document appears similar to the *qaul* agreements made with *zamīndārs* in the previous century. The alteration of regime and its cultural-ideological identity is signalled, on the other hand, by the language and script of the authoritative seal in the document. What is unclear, once

³⁴ 1750 Hin NCD, Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar (here, the date is roughly ascribed).

³⁵ 1751 Hin NCD Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar (here too, the date is roughly ascribed).

³⁶ 1783 Hin NCD, Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar (the problem with dating the document has been mentioned).

³⁷ Hindi usage in Maratha regimes was not limited to Dhar. On official usage of Hindi by Maratha regimes in Central India, including the Holkars and Sindhias, see Rambabu Sharma, *Rājbhāsha Hindī ki kahānī* (Dillī: Aknkur Prakshan, 1980), pp. 50–75.

again, is why these documents found a place in our protagonists' family archive; what role did they play in the making and recording of grants, the hiring of armed horsemen and other administrative activities by the new Puwar regime? These questions are easier to answer in the next period for which we have documentary evidence, when Dhar became a princely state under the authority of the British empire in India.

In addition to these Hindi documents, we also have three Persian-language legal documents: a *fārigh-khattī* and two *iqrārs* recording sales. All of them are perfectly formulated although scribed poorly (but very legibly) and involve disputes/transactions over property between members of the family with Afghan individuals.

The first document, a *fārigh-khattī*, is dated 1190 Fasli and 1845 Samvat, both of which convert to 1787, with some small variation of months. The document is not sealed, but it narrates that Anwar Beg, son of Jahan Beg, and Sayyid Azam had made a claim to the mango trees in the orchard of Sahib Rai, son of Dianat Rai, but the dispute was resolved and Anwar Beg and his companion wrote a *fārigh-khattī* in the court, in front of the judge, to the effect that the claim they had made was void. They also made a declaration to this effect in front of *zamīndārs* and *qānūngōs*. The witness clauses were in Perso-Arabic script for Anwar Beg and Sayyid Azam, and in Nagri script for *chaudhrī* Pratap Chand and others.³⁸

The two sale documents concern the family more directly, and are from the early nineteenth century. One records the sale of a house and adjoining land in the city of Dhar, and the other a plot of fallow land, adjoining the house of 'Thākūr Sāheb' Pratap Chand.³⁹ The sellers describe themselves, in both cases, as Afghans; the first, was a woman called Chand Bibi, wife of Khairulla Khan, and the second, Sultan Khan, son of Jahan Khan. Although the dates of the two documents are proximate (1803 and 1804) and the handwriting very similar, it is not clear whether there was any family connection between the two Afghan sellers. Both seemed to have lived or owned property in a particular part of the city of Dhar, which they refer to as '*dar al-anwar pīr*' or '*qasba pīrān*'. Both documents are sealed, the one from 1802 has three seals, the largest and most legible one reads Baha al-din Muhammad Abdullah, and bears the sub-script '*khādīm-i sharī'a muftī muhr namūd* (the servant of law *muftī* sealed [it])'. Both documents also bear witness clauses in the right-hand margin, in which the names of the Afghan parties are accompanied by symbols that are hard to interpret, but one of which looks like a spinning wheel; the families were weavers. The document from 1804 also has witness clauses with names written in Nagri, this includes one of Pratap Chand himself. In both cases, we have

³⁸ 1787 NC BRD, Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar.

³⁹ 1803 AC BRD; 1804 AC BRD, both Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar.

a table at the bottom of the document, describing the extent and nature of the properties.

The first of the two documents (1803 CE) also helpfully offers a genealogy of Pratap Chand, whom the Afghan sellers refer to respectfully as ‘*Thākūr Sāheb*’ – he is said to be the son of *Thākūr* Nihal Chand and the grandson of *Thākūr* Hamir Chand. Pratap Chand was co-buyer with Sarupchand, son of Harchand. All the details match the family trees which we shall discuss in the next chapter, except in one detail. There were two Pratap Chands in the family within the nineteenth century. The Pratap Chand I, who was the buyer of these Afghan-owned properties, was indeed the successor to the main line after Nihal Chand, but he was a younger brother, not a son. Perhaps the difference in ages between the two brothers was significant enough for the brothers to be taken as father and son and the error to pass unchecked into legal documents.

