“Clear as the Spotless Sun”: Honour, Reputation, and Self-Fashioning in the Career and Memoirs of Amir Khan of Tonk

Beentjes, John

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Painting of Nawab Amir Khan,
Govind, Jaipur, early 19th century, Victoria and Albert Museum, taken from
<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O427628/nawab-amir-khan-painting-govind/>

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An Afghan mounted, a lance held across his right shoulders,
Company school, circa 1820, San Diego Museum of Art, taken from
<https://kapoors.com/masterworks-museum-accessions/san-diego-museum-of-art/>

"Oh, God! Oh, God! that the world should so teem with deceit and treachery ; and that men, for the sake of the enjoyments of a few short days, for such is the limit of their span of life, should commit frauds and crimes to the loss of their good name for evermore, especially persons of rank, and men of distinction and high place in the world — to see such men practising dissimulation and meanness!!"

~Busawan Lal, *Amirnama*[1]

"One may know how to beat the drums and raise the standard,
But mere loot and plunder does not make one Alexander.
He who is not attuned to justice cannot be called brave"

~Qasim Ali Khan Afridi, *Diwan-i Afridi*[2]

[1] Busawun Lal, *Memoirs of the Puthan Soldier of Fortune: The Nuwab Ameer-ood-Doulah Muhummud Ameer Khan*, ed. and trans. by Henry Prinsep (Calcutta: G.C. Huttman, Military Orphan Press, 1832), p. 308.
[2] Taken from translated excerpt by Neveena Naqvi in *Writing the Inter-imperial World in Afghan North India ca. 1774-1857* (Los Angeles: University of California, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2018), p. 159.

Abstract

Historians of the late pre-colonial Indian political and military landscape have often pointed to the prevalence of self-interested pragmatism, intrigue and shifting allegiances within it. Against this backdrop, this thesis examines a prominent, yet understudied, military and political player within late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century India, Amir Khan of Tonk, through the lens of martial honour. This is done through analysis of both his career and memoirs, the *Amirnama*, in which he is represented as one "whose conduct and character within and without were clear as the spotless sun". Following the *Amirnama's* account of the four main stages of his career, whilst also cross-referencing with other relevant contemporary sources, reveals the complex and manifold relation of theoretical ideals of martial honour with the realities of political and military action within his world.

During the early stages of his career, cultivating a reputation for bravery and clemency on the battlefield facilitated his social climbing, enhancing "his fame and rank" and forging valuable alliances. Yet increasingly, a gulf appeared between the rhetoric and reality. Whilst honour could legitimise political action, it also contrasted sharply with the flexibility of allegiance, use of deception and even murder increasingly deployed by Amir Khan to achieve his ambitions and strategic aims. Ultimately, securing his political survival in the face of encroaching British power would necessitate jettisoning a plethora of social obligations to those with whom he was theoretically "honour-bound". Examining Amir Khan's self-fashioning in the *Amirnama* in light of these controversial acts reveals how the gap between the theoreticals of martial honour and the murkier realities of realpolitik pragmatism could be, at least rhetorically, reconciled.

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Introduction

The year was 1832, in late January to be more precise, and the then Governor-General of British India Lord William Bentinck was in Ajmer holding court for the six principal rulers of Rajasthan.[3] Engaged in a spirited interview with the Governor-General in the audience hall was the sixty-three year old Nawab of Tonk, Amir-ud-Dulah Muhammad Amir Khan, who freely shared his life story. Bentinck was captivated, for not only was the interview "extended to much beyond the usual length", but the "conversation never flagged, but was full of anecdote and repartee on the Ameer's [Amir Khan's] part".[4] Indeed, Amir Khan's whole career was of interest from a British perspective, having risen through longstanding mercenary service from the son of a minor Afghan *munshi* (secretary, scribe) in rural Rohillkhand to one of the most prominent military leaders of Hindustan, a key political player, and a formidable adversary-turned-ally of the British Empire. So when the Nawab offered to share a copy of the Persian-language biography he had commissioned, the *Amirnama*, with his receptive host, the offer was readily accepted. An English language translation was subsequently undertaken by the Persian Secretary to the Government, Henry T. Prinsep, an experienced Imperial administrator and Orientalist scholar.[5]

Surprisingly, Prinsep argued that the primary utility of translating this memoir was that it provided a non-European perspective on the British conquest of India, in stark contrast to the overwhelmingly British-dominated discourse. In Prinsep's own words, "We conquer and take the country, and make out our own case before the world… Very seldom is any voice heard on the other side".[6] This then raises the question: to what extent was Prinsep's effort to amplify Amir Khan's own voice a successful one?

The answer would appear to be mixed to negative. Whilst Prinsep's translation was reviewed in the *Asiatic Journal* in 1835, and even received several references in Orientalist scholar Horace Wilson's continuation volumes of *The History of British India,* over time it appears to have faded into obscurity.[7]

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[3] Joachim K. Bautze, 'The Ajmer Darbar of 1832 and Kota Painting', *South Asian Studies (Society for South Asian Studies)*, 6 (1990), 71–91 (p. 71).
[4] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. iii-v.
[5] Ibid., p. Vi
Alexander John Arbuthnot, 'Prinsep, Henry Thoby' in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 63 volumes (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1885-1900), XLVI (1896), pp. 392-95 (p. 392).
[6] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. viii-x.
[7] 'Memoirs of Ameer Khan', *Asiatic Journal*, 18 (November 1835), 226–36.
Horace Hayman Wilson, *The History of British India. From 1805 to 1835,* 3 volumes (London: James Madden, 1844-1848), I (1844), pp. 12, 14, 78, 308
Ibid., II (1846), pp. 176-79
Naqvi, p. 135.

Even in historical works written after the fall of the British Empire, Amir Khan's perspective remains an underutilised one. No modern biography has been written on his life. Furthermore, whilst he is discussed in works covering British responses towards the Pindaris, even the most extensive study of his career, found in Biswanath Ghosh's *British Policy Towards The Pathans And The Pindaris* (1966), makes only a handful of references to the *Amirnama*, drawing almost entirely on British intelligence reports instead.[8] With the exception of Naveena Naqvi's *Writing the Inter-Imperial World*, which includes brief analysis of the text in its survey of Afghan soldier-writings, historians have mostly avoided engaging in interpretative analysis with the text, despite its availability at a plethora of libraries across South Asia and the UK in both its original Persian form and the English translation.[9]

The following thesis seeks to address this lacuna by making use of Prinsep's translation to engage in interpretative analysis of Amir Khan's memoirs through the lens of martial honour, reputation and self-fashioning. This theme has been chosen for two key reasons. Firstly, it accords well with the nature of the source itself and its intended purpose. Throughout the text, Amir Khan's actions are repeatedly framed, explained, assessed and justified through the prism of honour. If Amir Khan's voice is a relatively neglected one, then surely engaging with it through a theme of such evident interest to the man himself would seem a good place to start.

Secondly, it enables this thesis to engage with and contribute to the historiography of the Indian pre-colonial military labour market. Scholars such as Dirk Kolff, Jos Gommans and André Wink have argued that the world of pre-colonial Indian politics and warfare was characterised by pragmatism, intrigue, and highly flexible loyalties and alliances.[10] In the words of Gommans: decision-making in the military labour market "had a simple cold logical outlook based on calculated selfish best interests".[11] As such, "the enemy's loyalty was nearly always for sale. Military alliances were as easily forged as broken, taking no account of so-called ascribed affiliations of caste, religion or ethnicity".[12] Or, in the words of William

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[8] Biswanath Ghosh, *British Policy towards the Pathans and the Pindaris in Central India, 1805–1818* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966).
[9] Naqvi, p. 135.
[10] André Wink, *Land and sovereignty in India : Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarājya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 21-34.
Dirk Kolff, 'The End of an *Ancien Regime*: Colonial War in India, 1798–1818,' in H. L. Wesseling and J. A. de Moor (eds.), *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa* (Leiden: University of Leiden, 1989), pp. 22-50 (pp. 25-27).
Jos Gommans, *The Indian Frontier: Horse and Warband in the Making of Empires* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2018), pp. 187, 246.
[11] Ibid., p. 246.
[12] Ibid., p. 187

Pinch, "as any student of late-eighteenth century empire in India knows, shameless duplicity was the best way to get ahead".[13]

Yet despite this pragmatic, and sometimes even ruthless reality, the worlds of soldiering and politics in the late-eighteenth century were by no means devoid of theoretical notions of honourable conduct, as evidenced by the *Amirnama*'s portrayal of its protagonist as someone "whose conduct and character within and without were clear as the spotless sun".[14] Naveena Naqvi makes the case that in the interlude between the Mughal and British Empires, soldiering individuals articulated their sense of identity in terms of an honour-based "soldierly service ethic". [15]

This then raises the question, how did these theoretical ideals of martial honour sit in relation to the practical realities of operating in the Indian military and political landscape of the time? This question is one that has not been addressed yet in the scholarship. The following study follows the implications of this question through the various stages of Amir Khan's career and social rise. This will occur on two main levels. On one level, this thesis will address this question by engaging with the military labour market scholarship to address several sub-questions that emerge on several occasions when unpacking the *Amirnama's* treatment of martial honour. For example, in a military labour market marked by flexible allegiance, was deserting one's martial employer seen as dishonourable? Or how did communal affiliation stand in relation to honour within the military labour market?

Yet on the second, more prominent level that underpins the narrative thrust of this thesis, it will examine what role martial honour played in these various stages of Amir Khan's career. As such, it will reveal a complex and nuanced picture. Whilst "honourable" conduct could prove conducive to Amir Khan's success, especially in the earlier stages of his career, it increasingly sat at odds with the actions taken to pursue his ambitions and strategic objectives. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated, Amir Khan's very political survival in the face of colonial expansion would be ensured by abandoning a variety of "honourable" obligations to his contemporaries, to the detriment of his reputation. As the *Amirnama* itself is an exercise in self-fashioning, particular attention will be given to the ways in which Amir Khan's more controversial actions could be legitimised, thereby illustrating how the theoretical ideals of martial honour could be reconciled with the practical realities of operating within the late pre-colonial Indian military labour market and political landscape.

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[13] William Pinch, *Warrior Aescetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 146
[14] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 308.
[15] Naqvi., p. 163.

Source Analysis

Before turning to the structure of this thesis, it is important to evaluate the nature of the sources utilised in this study. The *Amirnama* itself was not actually written by Amir Khan himself, rather, it was composed on his behalf by Busawan Lal, his longstanding Kayastha *munshi*.[16] Although he was not the direct author, the text will still be treated in this study as providing Amir Khan's personal perspective on events, as in the words of Prinsep, "the compilation has, however, been made under the chief's dictation…. and the personal adventures are told with such circumstance of time and place, as to bear intrinsic evidence of the quarter whence the story has emanated".[17]

Prinsep himself in his role as translator requires addressing; as Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation* argues, colonial translation was not merely a neutral intellectual exercise but "a site for perpetuating the unequal power relations" of colonial rule.[18] In fact, shortly after Prinsep declares his intentions to provide a "native" voice amidst all the Eurocentric discourse he notes that another major benefit of translating the *Amirnama* is the evidence it provides of pre-colonial India as a time of disruptive anarchy, thereby justifying British colonialism as supposedly bringing peace to the land.[19] The format of this translation is itself influenced by Princep's Eurocentric tastes, as he omits multiple verses of poetry by Lal due to him finding the effusive and highly metaphorical Persian poetry "flowery" and "laughable".[20] He also omits an entire chapter of the *Amirnama* due to him considering it irrelevant to Amir Khan himself and its information inaccurate, and his annotations include his own value judgments of events on several occasions.[21] This begs the question: what, other than practical and linguistic considerations, can justify the use of Prinsep's translation? The answer is that, despite his truncation of the text for stylistic reasons, what he does translate appears to be quite accurate. Having been Persian Secretary to the Government for twelve years by this point at a time when Persian was still an integral part of the colonial bureaucracy and communication with Indian elites, his grasp on the language was inevitably firm, and his translation of even passages critical of the British or detailing their defeats suggests a degree of trust can be placed in the translation.[22]

Perhaps of even greater bearing on this thesis are the distortions within the original work itself, rather than the translation. Prinsep considered Amir Khan to be an overall reliable

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[16] Lal, *Memoirs,* p. xii.
[17] Ibid., p. viii.
[18] Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (California: University of California Press, 1992), back cover.
[19] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. xi-xii.
[20] Ibid., pp. xi-xii.
[21] Ibid., pp. 300, 308, 400, 479.
[22] Arbuthnot, p. 393.

narrator, noting that during his interview with Bentinck the Nawab acknowledged "freely his errors and failures", and did not take "any pains to gloss over the motives of his actions, which were of most ambiguous morality".[23] That being said, comparing the *Amirnama* with other contemporary sources reveals several not inconsiderable discrepancies, and some outright distortions of events in Amir Khan's favour. This is of particular importance to analysing the theme of martial honour, as if the *Amirnama* seeks to portray Amir Khan's career in a more favourable light, then it begs the question: Was martial honour an important factor within Amir Khan's military and political career itself or were his actions merely presented through the lens of honour and in a more honourable light subsequently during the compilation of this memoir?

In order to help address this paradox, the *Amirnama*'s claims will be verified with other contemporary sources, when possible, to help build a more complete picture. Fortunately, for the early years of Amir Khan's career, a highly relevant contemporary non-colonial source exists, the *Waqai-Holkar*.[24] Composed in 1808 by a former employee of the Maratha Maharaja (king) Yashwant Rao Holkar, Mohan Singh, the text is ostensibly a history of the Holkar dynasty and Yashwant Rao himself "based on what he heard" from Bhawani Shankar, Holkar's *bakshi* (paymaster).[25] As Amir Khan was Holkar's right-hand man and companion in arms for the best part of a decade, this text provides great insight into this part of his career from the perspective of someone who was often an eyewitness and even a participant in the events in question. Furthermore, Shankar had actually worked with Amir Khan prior to his partnership with Holkar, and it was on Shankar's recommendation that Amir Khan was hired by the Maratha Maharaja.[26] As such, Shankar's perspective through Mohan Singh provides valuable insight into how Amir Khan's "reputation" and "character" were perceived at the time.

Yet the *Waqai-Holkar* is an exception, as inevitably the majority of relevant, contemporary sources available in the English language are colonial ones. The colonial sources utilised in this thesis fall into two main categories: the histories and memoirs of British soldier-administrators, and colonial intelligence despatches. Of the first category, Sir John Malcolm's *A Memoir of Central India* (1823), Colonel James Tod's highly influential *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han* (1829-32), James Baillie Fraser's and Colonel James Skinner's *Military Memoir of Lieut.-Col. James Skinner* (1851), and Prinsep's *A Narrative of the Political and Military Transactions of British India* (1820) constitute the main colonial sources engaged with in this thesis. Most of them are highly critical and disparaging of Amir

[23] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. vi.
[24] Mohan Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, trans. by Jadunath Sarkar, ed. by Raghubir Sinh (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1998).
[25] Naqvi, p. 131.
[26] Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, pp. 70-71.

Khan, with Malcolm designating him a cowardly schemer "who always strove to gain his ends by pliancy rather than firmness" and Tod declaring him a "villain" and a "traitor".[27]

Yet despite their often subjective tone, they contain the personal insights of those who had interacted with, negotiated and campaigned against him, and as such, cannot be lightly disregarded. Tod was the political agent for much of Rajasthan in the years following Amir Khan's influence there, whilst Skinner, an Anglo-Indian commander of irregular cavalry, had campaigned against Amir Khan on multiple occasions.[28] Furthermore, Malcolm's *Memoir* in particular draws extensively on relevant local informants and sources, and as such contains a considerable number of anecdotes on Amir Khan's political and military adventures.[29] In the aftermath of the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-18) and his defeat of the Holkarshahi army in battle, Malcolm was made commissioner of Malwa, the central Indian province that included the Holkarshahi state. As such, from 1818 to 1821, Malcolm had both considerable control over, and interaction with, the state that played a central role in much of Amir Khan's military and political career, providing him with extensive access to both archival material and personal interviews with relevant political and military figures.[30] It is for this reason that, despite his often partisan tone, Malcolm's *Memoir* is the colonial history used most extensively in this thesis to corroborate some of the *Amirnama*'s claims.