Together, the three documents attest to the continued use of Persian language and legal forms until the very end of independent Maratha rule in Dhar. They also demonstrate the continued relevance of institutions such as the *qāzī’s* court, for resolving disputes as well as recording legal transactions, and the continued involvement of landed powerholders and administrative personnel with the working of such institutions. And above all, they demonstrate continued facility in the use of Persian legal forms among members of the family, a feature we shall also see in the following period, when Dhar became subordinate to British supervision and turned into a princely state.

***Thākurs* in a ‘Princely State’**

After nearly half a century of economically ruinous warfare, the armies of the East India Company dislodged the Peshwa and defeated the most important Maratha warlords – and moved into Malwa. In keeping with the symbolism of all previous invading regimes, General (later Sir) John Malcolm ‘crossed the Narmada’ in November 1817, chasing the Pindaris.⁴⁰ In December, he defeated the Holkar’s army, and imposed a subordinating treaty in early 1818.⁴¹ Treaties followed with the Sindhia, the Nawab of Bhopal and various important states in subsequently formed ‘Rajputana’.

Thus began a process of disentangling claims and polities, and retrieving the rightful possessions of weaker (and more compliant) regimes from those of the larger and more threatening (most importantly, the Sindhias). Each sub-region of South Asia has a pioneering British military-civil officer to its name, whose specific brand of Orientalism, entangled with the subjugation of conquered territory, has continued to shape the region until the present day. If Rajasthan was Tod’s creation, ‘Central India,’ including Malwa, was John Malcolm’s.

⁴⁰ Grant Duff, *History of the Marathas*, Vol. III, p. 457. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 463–4.

This scion of a minor Scottish aristocratic family had fought in battles against Tipu Sultan and served in the Hyderabad court, becoming fluent in Persian and key to 'restoring' the Hindu Wodeyar *rājās* in Mysore after Tipu's demise. He had also served as commercial-diplomatic envoy to Oman and Qajar Iran, followed by a mission to Awadh in India again. From 1803, he had been involved in the Anglo-Maratha wars and in the diplomatic negotiations that followed, developing a reputation for being a negotiator generous to the Maratha *sardārs*. In 1817, he had several books under his belt, including a history of the princes of India, one on the Sikhs and one on Persia; he had acquired an honorary doctorate, suffered several failed missions and received a large pay-out from the Company on pleading poverty. He reprised his military-diplomatic career in December that year by chasing Pindaris across the Narmada, and then fighting against joint Maratha forces, followed by a typically over-generous settlement with the Peshwa.⁴² Then came the five years of his 'settlement' of Central India, creating a vast system of graded treaties by which the many competing principalities formed and re-formed during the days of the Maratha empire were shoehorned into a system of British colonialism by indirect rule.⁴³

According to Malcolm, the treaty with Dhar in 1818 was concluded at the invitation of the cornered widow-regent, Maina Bai, whom he clearly admired.⁴⁴ Malcolm recorded that the Puwars of Dhar were descendants of the Rajputs of Malwa (thus establishing the legend of the dynasty's connection with Raja Bhoj) who had migrated to the Deccan, and returned as conquerors with the Maratha army. Although lauded as among the most distinguished of Maratha families, and among the earliest Maratha conquerors of Malwa, things looked bleak for the family and its small principality by the end of the eighteenth century. Constantly under attack by the larger and more powerful regimes of the Sindhias and the Holkars, and their allies, the Afghan warlords, they lost territory constantly until annihilation looked imminent. In 1797, Dhar was embroiled with a succession conflict in the Holkar state, which also involved Amir Khan, the Afghan soldier and fortune hunter who eventually founded the state of Tonk.⁴⁵ The side they backed, however, repaid their assistance by attacking them and seizing territories together with their Afghan allies. In the early nineteenth century, the widow-regent Maina Bai desperately sought allies

⁴² R. E. Frykenberg, 'Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833), Diplomatist and Administrator in India', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 29 May 2018.

⁴³ For an excellent conceptualisation of indirect rule see Kavita Saraswathi Datla, 'The Origins of Indirect Rule in India: Hyderabad and the British Imperial Order', *Law and History Review*, 33: 2 (2015), 321–50.

⁴⁴ Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, Vol. I, 110–11.

⁴⁵ Busawun Lal, *Memoirs of the Puthan Soldier of Fortune, the Nuwab Ameer-ood-doulah Mohummud Ameer Khan*, translated Henry Prinsep (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1832), p. 93–5.

to save the kingdom for her minor son, including from among the archenemies, the Sindhias, the British and the Gaikwards of Baroda. Eventually, the British entered as saviours, forcing the Sindhia and the Pindaris to return key districts – Badnawar and Bersiah (the latter cannot be located on the map) – to Dhar.⁴⁶

Looking back on his work, Malcolm marvelled at the hugely improved situation in Central India – pointing to the increased revenues and decreased military expenditure in all major and minor states, especially Sindhia, Holkar, Kotah, Bhopal, Dhar and Dewas, but also the petty *rājās* of Amjhera, Ratlam, Sitamau, Jhabua and so on. Dhar had acquired a suitably sensible male *divān*, Bapu Raghunath. However, this story of peaceful content was clearly also one of de-militarisation and de-politicisation: where in 1817, the Dhar state was reported to have a ‘predatory army’ of eight thousand men, in 1821, it had a well-paid body of three hundred horse and eight hundred irregulars. The *girāsīyas* of the region were said to be in ‘repose,’ and the expectation was that their habits would change; the Bhils were being similarly pacified.⁴⁷

The treaty with Dhar provided that the kings would have ‘no intercourse, public or private, with any other State, but to act in subordinate connection with the British Government’. They were also to furnish troops according to their ability, when called upon to do so, while in return the British government was to protect the state of Dhar and its dependencies. Certain districts were to be made over to the British government as price of such protection.⁴⁸ There was also a list of ‘petty chiefs’ who paid tribute to the states with which the British government had signed treaties, ‘mediated’ by the British; this showed a tangled map of formal allegiances – still dominated by the Sindhia, but with shares to Dhar and the Afghan states – spread over non-contiguous territories.⁴⁹

By the early twentieth century, Dhar was part of a constellation of petty states that formed Malwa, mostly Rajput except Dhar and Dewas (although, these too, claimed ancient Rajput ancestry). From this long period of Dhar’s transition from a Maratha principality to a colonial ‘princely state’, we have the only Marathi-language records in the collection. These records appear after a gap of about a hundred years after Alimullah’s *mahẓar-nāma*, that is, from the late nineteenth century. They are also fragmentary and unsatisfactory, but they bear clear signs of regime change and consequent cultural transformation. Here, it is worth underlining that the transformation in question did not consist of a straightforward move to English language and English law. In the continued use of Persian, and the innovative use of Urdu as well as Marathi, this section of the family’s archive is striking evidence for the rarely noticed phenomenon of

⁴⁶ Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, Vol. I, 97–112.

⁴⁷ Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, Vol. II, pp. 223–63.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 408–9, Appendix, No. XVI, F ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 413–15.

the presence of prolific documentation in 'Modi in the [colonial] archives' that Prachi Deshpande has correctly drawn our attention to.⁵⁰

The 'colonial-era' records can be divided into five types, in which we have Persian-language political newsletters or *akhbārāts*; orders of various kinds, including in Hindi; an English-language petition; private letters in Urdu; and Marathi–Modi accounts. Each of these types attest to different aspects of the transition to colonialism, demonstrating continuities as well as transformations; in the remainder of this chapter, we shall discuss the *akhbārāts*, the orders and the petition.

Akhbārāts have been studied as emblematic of Mughal information systems and political cultures, as well as their transformation during the extended period of cultural and institutional hybridity that marked the first hundred years of British political power in India.⁵¹ Two *Akhbārāt* fragments in our collection, both from the year 1843, relate to events in Kolkata and Gwalior. The first, titled '*Khulāṣa al-akhbār-i dār al-imārat ṣadar Kalkatta*', is dated to 1843 '*māh-i agast* [August]' the calendar defined as '*iswī* [Christian]. It reported, in the typical stream-of-events style that characterises *akhbārāts*, that the *Sāhebs* of the capital city of Calcutta were engaged in the organisation of the taxes and territories/dominions of the '*sarkār-i kampānī Angrez*'. The news was that the Governor General and the *sipah-sālār* (Commander of the Army) would set out for Hindustan (i.e., North India), in the month of October, to inspect the troops of all areas. A *kharīṭa* (official letter) had been received from Dost Muhammad Khan of Afghanistan and an answer sent. But the crucial news, which may have led to this particular newsletter being preserved in Dhar, was that a *kharīṭa* of the Governor General had been sent to the queen of the *riyāsat* (kingdom) of Gwalior, Bai Sahiba, ordering her that Dada Khasgiwala should be extradited from her kingdom, and Mama Sahib invited, in proper form, and appointed the *mukhtār* (agent) of her kingdom. The reporter ended this section in a watchful, if somewhat ungrammatical note – '*dide bāyad ke che mī shawad* (it has to be seen what transpires)'.⁵²