The second category of sources are the products of the colonial intelligence network, and as such, were authored by an eclectic assortment of individuals, ranging from Governor-Generals and Political Residents to Indian court newswriters and spies employed by the EIC. In fact, even Amir Khan himself and his associates are the authors of some of these documents, in the form of letters that were either sent to colonial administrators as part of negotiations or intercepted by the colonial intelligence apparatus. For nearly two decades at the start of the nineteenth century, Amir Khan was a potent rival and adversary of the British and their local allies, and subsequently was the object of close observation, bordering on obsession, by the colonial intelligence network. The sources produced by these security anxieties have the benefit of temporal proximity to the events discussed in this thesis, as they were usually composed either during or in the immediate aftermath of the events they reported on. However, these documents are also shaped by the parameters,

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[27] John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India: Including Malwa, and Adjoining Provinces : with the History, and Copious Illustrations, of the Past and Present Condition of that Country*, 2 volumes (London: Kingsbury, Parbury & Allen, 1823), I, pp. 213, 334, 337
James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, 2 volumes, Coronation edition (Calcutta: The Society for the Resuscitation of Indian Literature, 1902-14), II, (1914), p. 503.
[28] Stephen Edward Wheeler, 'Tod, James', *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900*, ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 63 volumes (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1885-1900), LVI (1898), pp. 424-425 (p. 424)
Ibid., 'Skinner, James', Ibid., LII (1897), pp. 342-43 (p. 342).
[29] Jack Harrington, '"No longer Merchants, but Sovereigns of a vast Empire": The writings of Sir John Malcolm and British India, 1810 to 1833' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2009), p. 152
Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 231.
[30] Harrington, p. 139.

imperatives, and exigencies of colonial security policy in their representations of Amir Khan's actions, and as such must be handled with caution. It is only through a careful and combined integrated analysis of the *Amirnama* itself together with the *Waqai-Holkar*, colonial memoirs and histories and the colonial intelligence documents that Amir Khan's deployment of martial honour both during and after his mercenary career can be properly understood.

Structure

This thesis will unpack the role of martial honour in Amir Khan's career and the *Amirnama* in a broadly chronological manner by following the stages of his career, commencing with Amir Khan's emergence onto the Hindustani military labour market and ending with his submission to the British and its aftermath. However, multiple exceptions will be made to this chronology in cases where a more thematic approach is appropriate.

Amir Khan's career took place against the backdrop of some of the most complex, and also some of the most influential, events of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century India. As such, the first chapter provides a contextual overview of both the India of his time and his own personal career, set against that backdrop.

The second chapter, covering from Amir Khan's employment by the Nawabs of Bhopal up to his contract with Holkar, examines the role of honour and performative martial bravery on the battleground, in creating a favourable reputation and, as a result, securing career progression, in the late pre-colonial military labour market. At the same time, care will be taken to examine the other themes that arise when analysing this stage, especially the "honourable" performance of contracts, and the "Afghan name", using them to engage with the findings of the scholarship on the Indian military labour market.

The third chapter will analyse Amir Khan's position as one of the most prominent North Indian generals and Holkar's right hand man in the Maratha Civil War and the Second Anglo-Maratha War, revealing his use of clemency towards defeated enemies in light of the shifting nature of alliances in pre-colonial Indian warfare, demonstrating that it could wield tangible benefits in his military career. The *Amirnama*'s framing of Amir Khan vis-a-vis his military employer, Holkar, will also be examined, thereby shedding light on how the equally changeable nature of allegiance in the Indian military labour market could be reconciled with cultural taboos on dishonourably deserting one's employer.

The fourth chapter unpacks the role of honour in the *Amirnama*'s portrayal of Amir Khan's increasing political manoeuvring following his split from Yashwant Rao. For more concentrated analysis, this chapter is split into two sections. The first section examines a

campaign led by Amir Khan to reestablish his political involvement in the Holkarshahi *durbar* in 1810 to reveal his deployment of honour to legitimise it, whilst dealing heavily with the intricacies of source analysis.

The second section examines his political manoeuvring in Rajasthan through the lens of three case studies, illustrating his use of political murders and deaths to secure his strategic aims, contrary to the ideals of martial honour, with care taken to explore the motifs of rhetorical reconciling used to justify this discrepancy.

Finally, the last chapter contextualises Amir Khan's submission to the British in December 1817 in terms of its wider geo-political ramifications and effect on his reputation with his Indian peers to gain a clearer understanding of the *Amirnama*'s conscious rewritings of the past and portrayal of its patron as a stalwart defender of the honour of the Afghan name in the face of British expansion.

Chapter 1: Setting the Scene: c. 1780-1818

The Geopolitical Context of Amir Khan's India

At the end of the eighteenth century, the geopolitics of the Indian subcontinent was marked by two distinguishing features: the rise of the East India Company, and a variety of Indian polities and communal affiliations that had asserted, or in some cases, re-asserted themselves amidst the decline of the Mughal Empire. Of the second category, the most prominent were the Marathas, Hindu Marathi speaking warriors from the region now constituting the state of Maharashtra, in Western India. Despite setbacks, the Marathas, in the words of Mesrob Vartavarian, "came closest to constructing a transregional empire" across India out of the post-Mughal successor states, although by the late eighteenth century their "empire" more closely resembled a loosely-held confederation of regional dynasties.[31] Of these, the five most prominent were the Sindhian dynasty, then based in Ujjain, the Holkar dynasty, then based in Maheshwar, the Gaekwads of Baroda, the Bhonsles of Nagpur, and the Peshwa (prime minister) in Pune. Whilst the other four were theoretically subordinate to the Peshwa, the symbolic head of state, in reality they were mostly independent, even engaging in internecine warfare.[32] With powerful artillery and a professional army drilled in the latest European military techniques, the Sindhian dynasty had emerged preeminent by the last two decades of the eighteenth century, playing a role in setting the tone for overall Maratha policy.[33]

To the northwest of the Maratha states lay the various Hindu Rajput kingdoms in the vast desert region of Rajasthan. A communal affiliation shaped by martial identity, Rajput military culture placed heavy emphasis on honour and self-sacrificial bravery on the battlefield.[34] With longstanding, prestigious dynasties and powerful fortresses, the three most powerful Rajput states were Mewar, or Udaipur, Amber, or Jaipur, and Marwar, or Jodhpur.[35] Previously an integral part of the Mughal Empire and its military machine, the Rajput states now faced Maratha invasions and tribute demands, whilst also fighting amongst themselves.[36]

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[31] Jon Wilson, *India Conquered: Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire* (London, New York, Sydney, Toronto, New Delhi: Simon & Schuster UK, 2016), pp. 212-13.
[32] André Wink, *Land and sovereignty in India : Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarājya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 82
N. G. Rathod, *The Great Maratha Mahadaji Scindia* (Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 1994), pp. 167-71.
[33] Wink, p. 80
Rathod, pp. 167-71
Amar Farooqui, *Sindias and the Raj: Princely Gwalior C. 1800-1850* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), p. 9.
[34] Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 53-56.
[35] R. K. Saxena, *Maratha Relations with the Major States of Rajputana (1761-1818 AD)* (Delhi: S. Chand & Co. (Pvt.) Ltd., 1973), pp. 2-23.
[36] Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*, pp. 53-56
Saxena, pp. 2-23

Nestled between the Maratha states in central India lay the small state of Bhopal, led by Muslim, Afghan-identifying Nawabs. Carved out in 1709-17 by the opportunistic Afghan adventurer Dost Muhammad Khan through a combination of mercenary service, brutal intrigue and sheer force of arms, by the time of Amir Khan it was racked by a series of tumultuous power struggles.[37]

To the northeast of the Maratha states, in the north-west of what is now Uttar Pradesh, lay another region shaped by Afghan mercenaries: Rohillkhand. Formerly known as Katehr, the region had been transformed through the large-scale migration of Afghans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a process of state-formation in the first half of the eighteenth century led by Afghan horse traders and mercenaries.[38] As Gommans demonstrates, mercenaries from Rohillkhand were in high demand, and possessed a reputation for being skilled cavalry troops.[39] The Rohilla *riyasat* (state) had been destroyed and reduced to a rump state in a 1774 invasion by the East India Company and their ally, the neighbouring Nawab of Awadh. In the words of Gommans, "the expansion of the British East India Company gradually reduced the north-Indian market for Afghan man- and horsepower".[40] However, some young Rohilla Afghan warriors persisted in following the paths of their ancestors during the late eighteenth century and left their occupied homeland for mercenary service abroad.[41]

One such enterprising individual was Amir Khan himself. From the age of twenty, in 1788, he travelled across India, from Rajasthan in the north to the Konkan in the south in search of mercenary career options, yet mostly only attained unstable, temporary contracts, or faced outright rejection altogether.[42]

Stage 1: Building a Reputation: 1794-98

His fortunes began to rise after obtaining employment with the Nawabs of Bhopal in 1794, even receiving command of the two most prominent forts in Bhopal due to his successful cultivation of a reputation for bravery and courage. Yet the political instability in Bhopal interrupted his career progression, and for a period of four years he fluctuated between

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G. R. Parihar, *Marwar And The Marathas* (Jodhpur: Hindi Sahitya Mandir, 1965), pp. 98-140.

[37] Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth-Century India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 13

Zakir Husain, "The Rise of Dost Muhammad Khan (1708-1728), the First Nawab of Bhopal', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 62 (2001), 309-316

Sultan Shah Jahan Begum, *The Taj-ul Ikbal Tarikh Bhopal; or, The History of Bhopal*, trans. by H.C. Barstow (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1876), pp. 1-6, 18-23.

[38] Jos Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710-1780* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 104-43.

[39] Ibid., p. 137.

[40] Ibid., p. 179.

[41] Naqvi, pp. 119, 141-43.

[42] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 13-19.

mercenary service for the Nawabs of Bhopal, an enigmatic pair of minor Rajput outlaw princes, and the Sindhian general Bala Rao.[43]

Stage 2: Service with Holkar: 1798-1806

His fortunes improved significantly in 1798, when he entered into a contract with Yashwant Rao Holkar, the outlawed, illegitimate youngest son of the previous Holkar Maharaja (king), Tukoji Holkar. The current Sindhian Maharaja, Daulot Rao Sindhia, had taken full advantage of the outbreak of a succession crisis in 1797 following Tukoji's death to install the oldest Holkar brother, Kashi Rao, on the Holkarshahi *musnud* (throne) as his puppet, through the Peshwa's assent. Furthermore, on the 17th of September 1797, he orchestrated the murder of Yashwant Rao's second oldest brother, Malhar Rao, through a night assault, to prevent any future resistance. Against this backdrop, to help him in his war against Kashi Rao and Daulot Rao Sindhia, Yashwant Rao was recruiting competent commanders, including Amir Khan himself.[44]

Seizing Maheshwar in January 1799, and with it, the Holkarshahi *musnud* (throne), Yashwant Rao and Amir Khan's campaign escalated into a full scale Maratha Civil War, against Sindhia leading an unequal alliance with the young Peshwa, Baji Rao II. A third faction was led by Lakshmi Bai, Yamuna Bai, and Bhagirathi Bai, the widows of the previous Sindhian Maharaja Mahadji Sindhia, Daulot Rao Sindhia's granduncle. Their *casus belli* was Daulot Rao's abandonment of his pledge to provide them with independent provisions sufficient for their maintenance, yet despite gaining substantial support within the Sindhian military their rebellion subsided in 1802.[45] By contrast, despite several major defeats, Yashwant Rao had, through his talent for mounted warfare and lightning-speed, debilitating plundering raids, succeeded in gaining the upper hand. On the 25th of October 1802, Yashwant Rao Holkar, with his right-hand Amir Khan by his side, seized the capital of the Maratha Confederation, Pune, after decisively defeating a joint Sindhian-Peshwa force outside the city. Ignoring Holkar's entreaties to return, Peshwa Baji Rao II fled to a British ship, arriving at the EIC-controlled port city of Bassein in December.[46]

It was then that Peshwa Baji Rao II made a decision that would change the course of Indian history forever. On the 31st of December he signed a subordinate treaty with the British in return for their assistance in reclaiming his *musnud*, thereby essentially reconstituting the Maratha Confederation as an EIC vassal state. Horrified, Doulot Rao Sindhia, Yashwant Rao

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[43] Ibid., pp. 20-49.
[44] Ibid., pp. 95-97.
Govind Sardesai, *New History Of The Marathas*, 3 volumes (Bombay: Phoenix Publications, 1946-1948), III (1948), pp. 330-31, 363-66.
[45] Ibid., pp. 337-342, 365-66.
[46] Ibid., pp. 367-75
Joshua Provan, *Bullocks, Grain, and Good Madeira* (Warwick: Helion & Company, 2021), pp. ix-xii.

Holkar, and the Nagpur Maharaja, Raghuji Bhonsle, all readied for war against the British.[47] Whilst Holkar initially watched and waited as his longstanding enemy Daulot Rao and the British weakened each other in war throughout 1803, it would be his turn to clash swords with the EIC in 1804 following the Sindhian-Nagpur coalition's defeat.[48] In the war that followed, Amir Khan too would play an important role, achieving considerable success against British detachments in the Bundelkhand region through the use of swift cavalry ambushes, yet suffered heavy defeats when he invaded his homeland of Rohillkhand in an attempt to oust the British occupiers.[49]

Ultimately, the Holkarshahi stage of the Second Anglo-Maratha War would end in a kind of stalemate, with the British returning most of the Holkarshahi territories they had seized over the course of the war in a treaty ratified on January 5th, 1806.[50] As a result of their successful campaign against Sindhia and Nagpur, the EIC had made considerable territorial gains in the south and east of India, as well as gaining a symbolic mandate to rule by seizing Delhi, and with it, gaining control over the Mughal Emperor, now a figurehead.[51] Yet the war had taken a heavy financial toll on the EIC's coffers, and in 1805 the expansionist Governor-General Richard Wellesley was recalled and replaced by the non-interventionist Charles Cornwallis, followed shortly afterwards by George Barlow. As such, the EIC followed a considerably non-interventionist policy in the years after the Second Anglo-Maratha War, particularly in regards to Rajasthan.[52]

Stage 3: Independent Pursuit of Political Power: 1806-1817

One player to benefit particularly from this turn of events was Amir Khan. Having received the lands of Sironj, Tonk, Rampura and other small territories from Holkar after the Second Anglo-Maratha as his reward for his longstanding service, Amir Khan parted ways with his employer and partner in late 1806 to pursue his own ambitions.[53] War had broken out in Rajasthan between the young Raja (king) Jagat Singh of Jaipur and Raja Man Singh of Jodhpur over their shared and competing desire to marry the young princess of Udaipur,

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[47] Wilson, p. 213.
[48]Provan, pp. 44-45, 124-25.
[49] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 200-11, 250-62.
[50] Ibid., pp. 285-65.
[51] Wilson, pp. 217
Provan, p. 174.
[52] Ibid., p.p .170-71
Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 34, 36
Aryama Ghosh, 'Dacoits, Dragoons, and Diplomats: Amir Khan Pindari and the British Pacification of Malwa and Rajputana, 1803–18' in *Warfare and Society in British India, 1757–1947*, ed. by Ashutosh Kumar and Kaushik Roy (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023), pp. 102-21 (pp. 106, 111).
[53] Sir Roper Lethbridge, *The Golden Book of India: A Genealogical and Biographical Dictionary of the Ruling Princes, Chiefs, Nobles, and Other Personages, Titled or Decorated of the Indian Empire* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1893)
Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 110, 240
Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 307-310.

Krishna Kumari, and into this clash stepped Amir Khan.[54] Initially contracting his mercenary services to Jagat Singh and Jaipur, he switched sides to Jodhpur for a lucrative contract, helping Man Singh turn the tide of the war and gaining strong political influence over Jodhpur in the process.[55] Meanwhile, in the Holkarshahi *durbar*, he stepped into the vacuum left by a severe worsening mental illness affecting Yashwant Rao to assert his own paramount position.[56] Holkar's wife, and soon-to-be widow in 1811, Tulsi Bai, was ruling as regent, yet she struggled to maintain control in the face of repeated mutinies by fractious army officers.[57] Appointing a political representative and leveraging financial demands from the Holkarshahi treasury, Amir Khan maintained this position by styling himself as the dynasty's protector.[58]

His connection with the Holkarshahi dynasty also helped provide a pretext for his demands for tribute from neighbouring states, and the invasions taken to enforce them.[59] In 1809 he launched a devastating invasion against Nagpur.[60] In the years that followed, he used both threatened and actual force in the form of widespread plundering to extort his financial, contractual and political demands from Udaipur, Jaipur, and Jodhpur until, in the words of R.K. Saxena, he "completely mastered Rajputana [Rajasthan] and became the undisputed arbiter".[61]

This stage marked the high point of his political and military power. His Afghan-dominated army would be augmented on campaigns by thousands of Pindaris, independent irregular light cavalry skilled at lightning-strike raids and disrupting enemy civilian and logistical infrastructure.[62] In the words of Malcolm, he "appeared to those at a distance as the head of the Mahomedan [Muslim] soldiery of India", and was capable of marshalling "half the plunderers of India under his standard".[63] Yet his control was ultimately insecure, as his Afghan troops and their *sardars* (commanders) frequently resorted to mutinies to enforce their financial demands, even subjecting him to physical violence on occasion.[64] Amir Khan, did, however, also succeed in forging close, even familial, ties with some of his principal *sardars*, including Muhammad Iyaz Khan, his father-in-law, and Ghafur Khan, his brother-in-law and political representative at the Holkarshahi *durbar*.[65] Owing to his

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[54] Ibid., pp. 295-98, 311-13.
[55] Saxena, pp. 206-221.
[56] Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 77-81.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., pp. 77-84, 134-41.
[59] Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 337
Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 77-84, 134-41.
[60] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 368-85
[61]Saxena, pp. 5, 215-51.
[62] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 367-68, 375, 380, 382, 385, 391-92
[63] Malcolm, pp. 346, 348.
[64] Ibid.
Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 345-46, 372, 374-76, 402-05.
[65] Ibid., pp. 301, 347-48, 366, 390, 395, 415, 458, 465,

insecure position vis-a-vis his troops, his primary objectives, whether in war or peace, was to secure and maintain the financial inflows necessary for holding his army together.[66]

Stage 4: Becoming a British Vassal: 1817-18

After facing repeated devastating Pindari raids, the EIC assembled an army of 110,000 troops and more than 500 guns in 1817.[67] Determined to uproot what they saw as a "predatory system", colonial soldier-administrators aimed at establishing a monopoly on violence and the military labour market by subordinating, or if necessary crushing, a plethora of interconnected North and Central Indian powers.[68] These included the Maratha states, who they held responsible for sheltering the Pindaris, Amir Khan himself, whom they saw as one of the foremost "predatory" powers, and the most prominent Pindari chiefs, Chitu Khan, Karim Khan and Wasil Muhammad.[69] By contrast, Baji Rao II resented the tightening of British control and British subversion of Maratha power, and began making preparations of his own, promising financial compensation to all who joined his anti-colonial resistance.[70] Fearing for their livelihoods in the face of the impending threat of EIC monopolisation of the military labour market, in November 1817 the Holkarshahi military officers seized power in their state and rallied behind the Peshwa's cause.[71]

It was at this juncture that Amir Khan had to make a decision. On one hand, the coalition of the Peshwa, the Pindaris and the Holkarshahi state all eagerly sought his assistance.[72] On the other, desiring to achieve his separation from the Pindari-Maratha cause and gain control of his powerful artillery arsenal, the EIC sought his compliance in a subsidiary alliance.[73] Astutely hedging his bets, Amir Khan had waited until after the Third Anglo-Maratha War commenced. The British army had not only won a significant victory against Baji Rao's forces but were converging on his own position before he finally chose a side.[74] On the 16th of December, a subsidiary treaty with the EIC making Amir Khan the Nawab of the new "Princely State" of Tonk was ratified, leaving behind a plethora of his prior social ties and obligations in the process.[75] As a Nawab in a reconstituted Indian social order, Amir Khan now spent his days, in the words of the *Amirnama,* "cultivating the arts of peace" through

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[66] Malcolm, *Memoir*, pp. 338, 347-48.
[67] Wilson, pp. 223-25.
[68] Ibid.,
Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 345
Ibid., *The Political History of India, from 1784 to 1823*, 2 volumes (London: John Murray, 1826), II, pp. cl-cci.
[69] Ibid.,
Ghosh, British Policy, p. 262-83
Wilson, pp. 223-25.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Prinsep, pp. 288-89.
[72] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 464-65.
[73] Malcolm, *Political History,* p. Clx.
[74] Lal, *Memoirs*, 462-64.
[75] Ibid., pp. 466-67.

living a blissful life of Quran study, “redressing wrongs and administering equal justice”, and improving Tonk’s infrastructure “for the convenience and comfort of his subjects”.[76] The transformation of one of late pre-colonial India’s most enigmatic social-climbers was thus complete.

[76] Ibid., p. 485.

Chapter 2: Forging a Reputation for Martial Honour in the Military Labour Market: 1794-98

According to the *Amirnama*, Amir Khan was from his very birth cosmically predestined for greatness, born as he was "at the most favorable conjunction of the planets".[77] Yet despite his "signs of high destiny", Amir Khan's attempts to enter the military labour economy as he passed into adulthood were fraught with difficulty.[78] His first attempt at soldiering ended in failure, when, upon running away from home in an attempt to join the army of the notorious Rohilla warlord Ghulam Qadir Khan at first Lucknow and then Meerut, "neither occasion opened for him the prospect he desired", forcing him to return home to his worried father. Leaving home again upon his twentieth birthday, Amir Khan's ambitions were once again frustrated by Sindhia's French General Benoît de Boigne, who "refused to engage the Ameer on the ground of his youth".[79] The impression provided by the *Amirnama* of the years that followed is that they were hard years of fluctuating fortunes for him.[80] This is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that, nearly five years after his second foray into the military labour market, Amir Khan was reduced to such dire straits that he was forced to sell his *sitar* to afford a "rupee's worth of pulse and four annas worth of opium" just to feed the forty to fifty men that still stuck by him.[81]

This raises the question: how was Amir Khan able to transform his fortunes from such humble beginnings to become one of the main players within the pre-colonial Indian military labour market? This chapter argues that crucial to his rise within the mercenary market from an impoverished, minor *jemadar* (cavalry officer) to a *sardar* of prominence was the establishment of a favourable, "honourable" reputation first and foremost. This, it will be posited, occurred through conspicuous displays of bravery and martial exploits on the battlefield that made him appear a sensible hire and worthy of promotion. The implications of this 'reputation'-centric conception of honourable conduct will also be explored in the context of the wider scholarship, with the aim of shedding particular insights into conceptions of "loyalty" and allegiance within the military labour market, and the symbiotic relationship of martial honour with Afghan mercenary involvement in the military labour market. The *Amirnama* claims that it was only at Bhopal, a full six years after leaving home, "that the rise of the fortunes of the Ameer" finally commenced; so this chapter will examine the formative period in Amir Khan's mercenary career from his arrival at Bhopal in 1794 to his employment with Holkar in 1798.

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[77] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 9.
[78] Ibid., p. 10.
[79] Ibid., pp. 11-12.
[80] Ibid., pp. 14-17.
[81] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

A Dilemma of Honour: Social Sanctuary and Obligation

The *Amirnama*'s narrative of this rise begins, tellingly, with a matter of honour. The son of the late Nawab of Bhopal, Ghaus Muhammad Khan, had seized control after a bitter power struggle, and subsequently sought the lives of the two commanders who still defied him, Nuwab Khan and Darab Khan. He attempted to purchase Amir Khan's loyalty with generous offers, but "the Ameer, however, was, on a point of honor, compelled to hold back; for Nuwab Khan, and Darab Khan had claimed the protection of their lives at his hands".[82] As such, Amir Khan is portrayed as "honourable" through his fulfilment of a social obligation, due to these commanders having sought sanctuary with him. At first glance, this incident illustrates the potential occupational hazards of attempting to behave in an "honourable" manner in a cutthroat military and political arena, as after saving these two commanders lives, Amir Khan was initially refused employment by Bhopal's new Nawab.[83]

Enhancing his "fame and rank" at Bhopal through the Performance of Martial Bravery

However, the narration that follows illustrates the importance of forming a reputation for martial honour and bravery within this environment in the first place. The *Amirnama* notes that, as "none of the Sirdars [commanders, or *sardars*] of Bhopal were willing to undertake any thing for the relief of" the city of Hoshangabad, then under siege by the Maratha army of Nagpur, Ghaus Muhammad Khan reversed his decision and hired Amir Khan, as he "had both experienced and witnessed the boldness of the Ameer and his intrepidity in action".[84] Whilst the *Amirnama* itself is silent on the specifics of Amir Khan's career in the month before Ghaus Muhammad Khan successfully seized power, the *Waqai Holkar* helps to fill in this gap and furnish us with a sharper understanding of why the former had caught the eye of the new Nawab. We are told that Amir Khan was actively engaged within the power struggle on the side of his employer, Ghaus Muhammad Khan's primary rival and enemy, Amir Muhammad Khan, and that, "during these fights, heroic deeds were done by Amir Khan, which enhanced his fame and rank".[85]

Amir Khan's subsequent employment by Ghaus Muhammad Khan to break the siege of Hoshangabad would provide him with further crucial opportunities to demonstrate bravery, and thereby enhance his "fame and rank". The *Amirnama* notes that, whilst on a reconnaissance mission alone at night, Amir Khan discovered the Maratha camp directly blocking his troops' path to Hoshangabad. Observing "that they were in complete security, with no adequate watch kept", he "accordingly reflected that if God would but second his

[82] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 21.
[83] Ibid., p. 22.
[84] Ibid., pp. 23-24.
[85] Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, pp. 69-70.

ambition, now was the time for a bold effort to achieve reputation". Misleading the three hundred horse and foot under his command into thinking that the road ahead was clear of enemy troops so as not to dampen their resolve, Amir Khan led them right to the enemy camp, successfully rallying them to disperse the startled Maratha warriors and cross the Narmada river to join the Hoshangabad defence. Although the city's *Qiladar* (fort commandant) "had been tampered with [bribed] by the enemy" and "surrendered the place without a shot being fired", Amir Khan's bravery was not entirely in vain. Upon hearing an account of his night assault, the Nawab "received him with high honor, and gave him the command of the old Fort of Bhopal and of Futtehgurh [Fatehgarh]", the two most important forts in Bhopal state, demonstrating the rewards of enacting bravery and martial honour within the military labour economy.[86]

Weathering the Volatility of the Military Labour Market through Martial Bravery

The performance of martial bravery also enabled Amir Khan to weather the volatility of the Indian labour market, in which employment opportunities could be lost as quickly as gained. Bhopal especially appears to have been engulfed at this time in a seemingly never-ending series of fractious power struggles and coups; Amir Khan's position as a military commander there suffered as a result.[87] Suspicious of Amir Khan's rising fortunes, a new and ambitious political contender Murid Muhammad Khan orchestrated his "disgrace" and exile from Bhopal, resulting in a four month period of unemployment.[88] Although he subsequently regained Bhopali employment when Murid Muhammad Khan decided he would prove a valuable asset in a planned coup d'etat, Amir Khan was once again dismissed "eight or nine months" later due to "a quarrel arising between him and Ruhum Khan, the Commandant in Chief of the Bhopal troops".[89]

Once again cast adrift, Amir Khan made a career choice that, on the surface, appeared neither very prestigious, nor particularly promising: he would join the forces of two outlawed, minor Rajput former-princes of Raghugarh, Durjan Sal Khichi and his nephew Jai Singh, who had "taken to a life of promiscuous plunder, living in the neighbouring deserts and wild", after being dispossessed of their lands by Daulot Rao Sindhia.[90] Yet through battlefield exploits, Amir Khan was able to transform his membership within a bandit army into an opportunity, not a setback. The Amirnama claims that its patron "became a *Palkee Nasheen*, that is, assumed the privilege of riding in a palkee [palanquin]" after valiantly

[86] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 24-26.
[87] Begum, *Tarikh Bhopal*, pp. 18-23
[88] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 26-28.
[89] Ibid., pp. 28-29.
[90] Ibid., p. 30.

defeating a two-thousand strong joint-Holkar-Sindhian Maratha force with only 200 cavalry in the face of heavy artillery fire.[91]

Tellingly, there is clear evidence that this anecdote reflects far more than Amir Khan's own post-facto "heroic" self-fashioning. The *Waqai Holkar* notes that, having "exerted himself hard" and performed "heroic actions" during his employment by Durjan Sal, Amir Khan "was rewarded with the command of a *risala* [cavalry brigade] of 500 horse".[92] Even Malcolm, elsewhere so disparaging of his martial bravery and conduct, admits that "Ameer Khan distinguished himself in one of the first actions that these Rajpoot chiefs had with their Mahratta enemies; in consequence of which he was raised to the command of five hundred men, presented with a palanquin, and became a personage of some importance in this predatory army".[93] As such, it is clear that by cultivating a reputation for bravery, Amir Khan was able to not only secure favourable offers of employment and military promotions, but also successfully navigate the fluctuating fortunes and setbacks of the North Indian military labour market.

Cowardice and Courage: Situating Amir Khan's Martial Bravery within the Scholarship of the Military Labour Market

These conspicuous displays of valour on the battlefield by Amir Khan are significant when viewed in light of the claims of the scholarship of the Indian military labour market. Both Kolff and Gommans have drawn attention to reports by eighteenth-century European observers that Indian cavalry and mercenary troops were often highly circumspect on the battlefield out of self-interested pragmatism.[94] In the words of Gommans, "Obviously, their commercial outlook often functioned as a brake on their valour and courage at the battlefield. Only when they found themselves clearly in a position of superior strength were they prepared to actually engage the enemy".[95]

However, I would argue that, whilst his "commercial outlook" certainly played a role in his martial decision-making, for Amir Khan at this stage of his career the need to "achieve reputation" ultimately trumped the impulse for circumspection on the battlefield described by Gommans and Kolff. This can be seen in the *Amirnama*'s description of his decision to undertake the defence of the city of Shujalpur on behalf of the Maratha Peshwa against a superior invading force under Bala Rao, following the end of his martial service with the outlaw Rajputs. When offers of service were despatched by the city's *kamavisdar* (local

[91] Ibid., p. 30-31
[92] Singh, *Waqai Holkar*, p. 70.
[93] Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 326.
[94] Kolff, pp. 25-27
Gommans, *The Indian Frontier*, p. 161.
[95] Ibid.

administrative official of the Peshwa), Amir Khan initially made the calculated decision to protect his interests and refuse, as he "knew that Bala Rao intended to attack the place, and did not wish to be drawn into the quarrel".[96]

Yet upon being accused of cowardice by the *kamavisdar*'s agents, this "brake" on "his valour and courage" was loosened. We are told that Amir Khan accepted the contract, despite the odds, to protect his reputation. Furthermore, the Amirnama claims that, in the battle that ensued Amir Khan not only "rode into the enemy's line" with only "ten or twelve horse", but personally slew both of the enemy detachment's two commanders; all despite having a painful matchlock wound on his leg.[97] As much as this strains credulity, it may well be based on a kernel of truth; the *Waqai Holkar* notes that Amir Khan "highly pleased" the *kamavisdar* "by his splendid deeds" during his time at Shujalpur.[98]

This risk-taking behaviour, despite the fact that Amir Khan was a mercenary, becomes understandable when it is considered that, at this stage of his career, his "commercial outlook" and his need to "achieve reputation" were often one and the same. As illustrated so far, cultivating a reputation for bravery ensured his employment and career progression at Bhopal, and it enabled him to weather the volatility of the labour market successfully thereafter. As such, during this formative stage in his career, martial honour, in the form of conspicuous bravery, could prove compatible with, and even conducive to, the practical realities of achieving success within the military labour market.

<u>*Namak Halali*: Faithfully Fulfilling Contracts as Honourable Behaviour</u>

The Amirnama's account of Amir Khan's defence of Shujalpur is also significant for illustrating the importance placed in contemporary Indian cultural conceptions of martial honour on faithfully performing contractual obligations, emically referred to as being "true to one's salt", or *namak halali*. The Amirnama claims that, whilst defending Shujalpur, Amir Khan had received offers of service from Bala Rao to persuade him to switch allegiances, yet he refused, stating that "honor would not permit him at that time to accept". He was more than willing to "engage with him [Bala Rao]", but only "when the siege", and, by extension, his contract with the *kamavisdar*, "was over".[99]

In contrast to this emphasis on faithfully fulfilling contracts, Kolff's seminal article, *The End of an Ancien Regime*, posits that as a result of the ever-changing nature of allegiance and loyalty in the late pre-colonial Indian labour market, notions of treachery or desertion were absent. In his own words: "To take leave of a master, whose "salt one had eaten", did neither

[96] Lal, *Memoirs*. pp. 39-40.
[97] Ibid., pp. 36-40.
[98] Singh, *Waqai Holkar*, p. 71.
[99] Lal, Memoirs, pp. 40-41

amount to a breach of faith or the end of a relationship".[100] Yet whilst this fluctuating, pragmatic sense of loyalty may have been the practical reality of how allegiance functioned within the military labour market, I would argue that this behaviour was not quite as socially or culturally acceptable as Kolff suggests, despite its prevalence.