A second newsletter also reports on the unsettled situation in Gwalior, and the impending war with the British. Dated 2 Sha bān 1259 (8 August 1843) it reported tense discussions from the court of Maharaja Jayaji Rao Sindia.⁵³

Gwalior, the capital of the Sindhia kingdom, took shape in the late eighteenth century, under the leadership of Mahadji Sindhia, an indirect successor of one

⁵⁰ Prachi Deshpande, 'Scripting the Cultural History of Language: Modi in the Colonial Archive', in Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Bodhisattva Kar (eds.), *New Cultural Histories of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014). 62–86.

⁵¹ H. Beveridge, 'Colonel Tod's Newsletters of the Delhi court', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 40: 4 (1908), 1121–4; Margrit Pernau and Yunus Jaffery (eds.) *Information and the Public Sphere: Persian Newsletters from Mughal Delhi* (New Delhi: OUP, 2009).

⁵² 1843 BRD 5, Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar.

⁵³ 1843 BRD 24, Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar.

of the four Maratha generals whom we have encountered invading Malwa. The Bai Sahiba referred to in this newsletter was Tara Bai, the widow of Jankoji, third in line of succession from Mahadji. Jankoji Sindhia was the adopted son of the formidable and anti-British dowager-regent Baiza Bai, who had been chased out of Gwalior in 1833 in a palace coup by her own son, with the British Resident's connivance. Baiza Bai's departure was followed by the political ascent of Gangadhar Ballal, better known as Dada Khasgiwala, whose title indicated his jurisdiction over the household establishment (*khāsgī*) and entrenchment with harem politics. He, and his father before him, had served as Baiza Bai's interpreter in interactions with the British, and as prime minister, he soon turned out to be her successor as leader of the anti-British lobby. Krishna Rao Kadam, or Mama Sahib, the maternal uncle of Jankoji, on the other hand, was the Company's chosen agent at the Sindhia *darbār*. In 1843, matters were precipitated when Jankoji died, and a child adopted by his widow Tara Bai was placed on the throne under the regency of Mama Sahib, with British approval. In the middle of the year, Khasgiwala, together Tara Bai's father, hounded out Mama Sahib and took over the administration of the kingdom, and forced the British Resident, Col. Speirs, out of Sindhia domains. Finally, in December, the Company army attacked Gwalior and defeated it after two hard-fought battles, imposing a subsidiary alliance with a treaty signed in January 1844.⁵⁴

These two newsletters are evidence for the continued resilience of the Maratha polities of central India well into the nineteenth century, as Amar Farooqi has forcefully argued. In our case, they also offer evidence of the close attention paid by smaller neighbouring states, such as Dhar, to political developments in the vicinity, and their use of traditional (i.e., Mughal-style) newsletter systems in order to do so. As with the Hindi orders from the eighteenth century which we have seen in the previous section, it is difficult to say why these two newsletters should have found a place in the family's archive. But they certainly suggest that members of the family held key political and administrative positions in the Dhar state, as we know they did in the twentieth century.⁵⁵ That position lent itself to the issuing of certain kinds of orders which we shall now consider.

From 1859, we have a bilingual document, its upper part in Urdu and the lower in Hindi, and bearing the multi-lingual and multi-scribal seal of the Superintendent of Dhar. It is a self-described *parvāna*, addressed to all '*ilāqedārs* of the area, that *Thākūr* Motichand's son was to be married in a few days' time; the *bārāt* (wedding procession) would follow a certain

⁵⁴ Farooqi, *Sindhias and the Raj*, pp 58–61, 81–106.