We need not merely take the Amirnama's word that breaching one's contract was considered dishonourable; the case of the *Waqai Holkar*'s primary source of information, Yashwant Rao Holkar's *bakshi* (paymaster), Bhawani Shankar, is instructive in this regard. When, having faithfully served Holkar for seven years, he defected to the British during the Second Anglo-Maratha War in April 1805, he was met with intense condemnation by the inhabitants of his newfound home, Delhi. Declared a *namak haram* (one who is false to his salt, i.e., a traitor), he was followed by throngs of jeering street children calling out this label every time he left his house. Furthermore, even his house became colloquially known as *namak haram ki haveli* (the mansion of a traitor, literally translated as "the mansion of one who is not true to his salt"), a designation it retains to this very day.[101]

With such negative potential social ramifications of deserting one's employer in this way, the *Amirnama*'s depiction of a kind of social anxiety about being seen as *namak harami* becomes understandable. The text claims that prior to Bala Rao's offer of service, Amir Khan had attempted to persuade Afghan soldiers in the former's service to defect on the basis of their shared community, or *qaum*, and a substantial monetary reward. Yet tellingly, the Amirnama claims that they too, like Amir Khan, refused, as "the proposition was not consistent with the honor of the Afghan name", further illustrating the importance of honouring contractual agreements within the *Amirnama*'s conception of martial honour.[102]

The Honor of the Afghan Name: Articulating Honour on a Communal Basis

Amir Khan's attempt to win over Bala Rao's Afghan troops also illustrates an important aspect of the *Amirnama*'s treatment of martial honour; its intertwinement with notions of Afghan communal honour. Recent scholarship has often deemphasised the role of communal affiliations in the pre-colonial Indian labour market. Hannah Archambault's study of two Afghan military households in 17th and 18th century South India, *Geographies of Influence*, places firm emphasis on the necessity of avoiding identitarian, *qaum*-centric readings of Afghan participation in the Indian military labour market.[103] As a defining case study in her argument, she analyses instances mentioned in contemporary sources where membership of

[100] Kolff, pp. 25-27.

[101] Singh, *Waqai Holkar*, pp. Xviii-xix
The *Namak Haram Ki Haveli* can be visited at Chandni Chowk, Delhi for tourism. Its formal address is: 316, Kucha Ghasiram, Chandni Chowk, New Delhi, Delhi 110006, India.

[102] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 39-40.

[103] Hannah Archambault, 'Geographies of Influence: Two Afghan Military Households in 17th and 18th Century South India' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2018), p. 10.

a shared Afghan community, or *qaum*, was deployed to attempt to persuade Afghan soldiers to transfer allegiances, demonstrating convincingly that on these occasions, personal priorities dictated the decision-making process of these individuals, not their communal identification.[104] Archambault's argument is certainly pertinent to the aforementioned incident in the siege of Shujalpur, as Amir Khan's attempt to secure their loyalty on the basis of their shared Afghan origin failed outright, further illustrating the dangers of reading the pre-colonial Indian military labour market through a communal lens. Yet, equally the framing of the troop's rejection, in terms of the "honor of the Afghan name", illustrates a vital component of how Afghan troops presented themselves as both individuals, and a community, within the military labour market.[105]

Nile Green demonstrates that a distinctive Afghan identity took shape amongst "diffuse bands of tribesmen" only "amid the experience of migration to India and the encounter there with forms of social, religious, and political organization that differed from their own", especially during the Mughal period.[106] Green places emphasis on this communal fashioning occurring through genealogical histories articulating common, "Afghan", origins for these diffuse groups, as well as through identifying with particular Sufi saints.[107] Similarly, Gommans demonstrates that the emerging eighteenth century Rohilla Afghan *riyasat* placed considerable emphasis on articulating a shared Afghan communal tradition, or *nasab*.[108] Naturally, the composition of Afghan genealogical histories, both during the Mughal Empire and its successor states, occurred within a "courtly context" that was strongly cosmopolitan and Persianate, as Green notes.[109] In Rosalind O'Hanlon's study of the Afghan Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad, she argues that the emergence of new Afghan royal centres in the wake of the Mughal Empire's decline saw a reconfiguration of courtly expressions of masculinity away from more cosmopolitan and intricate Mughal forms of masculinity and social etiquette.[110]

Yet it is worth paying attention to Afghan cultural and martial norms beyond the royal setting. The decline of the Mughal Empire not only witnessed the formation of new Afghan political centres, but was also marked by a flourishing of Afghan involvement in the military labour market, with Gommans designating the "the period from about 1650 to 1750" as "the

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[104] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[105] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 39-40.
[106] Nile Green, 'Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67, (2008), 171-211 (p. 172).
[107] Ibid., pp. 183-197
Christopher Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 120.
[108] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan Empire*, pp. 160-70.
[109] Ibid., pp. 174-75, 199-200.
[110] Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Issues of Masculinity in North Indian History: The Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 4 (1997), 1-19 (pp. 7, 9-10).

heyday for the military entrepreneur".[111] Crucially, as Gommans notes, Rohilla Afghan identity was heavily shaped by military service, or *naukari*.

Naqavi argues that soldiering individuals during this period "loosened and unfixed the identity markers of community and ethnicity that they had inherited from the early modern period" by articulating their sense of identity in terms of an honour-based "soldierly service ethic" instead.[112] Yet the *Amirnama* indicates that the two need not stand juxtaposed. I would argue that, against the backdrop of Afghan mercenary involvement, Afghan soldiering individuals articulated and demarcated their position within the Indian military labour market with reference to themselves as members of an Afghan community defined by, and beholden to, norms of martial honour. In her examination of the *Jangnama* of Qazi Nur Muhammad, an eyewitness account of Ahmad Shah Abdali's 1764-65 invasion of Punjab by an Afghan participant, Purnima Dhavan argues that "Nur Muhammad recognized the common traits that he believed both Sikhs and Afghans shared as warriors", of which, martial honour was a central underpinning.[113] As such, the *Jangnama* implicitly suggests an Afghan affiliation with martial honour through its grudging respect for Sikh adherence to the same.[114]

Yet what the *Jangnama* suggests implicitly, the *Amirnama* articulates explicitly. In its description of a battle fought by Amir Khan and Yashwant Rao Holkar in 1801 against Daulot Rao Sindhia's general Sarje Rao Ghatge, the *Amirnama* affirms the martial honour of its patron's Afghan troops by contrasting them with those of his enemy. Lal declares that, "though the enemy were strong in cavalry at the point, yet their horse were only Pindaras [Pindaris], who make no stand in close fight, and hold it no disgrace to throw away their shields and fly from the field". In contrast, "the Ameer had his body of Afghans of the same tribe with himself, tried men, desperate in fight, who always behaved well, and with a high sense of the necessity of maintaining the honor of the Afghan name".[115] In this instance, Amir Khan's Afghan troops are contrasted favourably with another faction in the military labour market, the Pindaris, not only for their greater martial efficacy but for their adherence to martial honour. Furthermore, by fighting with honour, Amir Khan's troops not only uphold their own individual reputations, but the "honor of the Afghan name" as a whole. Maintaining the honour of the Afghan name is thus framed as a necessity; a communal obligation. Consequently, contrary to Naqvi's emphasis on the prioritisation of a martial

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[111] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan Empire*, p. 136.
[112] Naqvi, p. 163.
[113] Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 140.
[114] Ibid., pp. 140-41
Qazi Nur Muhammad, *Jang Namah: Giving An Account Of The Seventh Invasion Of Ahmad Shah Durrani (1764-1765)*, ed. and trans. by Ganda Singh (Khalsa College Amritsar, 1939), pp. 55-58.
[115] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 140-41.

service ethic over communal forms of identification amongst Afghan soldiering individuals, the two appear to have become intertwined through the articulation of Afghan warriors as custodians of the honour of the Afghan name.[116]

Amir Khan himself is especially portrayed in the *Amirnama* as upholding the honour of the Afghan name, both in his career as a whole, and during this earlier formatory stage. His aforementioned decision to shelter Nuwab and Darab Khan, despite the potential ramifications, is explained with reference to his concern "for the credit of the Afghan character".[117] At times, Amir Khan's deployment of Afghan communal honour appears cynical in the extreme. In one instance, having run out of supplies whilst holding the Bhopali fort of Fatehgarh for Balal Rao against a Bhopali army, the Amirnama claims its protagonist opened fire on the town itself. When the Bhopali commander Wazir Muhammad Khan "sent word to the Ameer, that it was unbecoming an Afghan to fire thus on the inoffensive inhabitants", Amir Khan replied, "Why have you forgotten the rights of Afghan hospitality? I am here hungry and you feasting", immediately securing him "a large supply of cooked victuals" from the former.[118]

Conclusion: The Rewards of Martial Honour

Yet on the whole, it appears that Amir Khan largely succeeded in developing and maintaining an honourable reputation in this formatory stage of his mercenary career. This is indicated strongly by the testimony of the *Waqai Holkar* and its praise of his conduct at Bhopal, in his service with the outlaw Rajputs, and at Shujalpur.[119] Perhaps the strongest evidence of Amir Khan's success in "achieving reputation", however, was his employment by Yashwant Rao Holkar in 1798. Determined to bring war to his elder brother and Daulot Rao Sindhia, the young Holkarshahi outlaw prince was certainly in need of capable commanders.[120] Fortunately for Amir Khan, Holkar's *bakshi*, Bhawani Shankar, had fought alongside him at Bhopal, and "told Jaswant Rao all about the merits of Amir Khan", reporting, "in the best of terms", his "high rank and character".[121] Although an illegitimate prince and an exile, Yashwant Rao Holkar's ambition and membership of one of the most prominent royal families in India rendered him a highly attractive employer, for reasons that are perhaps best articulated by the *Amirnama* itself.[122] Amir Khan was informed by Ghulami Khan, one of his followers tasked with assessing Holkar's situation, that, although "the Muharaj has not at

[116] Naqvi, p. 163.
[117] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 21.
[118] Ibid., p. 45.
[119] Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, pp. 69-71.
[120] Sardesai, III, pp. 364-65
Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 93-97.
[121] Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, pp. 69, 71.
[122] Sardesai, III, pp. 363-364.

present enough to provide himself with his night's meal, but he is the son of a Chief of high dignity, and through him there will be a road opened to the management of great affairs, even to the very highest from behind the curtain", to which he approved.[123] Evidently, the performance of feats of martial bravery could have great rewards when witnessed by the likes of Bhawani Shankar, further illustrating the vital importance of achieving an "honourable" reputation within the mercenary market.

[123] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 95-96.

Chapter 3: Clemency, Fidelity, and Self-fashioning of Amir Khan the General during his Partnership with Holkar: 1798- 1807

Amir Khan's newfound partnership with Yashwantrao Holkar would have a transformative effect on his career. As Holkar's right hand man, Amir Khan would find himself at the heart of the aforementioned Maratha Civil War and Second Anglo-Maratha War, and subsequently become one of the most significant generals in Hindustan.[124] As Joshua Provan notes in his study of the Second Anglo-Maratha War, "Few Indian military leaders, barring Holkar and Tipu, were spoken of with such mixed disdain, fear and respect as Amir Khan".[125] The troops under his command would swell to the tens of thousands, as horsemen rallied to his standard "on the strength of the Ameer's reputation".[126]

This chapter seeks to analyse this stage of Amir Khan's career through two main prisms. Firstly, his self-presentation and martial conduct as a general will be examined, revealing that he maintained a conciliatory, lenient policy towards defeated enemies and prisoners of wars. In so doing, it will be argued that not only did Amir Khan present himself in an honourable light, but also reaped tangible rewards, such as beneficial alliances with his former foes. As a result, it marked a combination of the ideals of honour with the practical realities of the military labour market, in which, as Kolff argued, "enemies" could swiftly become allies in the world of shifting allegiances.

Secondly, the *Amirnama*'s contrast of its protagonist's honourable conduct with that of Holkar will be explored, revealing how notions of faithful service and "being true to one's salt" could be reconciled with the practical realities of mercenary allegiance.

Granting Clemency

The *Amirnama* indicates that during the Maratha Civil War and the Second Anglo-Maratha War Amir Khan had, both actively cultivated, and successfully attained, a reputation for clemency towards defeated enemies. In 1798, Kashi Rao's French mercenary commander Chevalier Dudrenec, who had proved a particularly formidable adversary for both Holkar and Amir Khan, was forced to surrender for want of supplies. According to the *Amirnama*,

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[124] Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, 4 volumes (Calcutta: M C. Sarkar & Sons, Ltd., 1932-1950), IV, p. 168.
Sardesai, III, p. 429.
[125] Provan, p. 44.
[126] Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, p. 189
Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 104.

Dudrenec "sent to the Ameer to offer to come to terms with the Muharaj [Yashwant Rao Holkar]". When Holkar "proposed to draw the Frenchman into terms for the purpose of circumventing and treacherously slaying him", Lal claims that Amir Khan refused, as "this, he said, would be very cowardly, and besides, "who shall venture to raise a hand against those who make their peace through me?", and instead honourably received Dudrenec's surrender.[127] Whilst the *Waqai Holkar*'s recollection of Dudrenec's surrender is more terse by comparison, it at least partly confirms the *Amirnama's* narrative thrust by noting that, as one of his preconditions, the Chevalier specifically "demanded that he should be presented to the Maharajah by Amir Khan".[128]

Furthermore, the Amirnama notes that after Amir Khan ambushed and crushed a British force near Kalpi, Bundelkhand, in 1804, its "British Commanding Officer was taken alive, and the Ameer, in a spirit of mercy and extreme generosity, gave him his life and liberty"; a claim that, Prinsep notes, was confirmed by Skinner.[129] Captain Lieutenant James Young, of the Bengal Horse Artillery, noted in his journal in 1805 that Amir Khan was said to have granted two officers their freedom instead of executing or imprisoning them, further confirming his reputation for clemency.[130]

The Rewards of Strategic Clemency

Amir Khan's supposed secondary justification for refusing to murder Chevalier Dudrenec, that no one would dare to harm those who made peace with him, may provide a clue to understanding his conspicuous clemency if viewed in reverse; no one would dare to make their peace with him if he harmed those who did.[131] Skinner claims that the mass desertion of EIC sepoys in the aftermath of Colonel Monson's crushing defeat at the hands of Holkar immediately ceased after the sepoys witnessed many of Holkar's former troops whom he had brutally mutilated as punishment for desertion.[132] Evidently, a reliance on terror was potentially counterproductive in the military labour market, whilst Amir Khan's lenient approach could provide tangible benefits. The *Amirnama* claims that during the siege of Shahjahanpur in 1800, in which both Holkar and Sindhia temporarily collaborated to defeat a mutual enemy of theirs, a former Sindhian commander named Lukhwa Dada who had joined the Sindhian widows' rebellion, the latter "made his peace privately with the Ameer" after having been "reduced to extremity" by the siege. In return for being granted the

[127] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 103, 109-10.
[128] Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, pp. 83-84.
[129] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 209.
[130] Provan, p. 134.
[131] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 109.
[132] Fraser, *Military Memoir of Lieut-Col. James Skinner*, II p. 43.

opportunity to escape, Lukhwa promised Amir Khan that "he would in future act in concert with him in all matters when required".[133]

Whilst on this occasion Amir Khan acquired Holkar's consent to the arrangement, at other times his use of leniency to procure valuable allies stood in direct contravention to the directives of his military employers. After Lukhwa's escape, Amir Khan was despatched by Holkar to accompany Sindhia's commanding officer at the siege, Ambhaji Inglia, in his pursuit of Lukhwa to maintain appearances, whilst secretly stalling for time to facilitate his escape. Yet when Holkar sent instructions to seize Ambhaji, we are informed "the Ameer liked not the scheme", instead providing the Sindhian commander with a coded warning, framed as a suggestion to travel at a distance from him.[134] The rewards of Amir Khan's leniency are illustrated by the Amirnama's claim that, four years later during the Second Anglo-Maratha War, Ambhaji was enthusiastically willing to assist and collaborate with him, and even briefly provided his family with sanctuary.[135]

These instances are significant when viewed in light of Kolff and Gommans' claims of the ever-changing nature of alliances and enemies in the Hindustani military labour market. Gommans posits that, rather than rigorously crushing enemies on the field of battle, Mughal commanders frequently chose to entice them instead, noting that "after an often prearranged desertion or defeat, the former rebels were usually left unharmed and were symbolically incorporated into the imperial mansabdari system".[136] This blurred boundary between foe and friend appears to have only expanded with the decline of the Mughal Empire. Kolff argued that in the late pre-colonial Indian military labour market "enemies" were only temporary. "Instead", he noted, "all these rivalling, powerful men were each other's potential or actual allies. They kept their options open and made sure to have a little interest in as many loci of power as possible".[137] In consequence, by granting clemency to defeated enemies Amir Khan not only burnished his honourable credentials but furnished his own advancement by "seeking security in a multitude of options", sparing enemies, striking deals, and gaining valuable allies in the process.[138]

Tellingly, these instances of strategic clemency can find themselves framed as honourable in the *Amirnama*. This can be seen in its depiction of Amir Khan's decision in 1807 to allow Raja Man Singh of Jodhpur to escape whilst campaigning for his sworn enemy, Raja Jagat Singh of Jaipur. His reason for doing so, we are told, is that Raja Man Singh "was a great

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[133] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 130.
[134] Ibid., p. 131.
[135] Ibid., pp. 236-37.
[136] Gommans, *The Indian Frontier*, p. 188.
[137] Kolff, *Ancien Regime*, p. 26.
[138] Ibid., p. 187.

Chief", and, as such, "to pursue him further and reduce him to greater straits and degradation was not a worthy part for him [Amir Khan] to play". Shortly thereafter, he would switch allegiances to Man Singh, in return for which he received a generous contract.[139] In this manner, by casting strategic clemency as an honourable respect for an opponent's dignity, the *Amirnama* reconciles the pragmatism of functioning with the Indian military labour market with the ideals of martial honour.

Condemning Treachery and Emphasising Amir Khan's fidelity

Along with justifying strategic clemency, the *Amirnama*'s insistence on Amir's Khan's honourable conduct in his dealings with rivals, "enemies", and potential allies in the military labour market is repeatedly rhetorically juxtaposed with Holkar's actions. This particularly occurs through the lens of fidelity, in which keeping true to one's word is seen as honourable, and treachery is condemned. In its account of Dudrenec's surrender, the text contrasts Amir Khan's protection of and honesty towards his defeated foe against Holkar's treachery, even attributing Holkar's loss of an eye in a firing accident to divine "retribution for the treacherous designs he meditated against the Chevalier".[140] Later, a whole paragraph is devoted to castigating Holkar's supposed treachery in his interactions with Mahadji Sindhia's widows, commencing with "Oh, God! Oh, God! that the world should so teem with deceit and treachery; and that men …. should commit frauds and crimes to the loss of their good name for evermore".[141] Lal claims that Holkar lured the Sindhian royal widows into a false sense of security, promising in a negotiation to aid their rebellion by seizing Daulot Rao Sindhia for them, before treacherously launching a devastating night-assault on their camp. By contrast, Lal claims that Holkar preponed his night assault prior to Amir Khan's arrival at camp for fear of his moral disapproval.[142] Furthermore, Holkar is portrayed as humbled and chastised upon Amir Khan's return to camp by his sarcastic rebuke, in which he "complimented him [Holkar] on the courage and skill which had-achieved so vast a conquest from helpless women".[143]

This juxtaposition of Amir Khan's honourable integrity and fidelity against Holkar's treachery is again displayed in the *Amirnama*'s account of the twilight of the Maratha Civil War. After defeating the Sindhian-Peshwa coalition and seizing Pune, Holkar allegedly despatched *pandits* (Hindu priests) as agents to persuade the Peshwa to return to the city, promising obedience if so. Suspicious of Holkar, Lal claims Baji Rao "wrote, however, to the Ameer, that if he would give his word and be his security against evil, he would, on the faith

[139] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 315, 324.
[140] Ibid., p. 110.
[141] Ibid., pp. 127-28.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid., pp. 128-29.

of such a pledge from a stranger in the land and a brave man, return to Poona".[144] Yet when advised by Holkar to accept the proposition for the purpose of seizing the Peshwa by "stratagem and treachery" in return for the lucrative territory of "Bundelkhund, with its revenue of a crore [10 million] of rupees" as a reward, Amir Khan is portrayed as having held firm to his principals, politely rejecting Baji Rao's offer instead.[145]

Legitimising Leaving one's Employer by Emphasising one's *Namak Halali*

This framing of Holkar as dishonourable reflects the *Amirnama*'s seemingly confused approach to its patron's former partner, employer and brother-in arms. Elsewhere in the text, Holkar is referred to as Amir Khan's "brother", and praised for his battlefield exploits as a "Lion of bravery".[146] However, I would argue that this seemingly confused depiction can, at least partially, be understood in reference to Amir Khan's decision to leave Holkar's service in pursuit of his own ambitions in late 1806. As Gommans notes, the loyalties of mercenaries within the military labour market "could never be trusted because they always had on counter offers of cash and position".[147] Yet, as illustrated in the previous chapter, this mercenary mindset was by no means uncontroversial, and desertion or betrayal of one's employer could tarnish one's name and reputation.

One method for reconciling the cultural motifs of honour and taboos against being "false to one's salt" is demonstrated by the *Waqai Holkar*. As Naqvi notes, "at junctures in the narrative the Waqāʾiʿ appears to be a thinly veiled defense of Bhawānī Shankar's upstanding character, portraying him as a victim of circumstance rather than a traitor".[148] As such, allegations of *namak harami* could be countered by stressing instead one's *namak halali*. Shankar's loyal service is repeatedly emphasised, which is in turn juxtaposed with Holkar's alleged plans to have him treacherously seized, thereby legitimising his defection.[149]

Examining the *Amirnama*'s account of its own protagonist's rift with Yashwant Rao Holkar reveals considerable similarity with the *Waqai Holkar*'s own legitimising framework. Whilst the latter attributes Amir Khan's exit from Holkar's service to him being "disgusted at Jaswant's [Yashwant Rao's] failure to keep his promise of helping him with money out of the tribute received from Jaipur", the former posits far more longstanding roots of the rupture.[150] Despite his, in the *Amirnama*'s telling, central role in placing Yashwant Rao on the Holkarshahi *musnud*, the latter almost immediately thereafter undermines Amir Khan's

[144] Ibid., p. 174.
[145] Ibid., pp. 174-75.
[146] Ibid., pp. 224, 239, 281-82.
[147] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan Empire*, p. 141.
[148] Naqvi, pp. 132-332.
[149] Singh, *Waqai Holkar*, pp. 201-02.
[150] Ibid., p. 209.

authority by secretly attempting to win over his men, an offence he would repeat again.[151] By contrast, despite allegedly receiving multiple lucrative offers from the British to desert Holkar's cause in the Second Anglo-Maratha War, Amir Khan remained faithful.[152] Worst of all, Lal claims that "throwing away the fear of God, and discarding the recollection of the Ameer's past services and kindnesses", Holkar even twice attempted to murder his faithful partisan. The second murder scheme is even presented as occurring directly before Amir Khan's interview with Holkar declaring his intention to pursue his own ambitions, thereby implicitly legitimising his decision to part from his employer.[153]

This eagerness to absolve Amir Khan of any implications of *namak harami* is again reflected in the *Amirnama*'s account of his decision to transfer allegiance from Raja Jagat Singh of Jaipur to his sworn enemy in 1807. Lal lays the blame squarely on Jagat Singh's advisors, noting that "he [Amir Khan] had failed in no tittle of his own agreement with Raja Jugut Singh, while on their part there had been nothing but perfidy and bad faith".[154]

Overall then, by stressing Amir Khan's own honourable conduct as compared to Holkar's, whether within their own personal interactions or within the wider world of their military and political potential allies and enemies, including Dudrenec, the Sindhian widows and the Peshwa, his pragmatic pursual of his own career interests away from Holkar is legitimised as the inevitable result of the latter's faithlessness.

[151] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 100-104, 234.
[152] Ibid., pp. 188-89, 239.
[153] Ibid., pp. 291-93, 308-09.
[154] Ibid., p. 322.

Chapter 4: Honour and Politics, 1807-17

Part 1: Honour as a Legitimiser of Political Action in the Holkarshahi *Durbar*, 1809-10

According to the *Amirnama*, in his separatory interview with Yashwant Rao Holkar Amir Khan declared boldly that "Men of high ambition never abandon their purpose..... It is now my turn to see what Providence has in store for me". The following chapter examines the role of honour in the stage of Amir Khan's career following this decision, in which he pursued political control over multiple courts. To facilitate clearer, more in-depth analysis, this chapter is divided into two parts, with this section focusing on Amir Khan's maintenance of power in the Holkarshahi *durbar* in light of Yashwant Rao's worsening mental condition. To do so, it examines a particular case study; the reestablishment of his influence at the Holkarshahi *durbar* in early 1810.

Whilst Amir Khan was invading Nagpur in the autumn of 1809, a military coup had taken place back at the *durbar*, leading to the expulsion of his representative, Ghafur Khan, and his exclusion from Holkarshahi politics.[155] At the same time, concerned about Amir Khan campaigning so close to British territories, the British Governor-General Lord Minto decided to temporarily break with the current policy of non-interventionism to dispatch a task force under the command of the Resident at Pune, Colonel Barry Close, to ward Amir Khan from Nagpur.[156] Eventually, Amir Khan's political involvement at the Holkarshahi *durbar* was only reestablished after a campaign that utilised both military and diplomatic means, including requests for a personal interview with Yashwant Rao Holkar himself.[157] Carefully sifting through the contrasting narratives provided by the *Amirnama* and contemporary colonial intelligence despatches, analysing this historiographically neglected incident reveals how honour was deployed to legitimise Amir Khan's re-establishment of political influence. This, it will be shown, occurred both at the time of the incident itself and later in the *Amirnama*'s narrative, by portraying him as honouring his obligations to defend the Holkarshahi dynasty and the honour of the Afghan name.

An "affair of honor": The Amirnama's Perspective

In his account of Amir Khan's Nagpur campaign, Lal claims that his patron decided to terminate his invasion in late 1809 for two key reasons. Firstly, a vast force of British troops and their Indian allies were marching towards him. Secondly, he had received "pressing

[155] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 386, 390.
[156] Ghosh, British Policy, pp. 96-97.
[157] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 392-95.

letters" from Holkar's principal wife and acting regent, Tulsi Bai, urgently calling for his assistance in dealing with a violent coup d'etat led by the head of infantry, a *chela* (royal household slave) named Dhurman who had "already subjected herself to personal restraint, and she feared worse consequences".[158]

From there onwards, Amir Khan's retreat from Nagpur and subsequent invasion of Holkarshahi territory are portrayed as a honour-centric quest to save the Holkarshahi royal family and their state from grave danger, and in so doing, defend the "Afghan name". At a council of his *sardars* immediately prior to his invasion of Holkarshahi territory, Amir Khan stated that, despite the fact "that he was without funds for his present wants, still that the affair of Dhurman Chela, who was ruining the Holkur family, seemed to be pressing, "wherefore," he said, "let those only who are disposed for a service of want, and poverty, and hard work, join me in this expedition", promising to part in friendship with those who chose not to. In response to this exhortation, a spokesman of the *sardars*, Muhammad Said Khan declared that "To fail you now would be a disgrace to the Afghan name. It is an affair of honour. We will share your comforts or troubles", to which the other *sardars* enthusiastically agreed.[159]

After much skirmishing and political intrigue, the *Amirnama* claims its protagonist and his troops succeeded in their objective following a dramatic culmination in which Tulsi Bai affirmed Amir Khan as her saviour to the Holkarshahi troops and turned them against the coup leaders Dhurman Chela and Sobha Ram, the head of the artillery, who were executed in the aftermath.[160] The honour of Amir Khan and his Afghan troops is further emphasised by portraying them as agreeing to voluntarily donate two rupees each, despite their severe poverty, so as to secure the support of the Holkarshahi troops for Tulsi Bai by paying off their arrears. The *Amirnama* even claims that "those who had no money by them, still deeming the matter to be one that concerned the Afghan name, pawned or sold any rings, trinkets or little articles they had, that they could dispense with, so as not to fail in their subscription". Following the coup's defeat, Amir Khan met his "brother", Yashwant Rao Holkar, "then settled the affairs of the family in concert with the Baee, and to her complete satisfaction".[161] As such, Amir Khan's intervention in Holkarshahi politics are presented as an honourable and altruistic dispensation of personal obligations to the Holkar family, as well as a defence of the honour of the Afghan name on the part of his troops through their rigorous self-sacrifice.

<u>"the ferocious and perfidious Patan": the Colonial Narrative</u>

[158] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 386-87.
[159] Ibid., pp. 390-91.
[160] Ibid., pp. 391-94.
[161] Ibid., pp. 394-95.

Yet the only other non-colonial modern historian to deal with these particular events, Biswanath Ghosh, provides a completely opposing account of events: one in which Amir Khan's invasion served entirely to preserve his own political influence at the *durbar* and stood directly in contravention of the wishes of Tulsi Bai herself.[162] Ghosh's account draws almost exclusively on colonial intelligence despatches, particularly those of Archibald Seton, the Resident at Delhi, and Colonel Barry Close[163] Their reports emphasise the united nature of the opposition of the Holkarshahi *durbar*, including Tulsi Bai herself, against Amir Khan's return and further interference in Holkarshahi affairs.[164] Seton even claims that Tulsi Bai's eventual affirmation of Amir Khan in late March 1810 was solely due to her being "at length reduced to the sad necessity of submitting to the impervious demands of the ferocious and perfidious Patan", and that her decision to have Dhurman Chela and Sobha Ram executed "seems rather to have been extorted from her fears, than won from her confidence".[165]

Reading Against the Grain: Critically Analysing the Colonial Perspective

Further investigation into the colonial archive of intelligence despatches, however, reveals several discrepancies in this narrative. In his December 1, 1809 despatch to the Secret Committee of the EIC's Court of Directors, the then Governor-General Lord Minto notes that Amir Khan had in fact "been earnestly requested by Toolsee Bye the Wife of Holkar to return" the previous month following the Holkarshahi coup, as the *Amirnama* claims.[166] Tulsi Bai does appear to have eventually collaborated with the coup leaders, even adding her vocal assent to their hostility towards Amir Khan. An intelligence paper from Holkar's Camp from the 19th of December claims that at a conference which included Dhurman Chela she remonstrated against Amir Khan's actions and even considered seeking British support for the Holkar heir apparent, Malhar Rao.[167]

Yet this conciliatory approach may reflect the pragmatic necessities of political, and potentially even personal survival in the fractious and turbulent Holkarshahi political climate following the coup. An intelligence despatch dated the 17th of February, 1810, from Mir Qasim Ali, the Colonial Resident at Hyderabad's newswriter, or *akbar*, at the

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[162] Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 124-34.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
London, British Library, Close to Edmonstone, 24th March 1810, *Bengal Political and Secret Consultations* (hereafter *B.P.S.C.*), 2nd May 1810, No. 8
Ibid., Seton to Edmonstone, 22nd March, 1810, *Bengal Political Consultations* (hereafter *B.P.C.*), 10th April 1810, No. 7
Ibid., Seton to Lushington, 23rd March 1810, *B.P.C*, 10th April 1810, No. 10
Ibid., Seton to Edmonstone, 7th April 1810, *B.P.C*, 24th April 1810, No. 36
Ibid., 10th April 1810, *B.P.C*, 24th April 1810, No. 39.
[165] Seton to Edmonstone, 7th April 1810.
[166] London, British Library, Minto to Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, EIC, 1st December 1809, *Bengal Secret Letters* (hereafter *B.S.L.)*, No. 388.
[167] Ibid., 15th January 1810, *B.S.L*, No. 396.

Holkarshahi *durbar*, notes that the minister "Balaram Seyt and Dhurmajee Coohur [Dhurman Chela] for the sake of appearances acknowledge the authority of the Bhye Sahiba [Tulsi Bai] and Mulhar Rao, but they in reality do any thing they please". Consequently, he states that Tulsi Bai "is displeased with Dhurma Coonur [Dhurman Chela] and Soobaram [Sobha Ram]. But the Displeasure of the Bhye Sahiba does not avail".[168] The precarity of Tulsi Bai's position is further evidenced by Malcolm's claim that at the height of Amir Khan's military and political intervention Dhurman Chela, out of sheer desperation, attempted to murder the Holkar royal family in a jungle, and was only prevented from doing so by the timely intervention of Rutu Patel, a commander of the household troops.[169] The veracity of Malcolm's assertion is bolstered by his personal acquaintance with Rutu Patel, who still occupied a high position in the Holkar *durbar* at the time of the *Memoir of Central India*'s composition for having saved Malhar Rao's life.[170] Hence, it is likely that the coup leaders were executed by Tulsi Bai for the danger they had posed to the Holkar royal family, in line with the *Amirnama*'s assertions, rather than solely due to the persistence and ambition of Amir Khan.