⁵⁵ *Who's Who in British India and Burma*, entry on Thakur Nihal Chand, Inam Commissioner and Treasurer of the Dhar state from 1935. Clipping, Choudhary Family Collection, *Badā Rāolā* Dhar.

route, which was elaborated. The *ilāqedārs* were instructed to allow the procession to pass through those areas and to take care of the travellers' possessions. The documents listed the soldiers, ponies, mace-bearers, palanquins, elephants and men who would accompany the procession.⁵⁶

As a *parvāna*, the document situates itself in connection with Mughal documents of order that we have been discussing from the beginning of the book. It also bears the abbreviated invocation '*Alif*', which, as we know, is a shortening of Bismillah. Linguistically, however, this is the first and only legal or administrative document in the collection that is wholly or partially in Urdu, by which I mean Hindi written in the modified Perso-Arabic script with a slightly increased proportion of Persian-origin words. The seal that heads the document is similarly multi-lingual and multi-scribal – the outer rim in Nagri script, spelling out the English word 'superintendent' and the centre in Perso-Arabic script.

Competition and conflicts over processional precedence and ritual hierarchy, and their sublimation and reformulation through colonial judicial processes have been studied in connection with temples in early colonial southern India, as well as monastic groups in the north.⁵⁷ These legally and administratively mediated conflicts, apparently derived from pre-modern honours systems, shade into more collective tussles for the physical and metaphorical occupation of public space that, as 'communal riots' came to blight nation-formation in South Asia.⁵⁸ Our bilingual document about a wedding procession of a *Thākur*'s son in a princely state offers us a different angle for legal management of public space, which evokes both the aura of 'royal' power and its typical accoutrements (elephants, palanquins and so on) and modern governance (stamp-paper).

The final document that we shall mention in this chapter similarly evokes these dual axes of conceptualising power and entitlements. A slightly incomplete copy of an English-language petition, addressed to the Central Indian Agency, is preserved in the family's traditional home, the *Baḍā Rāolā*. Events mentioned within it, taken together with the dates of *Thākur* Pratap Chand II's active life, suggest that it was from around 1910. I have not been able to trace the petition and its outcome in the archives, but there is no reason to doubt that such a conflict did indeed take place. The dispute was with the Superintendent of the Dhar state over the entitlements of the family and the basis of those

⁵⁶ 1859 NCD, Choudhary Family Collection, *Baḍā Rāolā* Dhar.

⁵⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South India Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁵⁸ The literature on communal riots is immense, but in relation to conflicts over religious processions, see Kathryn Prior, 'Making History: The State's Intervention in Urban Religious Disputes in the North-Western Provinces in the early Nineteenth Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27: 1 (1993), 179–203.

rights, which we shall discuss in more detail in the following chapter. Suffice here to note that while the petition was written in English, and followed the format of many such colonial petitions – with a brief history of antecedents, the claim and the appeal, together with a series of exhibits and depositions – the story it told summarised the stories that had been repeatedly told in the many Persian documents in the collection, and the key pieces of evidence presented included both a translation of a Mughal-era *parvāna* and an excerpt from the *Dhar State Gazetteer*, compiled by Captain Luard and published in 1908.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Dhar's post-Mughal history as a Maratha kingdom, and then a small princely state, offers us an unusual opportunity for using the family's archive in order to study the many-routed and multi-staged process of conversion to modernity in South Asia. It helps us extend the story of Maratha imperialism beyond its ethnic core in predominantly Marathi-speaking areas and see it for what it really was: an empire replacing another, jostling for the allegiance of entrenched landed powerholders. Documents from this family's collection help open up that process of empire-substitution, demonstrating how people mobilised multiple arguments and norms to negotiate with the incoming regime, but also the cultural power and popularity of the Persianate legal forms both in extraordinary and everyday circumstances. They also reveal the complex and, to some extent, unexpected linguistic developments involved in that transition, such that the fully formed Maratha state in Dhar used old Hindi, rather than Marathi in its official orders.

The documents from the colonial period – when Dhar came under British indirect control – demonstrate this mixed story of continuity and innovation even further. Thus we have Persian newsletters of one princely state spying on another; we have *parvānas*, but in Hindi and Urdu, which had never been used before; and we have English-language petitions that reproduce Mughal *parvānas* as well as colonial gazetteers as evidence, but, as we shall see, refuse the fiscal rationality of a modern state and balanced transactions as the basis of property entitlements. This is, indeed, the story of little kings and big empires.

⁵⁹ Petition and exhibits, family collection. This specific issue of the *Dhar State Gazetteer*, which I have not been able to find a copy of, did exist, and is referred to in Luard, *Western States (Malwa) Gazetteer*, p. 2.