Close and Seton's claims therefore, are worth contextualising within contemporary colonial security concerns rather than being accepted at face value. In the aftermath of the expensive Second Anglo-Maratha War, the official EIC policy reverted to one of non-interventionism, with emphasis instead placed on upholding pre-existing treaties and diplomatic relations with Indian principalities.[171] Whilst Minto had authorised Close to repel Amir Khan from Nagpur, and even his territorial base of Sironj if deemed necessary, this was only temporary. By January 1810, Minto had decided to revert to non-interventionism owing to the possibility of renewed French expansionism in India in light of the Napoleonic Wars.[172] Against this backdrop, for colonial residents like Close and Seton who were concerned over the threat Amir Khan posed to British-controlled and allied territories, it was important to emphasise his separation from the Holkarshahi dynasty, to whom they were bound by the post-Second Anglo-Maratha treaty signed with Yashwant Rao Holkar.[173] By emphasising Amir Khan as a predatory power opposed by the entirety of the Holkarshahi court, the case for direct military action against him could be made easier, as it could be seen as sanctioned by their treaty with Holkar.[174] Yet in this narrative, details such as Tulsi Bai having herself summoned Amir Khan to return at the outbreak of the coup and the threats to her own safety

[168] London, British Library, Mir Qasim Ali to Mir Ibn Ali, 17th February 1810, *B.P.C.,* 3rd April 1810, No. 54.
[169] Malcolm, *Memoir*, pp. 269-71.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ghosh, *Dacoits, Dragoons and Diplomats*, pp. 107-07
Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 31-35, 88, 111, 117, 120-21
[172] Minto to Secret Committee, 25th January 1810, *B.S.L.*, no. 396.
[173] Ibid., pp. 131-34.
[174] Ibid., pp. 130-32.

at court found little place. Therefore, the narratives of Close and Seton's despatches are worth handling with extreme caution.

Revealing the Role of Practical and Political Considerations in this "affair of honor"

Yet despite the role of contemporary colonial security concerns in shaping the narratives of intelligence despatch reports, the colonial intelligence archive helps to provide important clarifications on the *Amirnama*'s honour-centric account by revealing the strong role in which contemporary practical and political considerations played a role in Amir Khan's campaigns of late 1809 and early 1810.

Firstly, whilst the *Amirnama* depicts its patron as single-mindedly focused on saving the Holkar royal family, intelligence despatches from Minto reveal that, despite having initially broken off his invasion of Nagpur in November 1809 following his receipt of Tulsi Bai's letter, he actually reinvaded Nagpur territory after having been ambushed by Nagpur forces whilst retreating.[175] Amir Khan appears to have decided to prioritise salvaging his reputation as a successful commander by reinvading Nagpur over coming to Tulsi Bai's aid, as in the words of Minto, "as a soldier of fortune Ameer Khaun must know that to lose his reputation must be nearly equivalent to losing all".[176] Tulsi Bai's temporary adoption of a conciliatory approach towards the coup leaders may well have partially resulted from Amir Khan's delay in returning, as she had sent a second letter in December urging him to return, yet he remained enmeshed in his reinvigorated campaign against Nagpur and only left its frontier in early January following the march of Colonel Close's troops in his direction.[177]

Secondly, the colonial intelligence archive helps reveal the extent to which Amir Khan's own political interests were threatened by the coup, and as such, the extent to which his campaign helped salvage his political influence. The *Amirnama* mentions that the coup leaders had expelled Amir Khan's representative in the Holkarshahi *durbar*, Ghafur Khan, but fails to mention that they had in fact gone as far as requesting Close to capture Amir Khan's vital territory of Sironj, granted to him by Holkar, and return it to their administration.[178] By dispossessing him of his hard won territorial base and removing his influence from Holkarshahi politics, the coup leaders were directly threatening Amir Khan's power. Despite the *Amirnama*'s framing of the campaign as solely a matter of honour, it is significant that

[175] London, British Library, Minto to Secret Committee, 21st December 1809, *B.S.L.*, No. 390
Ibid., 15th January 1810, *B.S.L.*, No. 396.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.
Ibid., 25th February 1810, *B.S.L.*, No. 403.
[178] London, British Library, Close to Edmonstone, 28th January 1810, *B.P.S.C.*, 20th February 1810, No. 37
Ibid., Minto to Secret Committee, 25th February 1810, *B.S.L.*, No. 403

his campaign into Holkarshahi territory only began in earnest in March after Close had ousted him from Sironj.[179]

Honour as a Contemporary Legitimiser of Political Action

Yet if pragmatic considerations played a stronger role in Amir Khan's intervention in the Holkarshahi *durbar* than his memoirs give credit for, it is clear that the motif of honour, both in terms of framing Amir Khan's actions as defending the Holkar family, as well as framing the entire expedition as a cause in which the honour of the Afghan name was at stake, played a strong role in Amir Khan's contemporary justifications for his intervention. Firstly, the *Amirnama*'s claim that his diplomatic attempts to reassert his political influence in the Holkarshahi *durbar* were framed as requests for personal interviews with Yashwant Rao Holkar in order to assess his well-being is confirmed in the intelligence despatches.[180] Furthermore, one of Seton's despatches notes that, prior to Amir Khan's invasion of Holkarshahi territory, the morale of his Afghan *sardars* was at rock bottom, with multiple offers pouring in from them seeking British service.[181] Yet not only did Amir Khan's Afghan troops invade Hokarshahi territory with devastating effect, Malcolm confirms that they did indeed pay the arrears for the Holkarshahi troops out of their own pockets as the *Amirnama* claims.[182] Elsewhere in the *Amirnama*, under similar circumstances, his troops mutiny repeatedly and forcefully.[183] Yet in this case, they evidently refrained from doing so. This raises the question: what then can account for the unlikely increase in morale and motivation amongst Amir Khan's troops?

I would argue that the *Amirnama*'s claims that they were inspired by Amir Khan's presentation of the intervention to them, immediately prior to their invasion of Holkarshahi territory, as an honour-focused fulfilment of his obligations to the Holkarshahi royal family, and that they became motivated by the necessity of "upholding the honour of the Afghan name" may prove surprisingly accurate. This is supported by Malcolm, who notes that during their clashes with the Holkarshahi troops, Amir Khan "in person stimulated his men to make their best efforts to save the family of Holkar from the disgrace and danger to which they were exposed".[184]

Conclusion: a Manifold Deployment of Honour

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[179] Ibid., Jenkins to Edmonstone, 2nd February 1810, *B.P.S.C.*, 27th February 1810, No. 45.
[180] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 392
Seton to Edmonstone, 7th April 1810, *B.P.C*
Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 124-25.
[181] Seton to Edmonstone, 22nd March, 1810, *B.P.C.*
[182] Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 273.
[183] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 345-46, 372, 374-76, 402-05.
[184] Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 269.

As such, closer inspection of this military and political campaign by Amir Khan reveals that the role of honour within it was manifold. On one level, by framing his invasion as an honourable defence of the Holkarshahi royal family, honour served as a contemporary political justifier and motivating element for his troops in an affair in which his own political interests were greatly at stake. Moreover, one and a half decades later, honour could then be redeployed as a literary motif in the *Amirnama*'s framing of the incidents, obscuring the role of these same political interests in his campaign and streamlining the more complex contemporary realities of Amir Khan's priorities, such as reinvading Nagpur.

Chapter 4: Honour and Politics, 1807-17

Part 2: Murders in Rajasthan: Legitimising the Dishonourable, 1807-15

The following section examines the Rajasthani theatre of the political stage of Amir Khan's career through the lens of three high profile Rajasthani deaths orchestrated by him. In doing so, it will reveal the discrepancy between the theoretical ideals of martial honour and the brutal realities of Amir Khan's pragmatic political decisions at this stage. Whilst these deaths were vital for establishing and maintaining his political power in Rajasthan, especially Jodhpur, they also sharply contravened the portrayal of Amir Khan as a protector of royal women and opponent of treachery. Therefore, this section will take care to analyse the legitimising motifs used by the *Amirnama* to justify these acts, including shifting the blame onto victims of treachery or framing Amir Khan's political manoeuvring as "Islamically valid".

Securing Political Advancement through the use of Treachery in the Murder of Sawai Singh, 1808

If honour was deployed as a legitimising agent for Amir Khan's involvement in Holkarshahi politics, the fulfilment of his political objectives in Rajasthan was achieved through means that starkly contravened the ideals of martial honour on multiple occasions. One such instance was his assassination of the powerful Rajput *thakur* (lord) Sawai Singh, on the 4th of April, 1808.[185] Having rescued his newfound employer, Raja Man Singh of Jodhpur, from the brink of collapse in the aforementioned Jaipur-Jodhpur war and crushed the confederation arrayed against him, Amir Khan was granted a highly lucrative contract of thirty-five *lakh* (3.5 million) rupees to deal with the former's last remaining significant threat; the renegade former Jodhpur notable and *thikanadar* (landlord) of Pokhran, Sawai Singh.[186] With Sawai Singh heavily invested in the fortified city of Nagaur, Amir Khan lured him out with promises of friendship and an offer of mercenary service before massacring him and his attendants at a celebration meeting hosted by Amir Khan himself.[187]

The strategic benefits of this act were swiftly reaped; not only did Amir Khan immediately receive half of his promised payment upfront, he was also granted residences within

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[185] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 357-59.
[186] Saxena, pp. 215-20
Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 311-12, 346-47
Tanuja Kothiyal, *Nomadic Narratives: A History of Mobility and Identity in the Great Indian Desert* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 113.
[187]Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 352-59.

Jodhpur's royal palace, Mehrangarh Fort.[188] In the words of Tod, he "was now the arbiter of Marwar [Jodhpur state]", and would gain further garrisons in the regions.[189] Yet for all its obvious political advantages, the use of treachery in the murder of Sawai Singh, naturally, stands in stark contrast to the emphasis on keeping one's word found elsewhere in the *Amirnama*.

One method utilised by Lal to reconcile this discrepancy was to emphasise Sawai Singh's own treachery and faithlessness. The *Amirnama* claims that immediately after the exchanging of oaths and ratification of his mercenary contract, Amir Khan apprehended four assassins sent against him by Sawai Singh, and as such, decided that "he was absolved entirely from his engagement, and free to pursue his own designs against that accursed one [Sawai Singh]".[190] Neither Tod, Prinsep, nor Malcolm make any mention of this supposed act of treachery on Sawai Singh's part in their accounts of his assassination.[191]

Legitimising the Use of Treachery and Murder to Remove Political Obstacles: the Murder of Singee Induraj and *Guru* As-Deonath, 1815

The presentation of Amir Khan's victims as the ones to blame appears once again in the *Amirnama*'s account of a later political assassination he had orchestrated, that of Raja Man Singh's minister Singee Induraj and his *Guru* (spiritual advisor) As-Deonath Pandit, in October 1815.[192] When approached by many of Jodhpur's notables with requests to dispose of them both in return for thirty *lakh* (3 million) rupees, the *Amirnama* claims that its protagonist was highly reluctant to accept, reflecting "that if he had found Singee Induraj, and the Priest, inclined to forward his interests at the Joudhpoor [Jodhpur] Court, and to settle his claims fairly and honestly, he could not of course, either from policy, or on any principle of honor or rectitude, have taken part against them".[193]

However, the *Amirnama* notes that these two leading Jodhpur politicians actively blocked his strategic aims, swaying Raja Man Singh against him and delaying and ignoring his "applications" for funds.[194] As such, they posed a direct threat to the hard-won political influence Amir Khan had established at Jodhpur through his involvement in the Jaipur-Jodhpur War and murder of Sawai Singh, a claim confirmed by Malcolm in his *Memoir*.[195]

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[188] Ibid., p. 360.
[189] Tod, *Annals*, I, p. 466.
[190] Ibid., pp. 354-56.
[191] Tod, *Annals*, I, pp. 199-200, 465-66
Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 359
Malcolm, *Memoir*, pp. 335-36.
[192] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 433-39.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Malcolm, p. 343

Yet the *Amirnama* goes one step further by claiming that, as with Sawai Singh, they allegedly dispatched assassins against Amir Khan first, who were, once again, caught in the act. As such, Amir Khan's decision to send two of his commanders "attended by ten or fifteen Afghans" to assassinate these two political obstacles under the pretence of a cordial negotiation over pay, after which, he had assured, his troops would leave Jodhpur in peace, is cast in a less "dishonourable" light.[196] In this manner, the lofty ideals of martial honour are once again reconciled with the murkier realities of operating in the fractious Hindustani political landscape.

Islam Deployed as a Legitimising Agent for Sawai Singh's Murder

The *Amirnama*'s account of Sawai Singh's assassination, however, contains an additional element in its legitimising framework; the role of Islam. Malcolm's *Memoir*, quoting the account of "a respectable eye-witness", claims that the day prior to murdering Sawai Singh, Amir Khan had gained his confidence at "the shrine of a Mahomedan Saint, close to the walls of Nagore [Nagaur]" by not only exchanging "Presents, dresses, and even turbans (a pledge of brotherhood)", but by going as far as swearing "at the tomb of the saint, to be faithful to his ally".[197] Tod identifies the site utilised as the Tarkeen Dargah, the Sufi shrine of the thirteenth-century Sufi saint Khwaja Hamiduddin Nagauri, distinguished disciple of the greatly revered Mu'in-al-Din Chishti, yet differs from Malcolm's eye-witness in claiming that Amir Khan's oath was sworn on the Quran, rather than the Saint's tomb.[198] Tellingly, the *Amirnama* makes no mention of either the *dargah* (shrine) itself, or Amir Khan falsely swearing oaths on the Quran or Sufi graves.[199]

This omission is rendered especially conspicuous by the fact that Lal displays no such reluctance in mentioning his patron's engagement with Sufi shrines on other occasions. The *Amirnama* notes that, shortly after his decision to switch sides from Jaipur to Jodhpur, Amir Khan visited the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Khwaja Mu'in-al-Din Chishti's shrine, and had a highly auspicious and fortuitous dream involving the saint.[200] A considerable amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to the significance of dreams in Islamicate culture, whilst Simon Digby notes that the "belief that Sufi Pirs bestowed victory or defeat was widely held in the medieval Muslim world", with dreams serving as a focal site for the appearance of

[196] Lal, pp. 433-39.
[197] Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 336.
[198] Tod, Annals, I, pp., 465-66.
Amol Vidyasagar, 'Social Role of Sufis in the Principalities of Chanderi and Nagaur', *Historicity Research Journal*, 1 (2014) 1-6 (p. 3).
[199] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 352-54.
[200] Ibid., p. 340.

these Sufi saints.[201] Similarly, the Ajmer Sharif had proven a longstanding focal point for those seeking to bolster their political legitimacy, with the Mughal *Badshah* (emperor) Akbar visiting it no less than seventeen times during the early years of his reign.[202] In the *Amirnama*'s telling, Amir Khan's campaigning in Rajasthan is certainly legitimised by his dream at the *dargah*, in which he witnesses tents arrayed at his camp belonging to "the host of Saints", who have come to fight "for him in the good cause", led by Khwaja Mu'in-al-Din Chishti himself. He then proceeds to tell "all the people of his army, in order that they too might feel assured that his star was on the ascendant, and derive increased confidence in his future fortune". Buoyed by this sacred legitimacy, he succeeds in "ejecting the Jypoor [Jaipur] garrisons from all the places in the Joudhpoor [Jodhpur] territory, and establishing his own in their stead".[203]

Making Sawai Singh's Murder *Halal*

Lal's decision to avoid mentioning Amir Khan's use of the Tarkeen Dargah at Nagaur despite strongly emphasising his involvement at the Ajmer Sharif Dargah can be best understood as part of the *Amirnama*'s attempt to portray Amir Khan's use of treachery to slaughter Sawai Singh and his men as Islamically valid. The *Amirnama* claims that when one of its protagonist's principal commanders, Muhammad Shah Khan, who had been chosen to act as the envoy to Sawai Singh, developed "certain doubts and scruples" regarding the scheme "on the score of morality", "all the officers [of Amir Khan] united in declaring that to shed the blood of an enemy to the faith, by treachery, when necessary for the good of the general cause of the faith, and its army, or for the service of one's Chief, was lawful".[204] Overall then, by omitting reference to any use of the Quran or Sufi shrines by Amir Khan to falsely swear religiously binding oaths, the *Amirnama* upholds its depiction of Sawai Singh's murder as justifiable by Islamic precepts, instead emphasising its protagonist's political and military endeavours in Rajasthan as being legitimised by one of the most revered Islamic figures of the Indian subcontinent, Khwaja Mu'in-al-Din Chishti.[205]

Orchestrating the Death of a Princess: the Poisoning of Krishna Kumari, 1810

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[201] Nile Green, 'The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 13 (2003), 287-313
Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies, ed. by Özgen Felek and Alexander D. Knysh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012)
Simon Digby, 'Dreams and Reminiscences of Dattu Sarvani a Sixteenth Century Indo-Afghan Soldier' *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 2 (1965), 52-80 (pp. 53-54).
[202] Pratyay Nath, 'Pilgrimage, performance, and peripatetic kingship: Akbar's journeys to Ajmer and the formation of the Mughal Empire', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 33 (2023), 271-296 (pp. 272-73).
Syed Liyaqat Hussain Moini, *The City of Ajmer during the Eighteenth Century a Political, Administrative & Economic History* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Aligarh Muslim University, 1987), pp. 339-53.
[203] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 340-41.
[204] Ibid., pp. 352-53.
[205] Nath, p. 272.

One death in particular orchestrated by Amir Khan in Rajasthan proved a challenge for the *Amirnama* to reconcile with its "honourable" portrayal of its protagonist; that of Krishna Kumari, the princess of Udaipur, in the summer of 1810.[206] Sadly, and through no choice of her own, the sixteen-year old princess lay at the heart of the Jaipur-Jodhpur war, sparked as it was by a dispute five years earlier between the Rajas Jagat Singh and Man Singh over who had the "right" to her hand in marriage.[207] Yet by this point, both parties appeared to have tired of the war, and instead proposed a reconciliation through a double marriage, in which Jagat Singh would marry Man Singh's daughter and Man Singh would marry the former's sister.[208] Malcolm claims that to "propitiate these nuptials, it was conceived that the honour of all parties required the death of Kishen Kower [Krishna Kumari]".[209] Attached as he was still to the Jodhpur Raja at this stage, and likely seeking stability after the financially costly re-imposition of his influence at the Holkar *Durbar*, Amir Khan likewise decided that peace was in his best interests, and demanded in a personal interview that Maharana (king, literally translated as"Great Prince") Bhim Singh of Udaipur put his own daughter to death.[210] The *Amirnama* notes that if he refused, Amir Khan threatened to forcibly abduct her and take her to Jodhpur to be married to Man Singh, upon which the Maharana consented.[211]

Amir Khan's Self-Fashioning as a Protector of Royal Women

Amir Khan's behaviour in this instance stands in stark contrast to the *Amirnama*'s depiction of the protection of royal women as an important constituent component of martial honour. His 1809-10 campaign against the Holkarshahi coup and alleged rescue of Tulsi Bai from constraint is by no means the only instance where Amir Khan is presented as a defender and upholder of the honour, dignity and lives of royal women in his memoirs. The *Amirnama* claims that in late 1807, whilst besieging the defenceless city of Jaipur, Amir Khan received a *dupatta* (women's headscarf veil) from Raja Jagat Singh's beleaguered sister, along with a message in which she beseeched him "to treat her also as a sister", and, in so doing, "take a money present, and leave the neighbourhood". We are informed that Amir Khan "felt proud at receiving this message", and replied that he would "always regard and respect" her as his own sister, and that he would ask no money present of her, ending his assault on the city.[212]

The *Amirnama*'s framing of this incident appears to heavily reflect the Indian festival and tradition of *Raksha Bandhan* (literally translated as "the bond of protection"), in which

[206] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 400.
[207] Saxena, pp. 195, 206.
[208] Ibid., p. 225
Malcolm, p. 339.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 399.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid., pp. 338-39.

sisters gift their brothers a token called a *rakhi* (usually a bracelet or piece of cloth), in return for which, her brother's status as her protector is reaffirmed.[213] Often, the practice of this tradition can also occur amongst males and females who are not blood relatives so as to forge voluntary kin relations.[214] There is evidence that this tradition of fraternal protection and guardianship of feminine honour featured within pre-colonial North Indian, especially Rajput, elite martial culture.[215] Tod's testimony indicates the popular legend that the sixteenth-century Mughal *Badshah* Humayun gallantly came to the rescue of the besieged Rani Karnavati of Chittor upon receiving a *rakhi* from her was part and parcel of the cultural repertoire of Amir Khan's time .[216]

In line with this tradition, the *Amirnama* claims that by declaring Amir Khan her brother, Raja Jagat Singh's unnamed sister "constituted him the guardian of her honour".[217] Similarly, the *Amirnama* ascribes its protagonist's decision to halt his fierce artillery bombardment of Jaipur in the summer of 1816 to a change of heart after receiving a message from its *Rani* (queen), Jagat Singh's wife and Man Singh's daughter. In the letter, she supposedly stated "I look upon you…. as my uncle", calling upon him to uphold her honour instead.[218] As such, Amir Khan assumes the *Raksha Bandhan*-aligned position of a familial custodian of royal women's honour in the text, affirming his own connections to martial honour.

The clear disparity between this "honourable" positioning and Amir Khan's fatal ultimatum for Krishna Kumari appears to be reflected in Lal's reserved tone when discussing his patron's role in her death. Rather than furnishing legitimising elements for his actions, as in the case of its descriptions of the murders of Sawai Singh and Man Singh's two leading courtiers, the *Amirnama* confines itself to straightforwardly and succinctly recounting the arguments made by Amir Khan to persuade Udaipur's Maharana.[219] Similarly, whilst Lal's narration of both of the aforementioned assassinations contain vivid poetic verse celebrating the murders and Amir Khan's cunning and stratagem in affecting them, the same is absent from his description of Krishna Kumari's death.[220] Any and all praise is directed towards the

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[213] *City of My Heart: Four Accounts of Love, Loss and Betrayal in Nineteenth-Century Delhi*, ed. and trans. by Rana Safvi (Gurugram: Hachette Book Publishing India, 2018), pp. 102-04
Religious Celebrations: An Encyclopedia of Holidays, Festivals, Solemn Observances, and Spiritual Commemorations, ed. by J. Gordon Melton, 2 volumes (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011), I, p. 733
Tod, *Annals*, I, p. 93
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.,
Tod states that "The festival of the bracelet (Rakhi) is in spring… The Rajpoot dame bestows with the Rakhi the title of adopted brother; and while its acceptance secures to her all the protection of a '*Cavaliere servente*' scandal itself never suggests any other tie to his devotion. He may hazard his life in her cause, and yet never receive a smile in reward, for he cannot even see the fair object who, as brother of her adoption, has constituted him her defender".
[216] Ibid., pp. 93-94
[217] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 338.
[218] Ibid., pp. 450-53.
[219] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 399-400.
[220] Ibid., pp. 357-59, 437-39, 399-400.

princess herself, for supposedly voluntarily sacrificing herself for her family's sake, thereby "earning the perpetual praise, and admiration of mankind" according to Lal; understandably, no such plaudits are reserved for Amir Khan on this occasion.[221] Evidently, on some occasions the brutal realities of political manoeuvring were simply too far removed from the lofty ideals of martial honour to be rhetorically reconciled.

[221] Ibid.

Chapter 5: Becoming a British Vassal and Rewriting the Past: 1817-18

On the 15th of December, 1817, Amir Khan submitted to the British Empire, represented in the person of Major-General Sir David Ochterlony, at an elaborate ceremony conducted atop elephants at the Rajasthani village of Ruswan.[222] The treaty incorporating him within the fold of the British Empire, ratified the next day, came at a heavy price. He was to disband his army and guns, retaining only those troops and artillery necessary for the defence of his lands. He was to "relinquish his connexion with the Pindaras and other plunderers, and .... moreover, co-operate to the utmost in his power, with the British Government, for their chastisement and suppression". Furthermore, he was to refrain from further invasions and extortions against not only the British Empire but also the surrounding Indian states he had subsisted on, as well as abandoning all lands he had seized through conquest in Rajasthan.[223] As compromising as this treaty was for Amir Khan, it marked his most appealing option for political survival. The status offered to him, as the Nawab of the "Princely State" of Tonk, allowed him to retain domestic control of the lands he had acquired from Holkar, as opposed to the alternative; facing head-on the enclosing British forces of General Donkin on one side and General Ochterlony on the other.[224]

Indeed, the *Amirnama* places heavy emphasis on the inevitable necessity of Amir Khan's choice of action. It is important to note that Amir Khan's submission took place against the wider backdrop of the third Anglo-Maratha War, and in particular, the war between the British and the Holkarshahi state that he had pledged allegiance to. The *Amirnama* portrays any potential attempt by Amir Khan to join the Holkarshahi army in their stand as being inevitably doomed. Not only was the path blocked by a British army, but his own troops were allegedly conspiring to seize him and deliver him to the British out of their fervent desire for peace.[225] Even if he succeeded in reaching the Holkarshahi camp, Tulsi Bai was apparently scheming to murder him in his sleep, whilst John Malcolm was marching to the camp with a large British army, having allegedly succeeded in securing the betrayal of several key Holkarshahi commanders, including Ghafur Khan.[226] Add to this Peshwa Baji Rao's recent decisive defeat and Amir Khan's submission appears not only inevitable, but even justifiable in the *Amirnama*'s telling.[227]

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[222] Wilson, p. 226
Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 446.
[223] Ibid., pp. 466-67.
[224] Ibid., p. 463.
[225] Ibid., pp. 463-65.
[226] Ibid., p. 464.
[227] Ibid., p. 464-5.

Yet this narrative presents a very one-sided account, and one that, this chapter will posit, represents a conscious attempt at legitimising actions that appeared highly dishonourable to his contemporary peers. Utilising the British memoirs and intelligence reports, this chapter will examine the effect of Amir Khan's submission on several groups to which he was theoretically obligated, namely, his own soldiers, the Holkarshahi dynasty, and the Pindaris, to illustrate how this decision went against the very norms of martial honour espoused within the *Amirnama* itself. In so doing, it will further highlight the difficulties of reconciling the theoretical ideals of an honourable service ethic with the practical necessities of operating within the contemporary military and political landscape. The negative effects of his submission on his reputation will be explored, as will his attempts to repair it. Not only did Amir Khan portray any attempt to resist the British as doomed and untenable in his memoirs, yet through communal identification as an upholder of Afghan honour he presented himself as an unflinching opponent to British expansion until no longer possible, defending his claims to honour.

Reframing the Disbandment of Amir Khan's Warband

Firstly, rather than his Afghan *sardars* eagerly seeking accommodation with the British and Amir Khan agreeing only reluctantly, closer inspection reveals the opposite was the case. Intelligence despatches, Malcolm, and Prinsep all indicate that Amir Khan had actually been engaged in secret negotiations with the British for months beforehand, with his agent in Delhi having already signed the treaty in November.[228] Whilst he held off with ratifying the treaty until the Peshwa's defeat and Ochterlony and Donkin's manoeuvring forced his hand, he was evidently hedging his bets in the late pre-colonial Indian military custom of underhand negotiations and bargaining defining allegiances described by Kolff and Gommans, simultaneously professing his loyalty to the Peshwa whilst negotiating with the British.[229] By contrast, Governor-General Hastings claimed in an intelligence despatch that Amir Khan's Afghan troops were "clamorous to be led to the field of action" against the British, inspired by news of the Maratha war effort and the desire to safeguard their interests.[230]

Prinsep notes that, as the ratified treaty necessitated the loss of their very livelihoods through their disarmament, threatening them with "the prospect of absolute starvation",

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[228] Henry Thoby Prinsep, *A Narrative of the Political and Military Transactions of British India, Under the Administration of the Marquess of Hastings. 1813 to 1818.* (London: John Murray, 1820), p. 214
Malcolm, *Political History*, II, p. Clxxxviii
Ghosh, *British Policy,* pp. 277-80.

[229] Ibid.
Gommans, *The Indian Frontier*, pp. 187, 246
Kolff, pp. 22-50.

[230] *Papers respecting the Pindarry and Mahratta wars*, comp. by the East India Company (London: J. L. Cox, 1824), p. 394.

Amir Khan's troops were so disgruntled in its aftermath that he was forced to seek refuge within a fort of his ally, Zalim Singh of Kota, until the protests subsided.[231] Whilst Ochterlony eventually incorporated several thousand of Amir Khan's finest troops into the British army in February to help diffuse the situation, the majority were cut off from the military labour market.[232] When one of Amir Khan's primary subordinates, Jamshed Khan, refused to disband and disarm, the former abandoned him to his fate, even assenting to Ochterlony's "request" to use force to seize his guns.[233]

As Naqvi's analysis notes, elsewhere in the *Amirnama*, Amir Khan is portrayed as resolutely safeguarding his soldier's interests and welfare, even risking death to secure their wages.[234] Naturally, this stands in stark contrast to his behaviour towards his warband in 1817-18. The *Amirnama*'s portrayal of Amir Khan's troops as the ones pressuring him to come to terms with the British, instead of the other way around, should be understand as an attempt to mask the more uncomfortable reality; that Amir Khan's political and personal interests trumped the ideals of martial honour in his decision to submit to the British Empire.

Reframing the Holkarshahi Resistance

Similarly, the *Amirnama*'s description of events at the Holkar camp obfuscates the resistance of the Holkarshahi military officers to the British so as to legitimise his abandonment of their cause. Lal claims that it was Tulsi Bai who was intent on war with the British, whilst the Holkarshahi army "took not from their ears the cotton stuffing of neglect, and made no proper dispositions for battle", despite the proximity of the British Army.[235] However, Prinsep reveals that on November 15th Tulsi Bai had made overtures to the Resident at Delhi, Charles Metcalfe, "offering to place herself and the young Mulhar Rao under the protection of the British government".[236] Furthermore, far from being lackadaisically indifferent to the encroaching British, as Lal claims, both Malcolm and Prinsep note that, like Amir Khan's own troops, the Holkarshahi officers were vociferously opposed to accommodation with the British out of concern for their future livelihoods.[237] Suspecting the Holkarshahi court of colluding with the British, the Holkarshahi military officers seized control and and kept the prominent minister Tantia Jog confined, thereafter taking "pledges of fidelity, by which they bound themselves in union during the dangers that were approaching", in the words of Malcolm.[238]

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[231] Prinsep, *Narrative*, p. 336.
[232] Ibid., p. 335-37.
[233] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 469-70.
[234] Naqvi, p. 162.
[235] Ibid., pp. 475-76.
[236] Prinsep, *Narrative*, p. 288.
[237] Ibid., p. 289
Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 310, 313.
[238] Prinsep, Narrative, p. 289.
Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 311.

Prinsep notes that later, determined to prevent any further collaboration with the British, the military officers had Tulsi Bai seized and murdered on the evening of December 20th.[239] After swearing further oaths of fidelity that night, they, according to Malcolm, "skilfully arranged" for battle against the British at Mahidpur on the banks of the river Shipra the following morning.[240] As the commander of the British forces at Mahidpur, Malcolm's testimony is certainly worth considering. As such, far from the half-hearted, confused and doomed effort depicted in the *Amirnama*, there was an organised and committed, if brutal, resistance by the Holkarshahi military faction that Amir Khan chose not to join. Yet by recharacterizing Holkarshahi resistance in this manner, Amir Khan's own decision not to come to the assistance of the dynasty he had previously so fervently positioned himself as the defender of is not only obscured, but justified.

Abandoning Ghafur Khan, then Framing him for Treason

Furthermore, as Ghafur Khan's supposed collusion with the British serves as a primary justification in the *Amirnama* for Amir Khan's own cooperation with the British and abandonment of the Holkar cause, it is worth examining further. Writing a little over three decades after the battle of Mahidpur, Lutfullah Khan claims that Ghafur Khan's reputation as a dishonourable traitor and the cause of the Holkar army's defeat was too firmly entrenched "to be effaced by his great liberality towards the poor and others".[241] This rumour appears to have had a considerable historiographical impact as well, finding itself accepted uncritically in Horace Wilson's continuation of *The History of British India*, the esteemed freedom fighter Pandit Sunderlal's *British Rule in India*, and even as recently as 2022 in Aryama Ghosh's article *Dacoits, Dragoons, and Diplomats*.[242] Its first appearance appears to be in the *Amirnama* itself. Lal claims that, having already entered into secret negotiations with the British through the intermediary of a double agent in Ghafur Khan's camp, Mir Zafar Ali, Ghafur Khan "kept aloof as a stranger looking on" at the battle of Mahidpur, despite having mounted for battle with the rest of the Holkar army "for appearance-sake".[243]

Yet an intelligence despatch by the same Mir Zafar Ali the night before the battle indicates the exact opposite. In it, Ali remorsed that, in contrast to his own fervent desire for peace with the British, in "consequence of the indisposition of the Nawaub Guffoor Khan, there is the greatest difficulty in settling matters".[244] Similarly, both Malcolm and Prinsep make no

[239] Prinsep, *Narrative*, p. 291.
[240] Malcolm, *Memoir*, pp. 315-318.
[241] Lutfullah Khan, *Autobiography of Lutfullah, a Mohammedan Gentleman: and his Transactions with his Fellow-Creatures: Interspersed with Remarks on the Habits, Customs, and Character of the People with whom he had to Deal*, ed. and trans. by Edward B. Eastwick (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1858), p. 97.
[242] Wilson, *History of British India*, II, pp. 288-89
Pandit Sunderlal, British Rule in India (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1972), p. 101
Ghosh, *Dacoits, Dragoons and Diplomats*, p. 113.
[243] Lal, *Memoirs*, pp. 474, 476-77.
[244] *Papers respecting the Pindarry and Mahratta wars,* p. 187.

mention of Ghafur Khan's supposed betrayal at Mahidpur or secret prior negotiations with the British, instead considering him one of the foremost heads of the pro-war, anti-British Holkar military faction.[245] Malcolm notes that Ghafur Khan's position in the battle was at the rearguard protecting the young Holkar prince Malhar Rao with his personal retainers and the royal guard, with no mention of him keeping "aloof as a stranger looking on".[246] Lastly, Prinsep, Malcolm and contemporary intelligence despatches all indicate that Ghafur Khan was camped with the defeated remnants of the Maratha army and Holkar court in the aftermath of the battle, an action that would seem not only highly unlikely but also unwise had he in fact clearly betrayed them to the British and cost them the battle.[247]

The *Amirnama*'s positioning of Ghafur Khan as a traitor appears disingenuous in the extreme, as Amir Khan appears to have been fully aware of his crucial role in resisting the British. In the days leading up to Mahidpur Amir Khan had sent letters beseeching Ghafur Khan to make peace with the British, and in communications with General Donkin in the battle's aftermath he strongly blamed his former subordinate for the "ill-advised rupture of Holkar with British government".[248] Yet by consciously rewriting the past, the *Amirnama* was once again able to recast its own patron in a more "honourable" light.

Social obligations to Kinly Relations in the Warband

Crucially, Ghafur Khan was not only one of Amir Khan's closest subordinates and longstanding political agent in the Holkar court, but also his own brother-in-law.[249] Elsewhere in the Amirnama, strong emphasis is placed on its patron's "honourable" fulfilment of obligations towards his relations. When the wives and children of Muhammad Iyaz Khan, Amir Khan's father-in-law and one of his principal *sardars*, were abducted and taken to the fort of Madhorajpura, Rajasthan, by the belligerent *zamindar* (landlord) of Ludhana, Thakur Bharuth Singh, Lal depicts his patron as stopping at nothing to rescue them.[250] Despite two failed direct assaults on the fortress and a highly spirited defence, Amir Khan persisted in the siege for nine months, finally succeeding in obtaining their release as the oncoming armies of Generals Donkin and Ochterlony enclosed on his position.[251] Evidently, this portrayal contrasts sharply with his pragmatic abandonment of his other subordinate-cum-familial relation, Ghafur Khan. By framing him as a traitor, Amir Khan's own decision to abandon his brother-in-law in his struggle against the military might of the

[245] Prinsep, *Narrative*, pp. 289-91
Malcolm, *Memoir*, pp. 311-18.
[246] Ibid., p. 318.
[247] Prinsep, *Narrative*, p. 297
Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 320
Papers respecting the Pindarry and Mahratta wars, p. 187.
[248] Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 304-05.
[249] Ibid., p. 81.
[250] Lal, *Memoirs*, p. 458.
[251] Ibid., pp. 458-65.

British Empire is obfuscated. Furthermore, his abandonment of the Holkarshahi state as a whole is further legitimised by presenting its war effort as not only poorly led but also undermined by treachery, reinforcing the *Amirnama*'s portrayal of any further anti-British resistance at this stage as a lost cause.

Abandoning the Pindaris

Amir Khan's relations with the ostensible cause of the whole third Anglo-Maratha War, the Pindaris, also bear further inspection. The *Amirnama*'s account of Amir Khan's submission dismisses the Pindaris with a line noting that, amongst the different Indian political factions calling for his aid against the British, "the Pindaras too were expecting his support", but "The Ameer had, in reality, no reliance upon any of these".[252] Yet intercepted letters exchanged between Amir Khan and the Pindari leaders Chitu Khan and Wasil Muhammad, enclosed within British intelligence despatches, reveal a very different approach by Amir Khan in early 1817. When Chitu Khan had sought Amir Khan's assistance in providing him with a safe refuge from where he could launch raids against the British, the latter encouraged and sheltered him, allowing him and Wasil Muhammad to build cantonments at Sironj. Amir Khan provided them with advice on how best to campaign against the British, and told his manager at Sironj that "the affairs of the Jemadar [Wasil Muhammad] and my brother Cheetoo are mine, there is no point of difference or separation of them ".[253] Yet when his personal and political interests necessitated coming to terms with the British later that year, he not only abandoned the Pindaris to their fate but actively collaborated with the British against them. In response to a command by General Donkin to attack any Pindaris crossing the Chambal River, Amir Khan thanked him for providing "an opportunity of evincing his zeal and attachment to the Company" and despatched troops to that effect.[254] Once again, these actions stand in marked contrast to the emphasis on honouring obligations and fidelity within the martial service ethic espoused elsewhere in the *Amirnama*, such as when Amir Khan risked his own career at Bhopal to protect Nuwab and Darab Khan.

A Reputation Tarnished: the Negative Social Repercussions of Amir Khan's British Accomodation

There is evidence that Amir Khan's decisions at this time, necessary as they were from a pragmatic, realpolitik perspective, took a considerable toll on his reputation. The *Military Memoir of Lieut-Col. James Skinner* claims that, during Amir Khan's meetings with the British on the 15th of December, his "attendants talked lightly of him, and abused him for truckling, as they said, to the English, for which he would get well handled on his return to

[252] Ibid., p. 465.
[253] Ghosh, *British Policy*, pp. 276-77.
[254] Ibid., p. 304.

camp".[255] In an intelligence despatch from January 6th 1818 detailing his negotiations with the defeated Holkar court, Malcolm notes that the reinstated Tantia Jog declared that Amir Khan "had thought only of himself, and entirely forgotten a ruler to whose family he owed his rise, and to whom he continued to profess an allegiance and obedience".[256] Years later, in his *Memoir of Central India,* Malcolm claimed that "few men ever retired from a scene of great operations less respected than Ameer Khan. By the court of Holkar he is naturally viewed as a person who has deserted and despoiled the sovereignty, to which he owed his rise; and when he desired to interfere as a mediator between this government and the English…. a rancorous feeling of hostility was evinced by all parties against him".[257] As strong as his personal dislike for Amir Khan may have been, Malcolm's observations on this occasion are clearly based on his interactions with the Holkar court, and as such, are worth taking into account. Overall then, it would appear that Amir Khan's earlier reputation as a man of honour and bravery, so fervently attested to in the *Waqai Holkar*, had been replaced instead with a perception of him as someone who abandoned his social and martial obligations to collaborate with the British for his own personal gain amongst his contemporaries, both in the Holkar court and amongst his own subordinates.

One method for defending his reputation, that of stressing the exigency and inevitability of his own course of action whilst reframing the individuals who had actually resisted the British in 1817-18 as the real collaborators, has already been explored in this chapter.

Utilizing *Qaum* and *jihad* to Reframe his Accomodation with the British

Another, that of reframing the end of the Holkar theatre of the Second Anglo-Maratha War in late 1805-06 to position himself as a staunch defender of Islam and the Afghan cause who doggedly refused to submit to the British invaders until absolutely necessary, is worth examining here. The *Amirnama* asserts that, not only did Amir Khan send away empty-handed an EIC agent seeking to open negotiations, but when Yashwant Rao Holkar attempted to subtly persuade him that peace with the British was necessary, he adamantly refused.

Instead, Lal claims he declared his intention to travel to Afghanistan to gain the support of Shah Shuja Durrani of Kabul to "drive the English out of Hindustan", failing which he would go directly to the Yusufzai Afghan tribes, proclaiming that "with these will I join and meet the enemy, and may I never rest from the pursuit of this object…… I shall not relinquish my purpose though it be the sacrifice". After further declarations to this effect, Lal includes a whole stanza describing his patron rallying his Afghan warriors to "fight the fight of faith in

[255] Fraser, *Military Memoir of Lieut-Col. James Skinner*, II, p. 140.
[256] *Papers respecting the Pindarry and Mahratta wars*, pp. 190-91.
[257] Malcolm, *Memoir*, p. 346.

Hindustan", with one line even specifically invoking the memory of the notorious Afghan conqueror Ahmad Shah Abdali's *jihad*-framed invasions of India.[258]

Amir Khan's staunch opposition to peace with the English is juxtaposed with the British negotiator Charles Metcalfe and the Commander-in-Chief in India Lieutenant General Gerrard Lake's supposed insistence that Amir Khan himself must sign the treaty, not just Holkar, for it to be considered binding. It is only after much pleading from Holkar that Amir Khan finally assents to withdrawing his opposition from the treaty "merely out of regard for the Muharaj". Even then, he is portrayed as still refusing to actually sign the treaty itself "on any account".[259]

Yet Metcalfe's own personal correspondences paint a rather different picture. Metcalfe's report to General Lake make no mention of specifically requiring Amir Khan's consent.[260] Furthermore, in a letter written to a friend shortly after a meeting to celebrate the treaty at Holkar's camp in early January 1806, he notes that he not only did not recognise Amir Khan when the latter tried to converse with him at the event, but completely ignored him.[261] The *Amirnama*'s narrative appears even more implausible when a letter written the following month by Amir Khan to General Lake is taken into account.[262] In the letter, Amir Khan congratulated Lake and claimed that "it was always the first wish of my heart to be upon terms of friendship and harmony with all around me, but more especially with the British Government, its allies and dependents", and that he had only refrained from doing so out of "the strict observance which I was bound to pay to those engagements into which I had entered with others".[263] In a letter he wrote to Malcolm around the same time, he even professed to be "ready to enter the duties of a faithful and attached servant to the Hon'ble Company whenever you shall command" in return for an endowment of a *jagir*, undermining the *Amirnama*'s portrayal of him as dogmatically resisting peace with the EIC.[264]

Yet as implausible as the *Amirnama's* narrative of Amir Khan's conduct in the twilight of the Second Anglo-Maratha War may be, as an exercise in self-fashioning, it portrays valuable insight into how he wished his interactions with the British to be viewed. By emphasising Amir Khan's supposed insistence on upholding the cause of *jihad* and the Afghan name in 1805-6 and stubbornly refusing to submit to the British, the *Amirnama* provides the

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[258] Lal, pp. 278-87
[259] Ibid.
[260] Charles Theophilus Metcalfe, *The Life and Correspondence of Charles, Lord Metcalfe: From Unpublished Letters and Journals Preserved by Himself, His Family, and His Friends*, ed. by John William Kaye, 2 volumes (London: Richard Bentley), I, pp. 503-506.
[261] Ibid., p. 198.
[262] Ghosh, *British Policy,* p. 32.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

impression that he emphatically resisted the British as long as he could. In conclusion, when combined with the text's insistence on the futility and impossibility of of resisting the British in 1817 and its character-assasination of those who did, this motif helps to justify Amir Khan's decision to abandon his allies and become a British subordinate, thereby defending his claims to honour.

Conclusion

As Lal's notions of martial honour and honourable conduct are dispersed across the breadth of the *Amirnama*, this thesis has, up until now, followed a similar scheme, unfolding the notions of martial honour primarily in terms of the role they played in the main stages of Amir Khan's career and Lal's accounts of them. Having done so, it is possible here to marshall together these elements of honour to provide a clearer overview.

An important underpinning of this notion of honour is *qaum*, or communal affiliation. Despite scholarly emphasis on the dangers of reading the military labour market through a *qaum*-centric lens, Lal's emphasis on upholding the "honour of the Afghan name" articulates a conception of Afghan troops as beholden to norms of martial honour. Honour, as such, has both personal and communal implications. By behaving honourably, Amir Khan can increase his own personal reputation, yet the behaviour of him and his troops can reflect more broadly on the reputation of the Afghan *qaum* as a whole.

One behaviour in particular that is portrayed as being essential to safeguarding both personal and communal reputation is *namak halali*, or being true to one's salt. As historians have demonstrated, loyalty was highly flexible in the military labour market, with mercenaries pragmatically choosing the best options for their careers. Yet both the *Waqai Holkar* and *Amirnama* indicate that, at least theoretically, faithfully fulfilling the terms of one's contract constituted honourable conduct.

Interrelated with this is a more general castigation of treachery, with emphasis instead placed on adhering to one's word. As such Amir Khan is portrayed as keeping his word to several contemporary figures, including Peshwa Baji Rao II and Chevalier Dudrenec, despite incentives to the contrary.

Furthermore, emphasis is placed on fulfilling social obligations, despite how contrary they may be to one's interests. Lal describes his patron as refusing to turn over Nawab Khan and Darab Khan after they had sought protection with him, despite this action having the potential to jeopardise his career at Bhopal. This also extends to family members, as when Amir Khan persisted in a bitter, costly siege for nine months to rescue his father-in-law's family. As Naqvi notes, one's warband more broadly features as a source of obligation, with Amir Khan portrayed as going to great lengths to provide for his troops in adverse circumstances.

Bravery on the battlefield is likewise emphasised, with Amir Khan's martial exploits being framed as actions that would enable him to "achieve reputation". Granting clemency to

defeated enemies is likewise portrayed as honourable conduct, whilst emphasis is also placed on protecting the lives and dignity of royal women, particularly through the Indian cultural theme of *rakhi*.

Examining the various stages of Amir Khan's career in light of these theoretical notions of honour reveals a highly complex and nuanced image. Verifying the *Amirnama's* claims against other contemporary sources reveals that, particularly at the beginning of his career, Amir Khan did indeed place himself at great personal risk on the battlefield on numerous occasions, carving out a name for himself and bolstering his career in the process. Similarly, contemporary sources indicate that he did in fact treat defeated enemies and prisoners of war with considerable leniency. When viewed in light of the historiography of the military labour market, it becomes clear that the use of clemency need not necessarily stand opposed to the mercenary logic of the military labour market, due to its potential for securing valuable alliances and collaborations with erstwhile rivals.

Yet as his career progressed, the actions taken by Amir Khan to achieve success within his political and military environment would increasingly stand at odds with the ideals attributed to him in the *Amirnama*. Despite the text's emphasis on *namak halali,* Amir Khan's own personal ambitions ensured that he separated from his longstanding partner, Holkar and switched sides in the Jaipur-Jodhpur War.

His political advancement would see an even sharper divergence between honour and Amir Khan's actions. Political involvement was not intrinsically diametrically opposed to honour, as motifs of honour served as powerful legitimisers for Amir Khan's re-establishment of political influence in the Holkarshahi *durbar* in 1810. Yet in Rajasthan, his financial and political objectives would be both advanced and sustained through the use of false promises to murder those who stood in his way, despite the *Amirnama's* condemnation of treachery. Similarly, his role in the death of Krishna Kumari stands in sharp contrast to his portrayal as a protector and guardian of royal women.

Ultimately, his very political survival would be ensured by severing many of the social ties he had forged over the course of his career, abandoning his own longstanding Afghan subordinates, the Pindari raiders to whom he had promised sanctuary, and the Maratha Holkar state that he had sworn to protect, to the mercy of the cold steel and hot artillery fire of the British Indian army. Naturally, this had direct negative implications for his reputation amongst his personal acquaintances as a result.

By commissioning his own biography, Amir Khan had the means to defend his reputation through the medium of Lal's pen. Through its engagement in self-fashioning, the *Amirnama* provides noteworthy examples of how the aforementioned ideals of honour could be

rhetorically reconciled with the murkier realities of the contemporary military and political landscape. By emphasising Amir Khan's faithfulness to his contemporaries and employers, whilst castigating their failures in that regard towards him, Lal attempted to absolve his patron of any implications of *namak harami*. Similarly, by placing the burden of blame squarely on those he murdered through the use of false promises and those he abandoned in his pursuit of accommodation with the British Empire, Amir Khan's own reputation was defended.

Religion also played a role in this legitimisation; with any mention of the use of Islamic sacred sites in the swearing of false oaths to murder Sawai Singh omitted, and replaced instead with an emphasis on the spiritual legitimacy he supernaturally received from one of the most prominent Muslim figures in Indian traditions, Khwaja Moin-uddin Chisti. Likewise, by portraying him as a relentless defender of the Afghan name and the cause of *jihad,* his own accommodations with the British could be obscured and legitimised. Both Lal and Amir Khan took great liberties in rewriting the past to accomplish the above, revealing just how important being seen as "clear as the spotless sun" was for this enigmatic and influential social-climber.

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